

Lawman's Dilemma: A Reuben Braddock Western

Ray Bilderback

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Admirers of old black-and-white Western films will enjoy this Bilderback novel. *Lawman's Dilemma* is one installment in the ongoing adventures of Reuben Braddock, a lawman determined to clean up the American Wild West. Braddock is a larger-than-life hero with a calling—not even love can surpass his need to restore order to towns terrorized by rogues and criminals.

Typical genre fiction, the work is edited well and preserves the flavor of the time in which the plot is set, backed by the author's research into the minute details of daily existence in dangerous territory. Isolated from the social norms of the populated urban east, this is a rugged environment that encourages an every-man-for-himself philosophy. With a story light on romance and heavy on action, emphasis remains on Marshal Braddock's attempts to find the bad guy and bring him to justice.

Dialogue is spiced with regional dialect straight off a movie set. The prose is tight; no superfluous padding fills the pages. Bilderback's writing is polished, and every word is placed with skill: "A hawk flew over. Quail called from a thicket of blackberries. A breeze rustled the treetops. Reuben searched for the right reply. Couldn't find it."

While the larger audience for this book may be action-oriented, the novel will capture fans of sweet romance as well. In one passage, Bilderback writes, "In minutes, he was asleep again but not before he remembered back to the night just last week that he'd spent in Maria's bed with cool, clean-smelling sheets, the warm, musky scent of Maria. She had rubbed his back and shoulders, crawled in, and drawn him to her. Why would a man trade that for a pile of rocks?"

Easy to read, but without the author resorting to stylistic brevity, this book's appeal may extend to the classroom. *Lawman's Dilemma* is a wholesome novel written with realistic honesty—perfect for extracurricular reading. Ray Bilderback draws on his own background, which is rich in turn-of-the-century farming methods and sustainable living techniques used in rural America during the 1930s and 1940s, areas where no electricity was available.

The book is divided into three parts, with each part broken into chapters. These stories stand individually, but they can be read as a whole—another advantage for a teacher wanting to assign manageable pieces to a student.

Entertaining yet educational, Bilderback's work presents bits of western history within a solid plot. This novel upholds tradition and espouses a morality enforced with violence in a harsh world, so, due to the occasional graphic scenes, context must be emphasized to adolescents.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (May 13, 2013)

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