

In the Company of Educated Men

Leonce Gaiter

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This mix of crime thriller and road-trip story sends three friends on a psychological excursion into everpresent danger.

About a quarter of the way in, Leonce Gaiter's novel *In the Company of Educated Men* takes a significant turn that not only changes the story's trajectory but also turns a fairly standard coming-of-age story into a more interesting tale. The result is a fast-paced read with a nice narrative twist that creates big drama from a series of small coincidences.

The story begins with the narrator Lennie, his roommate Paul, and their friend Louisa graduating from Harvard, with the familiar questions about what comes next after a lifetime of structure. Though his friends take "real-world" jobs, Lennie is born with the financial resources to avoid having to grow up as quickly. When his father dies after a life of work-related stress, Lennie decides to instead take a road trip and talks Paul and Louisa into joining him on a drive west with no real destination.

Where *In the Company of Educated Men* really picks up steam is after the travelers stop to get gas along the way and a young drifter holds up the register and forces the group at gunpoint to take him with them. What follows turns into a mix of a crime thriller and a road-trip story, as the friends get to know the gunman, the police get involved, and a series of unexpected events turn what should have been a carefree trip into constant danger.

At this point, Gaiter makes an interesting writing choice that marks a sharp but welcome and compelling change from the early part of the book. In his recollection of the rest of their journey, Lennie leaves out what are obviously key details of the events during that part of the trip, focusing mostly on his guilt about getting his friends involved. Gaiter then has Lennie fill in the gaps years after the fact by visiting the other players and asking for their perspectives on what took place. This strategy lets the reader speculate on how the ordeal ends, providing hints that could go several ways, and then provides an answer that holds together in a narratively satisfying way. That writing choice makes a big impact, and takes *In the Company of Educated Men* in a memorable direction, making it appeal to readers of both coming-of-age stories and crime thrillers.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Winter 2015)

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