



Four Hands: A Novel

Paco Ignacio Taibo II, Laura C. Dail (Translator)

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Greg Simon and Julio Fernandez are investigative journalists who are chasing down an elaborate conspiracy plot. The story they discover and type out together weaves truth with lies, wild humor with tragedy, and reality with fantasy--a stranger-than-fiction tale of imperial excess where delusion makes perfect sense.

Four Hands: A Novel Details

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From Reader Review Four Hands: A Novel for online ebook

Christian Schwoerke says

I was given this novel by a fan of Taibo's oeuvre, and I wanted to thank his generosity by doing the novel justice, reading carefully and attentively. Unfortunately, I was in the midst of personal chaos (making a permanent move from one continent to another), and I jerkily proceeded in fits and starts through the novel over the course of four days, never being able to read for longer than 30 minutes. This created something of mental strobe effect, a disjointed perception of what appears to be happening. Combine this strobe effect with the author's intentional fragmenting of a multi-threaded story, and it's probably safe to say I didn't get as much from my reading as I'd have wished. That said, I enjoyed the story, especially upon reflection.

The story is largely about a present day (the novel was published in 1990) CIA plot to weaken external support for and cause internal strife within the Sandinista movement in South America, but behind this is another story of two old-time revolutionaries whose stories begin with the Spanish Civil War and continue through conflicts during and after WWII, in Europe and in South America. And, amongst many other additional threads, there are seemingly irrelevant events involving Stan Laurel and Houdini.

The "four hands" of the novel's title refer to the writing method of two globe-hopping journalists, one American and the other Spanish-Mexican, who compose their stories in both English and Spanish, then spawn variants suitable to one or another market (eg, Europe, US, Latin America). These two tell their part of the story, with their chapters alternating first-person narrators. Their part in the grander scheme is to serve as the CIA mastermind's newsbreaking source of the scandal of the Sandinista general's connections with international drug operations.

The other principal perspective in the novel is the CIA mastermind, Alex, a hair's breadth away from a psychotic break, whose chapters develop the means and illustrate the mechanisms by which the plot is staged and enacted. His principle belief is that there is no coincidence, that all events can be controlled. Ha! Coincidence does in fact exist, and it is ironic, as the revolutionary general he means to bring down is ultimately saved by the actions of the two old-time revolutionaries who recognize malfeasance when they see it, even if they don't know the particulars.

More than the unraveling of an elaborate plan to deceive and destroy, this is the story of a prevailing spirit of rebellion against injustice. Much of the pleasure in reading this book is trying to see the forest when in front of you at any given moment Taibo has planted a yet another tree with its own rich, distinct, concealing foliage.

Gregory says

I love his detective novels, but this book bored me to the point that I stopped reading.

Maria Kottari says

A very innovative and clever setting for a novel though I find it hard to follow all the information given and I found, many times, myself lost in the traces of narration after one day of reading pause. I have enriched my knowledge on Latin America politics through personal research inspired by the novel.

Δ?ρος Αντωνι?δης says

Πραγματικ? περ?πλοκο. Αδυνατο?σα να συλλ?βω πως ?λοι αυτο? οι ?ρωες θα δ?σουν, θα γ?νουν συστατικ? της ?διας συνταγ?ς. Και ?μως, ?γινε! Απ? τα μυθιστορ?ματα που σε κ?νουν να αναρωτι?σαι ποιο μυαλ? μπορε? να συλλ?βει τ?τοια πολυπλοκ?τητα (και στον αντ?ποδα γιατ? το δικ? σου μπορε? τυχ?ν να πλ?σει μ?λινς κ?τι στοιχει?δες...) και να την ολοκληρ?σει/ παρουσι?σει χωρ?ς κεν?.

Αξ?ζει να το διαβ?σει κανε?ς, για να «μπει» και στο (ν?ο) Λατινοαμερικ?νικο αστυνομικ? μυθιστ?ρημα και να αναγνωρ?σει τις μεγ?λες διαφορ?ς και απ? το βορειο ευρωπαικ? (Σκανδιναβ?α), αλλ? και απ? το μεσογειακ? (Ισπαν?α, Ιταλ?α, Ελλ?δα).

Tav says

THIS is fantastic crime/espionage novel... even if you need a degree in central american revolutionary history to truly follow. Taibo II is so intelligent it hurts and the dexterity with which he ties together disparate arcs is a wonder to behold. Four Hands is a bit of a patchwork, and with the abundance of characters and histories it can be daunting, but I quickly became addicted to each of the story lines and found them all rewarding threads in and of themselves. But in that sense I almost had to read it as a collection of interlocking short stories, and this may be the only reason I couldn't give it the 5 stars. Maybe I'm just not mentally agile enough...

Hilary says

my smart friend josh macphee told me to read this- thanks josh. if you find conspiracies interesting, read this.

Jim says

Excellent read. As you are reading this, you find yourself wondering how on earth it all ties. together. This is well done, and ties together quite well, although I must admit I am tempted to put this on re-read list to see I figured it out correctly.

Nikos79 says

I 'm not really a fan of detective or crime novels. Although when it happens to read these kind of books I have this problem. I like almost most of them, just a few seem uninteresting to me, and less make me love

them. Unfortunately this one was one of them which didn't manage to impress me. I had this book many days next to my bed, and when I was taking it to my hands for reading it was very easy for me to put it down after a few pages or paragraphs. It's not a really easy reading I think, and if I could give an advice to someone who wants to read it, that would be to do it in a fast pace. And this because it's a bit complicated, the plot moves back and forth, and the characters are so many so if you want to follow the plot you must be focused. Didn't really liked it and finished it more because I didn't want to leave it unread.

Karlo Mikhail says

In spite of the deceptive complexity, the plot of Paco Ignacio Taibo II's *Four Hands* is actually very simple. It is the colorful yet believable characters and the playful and witty telling that makes the novel very engaging.

The story is simply about how the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) tried to frame a Sandinista Minister who had a significant role in the struggle against dictator Somoza, spread disinformation, and demoralize the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. This occurs in the background of a brutal US-sponsored Contra War to topple the Sandinistas. But the contours of this narrative can only be realized near the novel's end, when all the seemingly disparate mini-narratives coalesce.

We are first introduced to the personal narrations of the protagonists, the journalists Julio and Greg, one Mexican and the other American, who have a good time backstabbing each other in their minds and giving sardonic comments about everything.

One of my favorite characters include the American engineer who volunteered to do social work in the Nicaraguan countryside but was executed by Contra paramilitaries armed by the U.S.

Another is the CIA operative Alex who is some sort of sick conjurer whose main role, among others, is to sow disinformation and discord among opponents of US imperialist interests. He operates clandestinely through corporate fronts, flies all over the World in a jet, is well versed in high and popular culture, fights bureaucratic turf wars with his colleagues, and is a torturer and crazy to boot.

Leon Trotsky, whose notes for his own novel are provided to us for a peek, also makes a special appearance. Trotsky outlines the main plot, invents his main characters, comments on his own writing, and in the end decides to discard his novel.

Then there are the rejected Master's thesis proposals of Elena Jordan, Greg's ex-wife which are both ingenious and hilarious.

And finally, the long but curious story of the Bulgarian Vasilev, aging revolutionary internationalist extraordinaire who survived the Bulgarian struggle, hobnobbed with Stalin, spent some time in the Gulag, became a firm supporter of Castro, and was involved in the Sandinista final offensive against the Nicaraguan dictator Somoza.

Much of socially-oriented literature, both in prose and in poetry, that is considered to be sympathetic or directly supportive of revolutionary causes are perceived mostly as serious, grim and determined works with no place for black humor and playfulness. What Taibo II manages to create in *Four Hands* is a narrative that critiques the dominant social order while remaining entertaining all throughout.

From Taibo's Four Hands

Derek says

possibly one of the best books I've read

Esagui says

"Llevando ya varios libros del autor puedo afirmar que esta novela se aleja mucho de lo que nos tiene acostumbrados. Lo que llevaría a muchos a tomar distancia. Y sí, puedo secundar esa acción. No es un libro complicado pero tampoco es tan sencillo como las decenas que le preceden. No es difícil de leer pero sí de ver en un contexto general y poder definir el camino a seguir. Los personajes son geniales y te encariñas fácilmente, pero de la misma manera te pierdes y cuesta engancharlos unos a otros."

Reseña completa en: <http://contraelpromediomexicano.com/2...>

Alejandro Ramirez says

Maestro de maestros. Estilo envidiable y disfrutabilísimo. Una parte lo leí en un jacuzzi en una terraza en Vernon (silver star) con una Kokanee en la mano después de la carrera ciclista 24 horas de adrenalina.

Brett Bydairk says

Another book that requires close attention, as the rather short chapters change viewpoint frequently, but this layered novel by one of Mexico's premier novelists is worth it.
It starts with Stan Laurel observing the assassination of Pancho Villa in 1923, and gets stranger.

Tripmastermonkey says

this book is HELLA fun. bungling CIA agents are the bad guys (like in real life, right?). a pair of Mexican and American Jewish journalists, and a pair of old comrades- a Spanish anarchist and Ukranian (? i might be remembering wrong) communist- are the good guys.

throw in some references to Laurel and Hardy, a PhD student with outlandish dissertation topics, and a pirate story within the story, and you have a great book.

Under_rubble says

Enjoyed the hell out of it. But have no desire to write about it.
