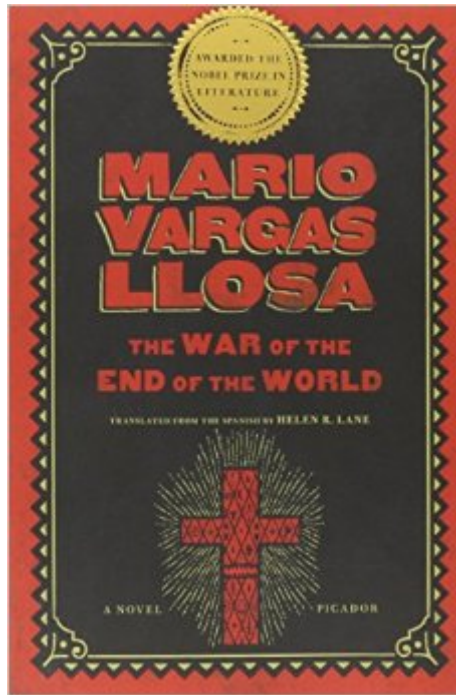


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The War Of The End Of The World



Synopsis

Deep within the remote backlands of nineteenth-century Brazil lies Canudos, home to all the damned of the earth: prostitutes, bandits, beggars, and every kind of outcast. It is a place where history and civilization have been wiped away. There is no money, no taxation, no marriage, no census. Canudos is a cauldron for the revolutionary spirit in its purest form, a state with all the potential for a true, libertarian paradise--and one the Brazilian government is determined to crush at any cost. In perhaps his most ambitious and tragic novel, Mario Vargas Llosa tells his own version of the real story of Canudos, inhabiting characters on both sides of the massive, cataclysmic battle between the society and government troops. The resulting novel is a fable of Latin American revolutionary history, an unforgettable story of passion, violence, and the devastation that follows from fanaticism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The War of the End of the World is an impossibly ambitious book which nevertheless succeeds completely, and in the process confirms that Vargas Llosa deserves to be considered among the great authors of all time. Unlike his other books, which are either frankly autobiographical or significantly based on the author's personal experience, this is a straightforward historical novel, taking place in 1890s northeastern Brazil. It is also a real novel of ideas, confronting very seriously such timeless topics as the relationship of individual to society and of faith and personal belief to law and social order, the source of state authority, and truth/beauty and means/ends issues. While somewhat "modern" in style - the narrative does not proceed in a linear fashion, perspectives shift

sharply from one character to the next, and "truth" is often in the eye of the beholder - the book really aspires to be a Great Historical Novel in a classic mode, like *The Red and the Black* or *War and Peace*. (Personally, I think it is stronger than either of those; at the very least it belongs on the same shelf.) In other words, it is no post-modern mirror-job, but a serious attempt to engage all thoughtful people - including those who ordinarily do not care for fiction - in a subtle and thorough consideration of the factors that create Peru's Shining Path, or Waco, Jonestown, MOVE, Hamas, etc. Vargas Llosa even manages the trick of being both sympathetic to and critical of all sides.

Vargas Llosa's gripping 1981 book is a fictionalized history of Canudos, the community in the dry interior of Brazil that was utterly wiped out by the Brazilian army in 1897. Vargas Llosa's book is as long (over 500 pages) and as dense as the seminal Canudos book "Rebellion in the Backlands" by Euclides da Cunha, and those fascinated by the story will want to read both. This book takes da Cunha's as its point of departure, for where da Cunha was a military engineer who accompanied the military campaigns against Canudos and wrote about the event's impact on the Brazilian identity, Vargas Llosa is a novelist captivated by the human element. "The War of the End of the World" is the massive story of four successive military campaigns against a religious sect (part-Waco, part-Masada) that killed about 10,000 people on both sides. It is built on the lives of many key personalities. By threading together the life stories of several real Canudos inhabitants who included criminals, castoffs, and misfits with the lives of landowners, journalists, and military officers, including the famously brutal general Moreira Cesar, Vargas Llosa both chronicles the Canudos tale and creates a powerful human novel. Da Cunha was intrigued by the "why" of Canudos. What fostered a fanatical religious sect in Brazil's interior, allowed it thrive and grow, and why was it the subject of such national fear that the fourth campaign against the village involved fully half of the Brazilian army? Da Cunha spent dozens of pages writing about Antonio the Counselor, Canudos messianic leader. Vargas Llosa is less sympathetic to the military's point of view, depicting Canudos as a safe haven for those rejected by society, by sweethearts, employers, or the church. An island of broken toys.

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