

The King of Taos

Max Evans

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In his novel *The King of Taos*, Max Evans chronicles the lives of friends who wile away their days drinking in a local bar and thinking up ways to make a little money in their tourist-heavy New Mexico town.

Set in the 1950s, Evans's novel unfolds as a series of distinct episodes, with time passing slowly in the lived-in setting for his realistically lost characters. There's Zacharias, who spends most days drunk, asking favors from friends while he waits for a huge check from the Veterans Administration that he swears will be arriving any day. While his wife works and his children grow, Zacharias borrows against his potential windfall. Meanwhile, Shaw, a young aspiring artist who moves to town, finds a muse in the prostitute whom he routinely paints, and creates a lot of work to sell to eager tourists.

The group includes men known as the Lover, the Fighter, and the Undertaker, whose apt nicknames reflect the roles they play in a town where little seems to change. Their stories are interconnected: Zacharias ensures that his daughter will marry the Lover, Shaw befriends the town's one successful artist, everyone congregates at the local hangout, and all are on a never-ending search for a little more money and a little more alcohol.

Though the stakes of the *The King of Taos* seem small, they loom large to the characters, resulting in a novel filled with easy charm. The landscape of Taos draws the visitors who fund the townspeople's existences, and that setting is rendered with such beauty that it becomes a presence in its own right. *The King of Taos* is a nostalgic portrait of a time and place, packed with people whose mistakes and shifting ambitions make them memorable.

JEFF FLEISCHER (July / August 2020)

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