



The First Fast Draw

Louis L'Amour

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You can't go home again....

East Texas wasn't much of a home for Cullen Baker. Few liked him, and some even tried to kill him. Yet after three hard years of wandering, he's come back to farm the land that's rightfully his.

Only Cullen's in for an unwelcome homecoming: his neighbors have long memories, the Reconstructionists have greedy hearts, and his worst enemy has teamed up with a vicious outlaw. But Cullen isn't about to back down. Instead, he's intent on perfecting a new way of gunfighting—the fast draw. And now, with enemies closing in on three sides and threatening the woman he loves, he'll have to be faster than lightning—and twice as deadly—just to survive.

The First Fast Draw Details

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From Reader Review The First Fast Draw for online ebook

Paul says

Number 15 in my Louis L'Amour project and the first of two books from 1959.

Told in the first person Cullen Baker has returned to his boyhood home in East Texas that he left as a youngster after his folks died. His family was poor and scratched out a living but Cullen was not liked because of his social status.

Deciding to return to the Texas homestead after the Civil War Cullen soon runs afoul of Reconstruction carpet baggers and bullies from his childhood past who are not too happy to see him and beat him nearly to death. Not about to give up Cullen plans to stay but first trains himself to become an expert with a pistol teaching himself how to fast draw, thus the title of the book as he is supposed to be the originator of the skill.

In end the bad guys satisfyingly get their comeuppance.

I liked the story although not as much as some of the previous books I've read but still a solid 3/5 stars (I liked it versus I really liked it). I found the language, written word usage to be a bit more formal which was completely fine but a little different feel from his previous works I've read making me wonder if this was an early story of his that was published a few years later from when he started or if he was experimenting with a different style.

Afshin Afshar says

Not one of my Luis L'amour favorites, but very entertaining and fun read nonetheless. There is a bit of everything in this story even a recognizable name or two from the old west. Loved the language as spoken by the hero of the story.

Steven says

Wanted to read this again because it was the first L'Amour book I had read back in junior high. I loved it then and that started me collecting and reading all of his books. Such a fan boy then that I wrote him a letter and still have his signed reply (brown typewriter ink and brown ink autograph!). So long ago now that I expected this to be a fresh read. Wrong, it was like a flashback. A pleasurable one, though, as I must have read this ten times when I was thirteen and practically had it memorized. All came flooding back as I read. Anyway . . .

Great prodigal returns plot. Nice bit of post civil-war reconstruction history lesson. Cullen Baker holes up in the swamps practicing his quick draw to get an edge on his enemies who just won't let him farm the old homestead. L'Amour uses a catch and release, catch and release, narrative arc to keep the tension building to the final battle.

He had the smoothest, easiest reading style of all the classic wester writers. Always gave you characters to identify with and to root for, plus a cast of characters to root against. Friendship loyalty was a big part of L'Amour's ethos and that is a strong thread woven into the texture of this novel.

Jonah says

Sunday school lesson, by Mr. L'Amour:

English, he stayed where he was, keeping an eye out for trouble, but the rest of us started for the saloon. Just about that time the saloon door opened and Joel Reese walked out.

He started to stretch and he caught himself right in the middle of it, and he stood there staring at me like his spine had come unsnapped, his face turning kind of sick gray.

"Bob," I said, "this gent is one of those who entertained me the other night. Fact is, he was one of those calling the numbers for the dance. I figure this man should be instructed in the Word of the Lord."

"Yes, sir," Bob Lee was mighty serious, "you take your text from Job, fourth chapter, eighth verse: They that plow iniquity and sow wickedness, they shall reap the same.' "

Joel Reese took a sort of half-step back, looking around for help. Longley had moved around to cut him off and he was standing there, lazy-like, his thumbs hooked in his belt, but boy though he was, there was nothing soft about Bill Longley.

Reese, he looked at me and he set up to say something but I wasn't figuring on much talk. So I slapped him across the mouth. Well, sir, I'm a big man and I have done a sight of work in my time, and I was remembering how they had closed in on me the other night, so that slap shook him up, somewhat.

He struck out at me, and I just shifted my feet to make the blow miss and slapped him again. That time it started blood from his nose. Colonel Belser came to the door and he had a rifle in his hands. "Here! Stop that!" Now Bill Longley had him a Dragoon Colt in his hand and he was looking right at the colonel. "Mister Belser, sir," he said that, only he dragged it out a might, "you see a sinner being shown that the way of the transgressor is hard, and Colonel, sir, should you transgress any further with that weapon, you will transgress yourself right into a belly full of lead."

Eva Seyler says

It may be a while before it actually sinks in that I of all people actually just read a WESTERN NOVEL.

Seriously. This is ME we are talking about here.

It took me a while to get into it and adjust to the odd cadence of the narrator's voice, but by the time I got to the third chapter or so I stopped noticing that so much and was able to better focus on the story itself.

It was nice and fast-paced, did not waste time with unwieldy narrative, and while certain parts of it were predictable, there was enough that wasn't to keep me from feeling completely cheated of an hour of my life.

On the whole, not a bad read. I would like to read a couple more of his books before I really form an opinion.

Rob Smith says

A fine tale by L'Amour with the usual unusual layout of a story that most westerns can't pull off. Also, as usual a lot is covered in a few pages another author would take 50 to write.

This setting is north Texas and the scenery is excellently written as usual. L'Amour covers everywhere from swamp to mansion to town in description that will put the reader there. The characters are also great as always, though there is often too much similarity between various characters from other books. I have to wonder why L'Amour didn't just do a series of one character instead what is nearly a series of one character with different names.

The ending for some will be somewhat unsatisfying, but that is not unusual of a L'Amour book.

Bottom line: I recommend this book. 8 of 10 points.

Christopher Madsen says

I this book for the book group I facilitate at work for some of my clients. It's the first Louis L'Amore book I have ever read and I have to say I was surprised how much I liked it. I read the whole thing in about two days. Face paced, gun fights, friendship, love, all the elements of a good western are there. Fun to read.

Berry Muhl says

An interesting departure from the previous books I've read by this author. So far, it's the only one in first-person perspective. The hero is a bit more self-deprecating than most, and we expect a bit more moral gray area on that basis, but he turns out to be as upright as any of the others.

If there's anything to complain about, it's that self-deprecation. It gets a bit repetitive after a while, and we don't need to hear quite so much about the narrator's supposed moral failings ever time he steals himself for confrontation. But although the ending isn't quite what that narrator hoped for, it's still fairly satisfying. Recommended.

serena482* says

My rating 4.5 stars. I really enjoyed this one!!! :D

Prasidh Ramson says

Reading outside my genre again - I've decided to try a Western. Louis L'Amour has been a name synonymous with this genre, so I chose this book based on the synopsis and the cover art. I was not

disappointed.

Cullen Baker, is a young cowboy, that after years of wandering returns to his late parents' dilapidated farm to start life anew. Looming over him are old enemies, rival neighbours and post-Civil War Reconstructionists. As if this wasn't enough, a young lady has also caught his eye. The title refers to a gunfighting technique that he has to perfect if he wants to survive.

I really enjoyed this! A short read, just over 150 pages, very descriptive and tersely written. The action scenes are frenetic (Most accidental like my carbine was lyin' across my saddle and pointed right at his heart...) with the burgeoning romance delicately handled. (It wasn't me to go to talking like that. Shows what candlelight and a pretty woman can do to a man's judgement of the fitness of things). Characters are well written and believable with the women just as head strong and gutsy. I could not help but read this with a Southern Drawl, y'all. Lastly, I was impressed with the meditations these cowboys had on their lives and futures. In one scene, they ponder how long they had have left to live given the violent nature of the West and bounties placed in their heads - short, sad and poignant.

On the whole, an exciting read with action, romance and reflection. Being a newbie to this genre, I am now a fan and look forward to reading more Westerns. Yee-ha!

John Bess says

I'm not a big country western fan but this was an interesting and captivating short story.

Chuck says

This was my fiftieth Louis L'Amour novel which means I am nearing the halfway point. This surprisingly was not one of his formularily westerns which as a general rule, by my tastes, is a good thing. The book, however was a disappointment. The male characters in this book were ragged, violent and mean spirited men and even the major character left me feeling that I would not want to spend much time with him. It takes place in the swamps on the Louisiana-Texas border which did not evoke what L'Amour is so good at; the descriptions of the West. In any case, a rather tedious adventure of alligators, snakes [both human and reptile], and less than redeeming characters. The only cleverness comes from the title wherein the lead character was supposedly the developer of the fast draw for western gunfights.

Moe Shinola says

This is a really good book to start with if you're new to L'Amour's books. It moves along well, has a good story and characters, and ends well also. After this you should check out The Sky-Liners and Sackett.

Gordon Lindstrom says

A well written story about a lonely man who tries to come home, and the turmoil that results. Not one of

L'Amour's best books but worthy of a read.

Benjamin Thomas says

“You could have bought my chances right then for a plugged two-bit piece and been ahead of the game. I felt like a limp deuce in an ace-high deck.”

I need to do some research and see if there exists a volume devoted to Louis L'Amour quotes. If so I'd light a shuck to get my hands on a copy. So much philosophical wisdom packed away in the guise of these western novels...

“The First Fast Draw” is a nice little story about a lone man named Cullen Baker who is forced to stand up to a bunch of bullies. It takes place just after the end of the Civil War and as the title implies, Cullen develops a new method of quick-drawing a pistol in order to stand a chance against multiple foes. A fairly good representation of L'Amour's western fiction, I would say, although with a bit more of a romantic angle than he usually includes.

I always enjoy reading one of these westerns between larger novels, partly because it's a good break, and partly because it's a good stress reliever to read a book in which you know the good guys from the bad and you're certain the good guys will emerge triumphant in the end. But on top of that, they are generally just good old fashioned storytelling.

Michael Kennard says

Read most of Louis Lamour's books when I was in my late teens and early twenties. They are important to me as they were some of the first books that got me into the reading habit. For that I shall be forever grateful

Ryan Mishap says

The boom reverberated off the canyon walls and the screams and the smoke and the noise—I'm ashamed to say I fainted. I came to rather quickly, the explosive percussion fading like a thunderclap far away, but my mind had fallen into that other canyon—the darker one of memory. That last night in our town, before we were ordered to evacuate, when Mother screamed and smoke billowed from the broken windows of the church. That night when I—

Funny, the places your mind takes you at inopportune moments. I read a novel for school that was written as if it were a teenager's diary. It told of her family's journey to a new land, America (part of the Old Country), and I remember being annoyed that she stopped a sentence as if she had been interrupted speaking and not writing. A bothersome affectation, I thought, or, worse, a cheap trick to fool the reader into suspense. Yet here I just did the very same thing I criticized in my report (I got an “A”). I promise I won't do that again. Pa helped me up and I was rather touched his first concern was my welfare instead of what the deuce just happened. Our wagon was more or less in the middle of the caravan, so our view in either direction was blocked. Shouting could be heard and soon men were pushing past us, heading to the front of the group. I was still woozy when Mother appeared, grim faced.

“Stay,” was all she said. I nodded, looking past her to my sister's face peering out the wagon door. I'd seen

her scowl at Mother's back before, but the look on her face just then...I couldn't place it, connect the emotion.

Pa melted away during the next interval after Father appeared to check on our well-being. Both my parents were soon off, disappearing from sight in the ungodly amount of dust created by the explosion, but not before I heard her spit out "Chiggers!" and he "Accident."

I decided on action myself. Though my legs trembled when I followed, I was determined to atone for my previous weakness. After all, many a hero has quailed before conquering fear and finding his true strength. I fancied the rail a narrow bridge above some foreboding chasm, letting it guide me through the smoke and dust and only stepping off to pass around wagons. I heard voices, sensed the presence of others, but did not stop. I must have been close to the front when I thought I heard Pa—well, our Pa, I should say as many of the families had brought along their servants. The smoke was thick and slow like thoughts when one first awakes, but I thought I could see indistinct silhouettes when I looked left. Their whispers rode the pressure waves of silence that followed the explosion and I stopped to listen.

".....,

"..... No, no,"

".....??"

"Okay, Okay,"

The English words were certainly spoken by our Pa, and the rest was the gibberish the natives grunted at each other when they thought themselves alone. Probably making fun of us, Mother always said. "The Great do and the feebled minded poke fun."

I stepped off the rail, silent footfalls brought me closer, and then I heard a quick intake of breath. The silhouettes broke apart: one moving up the seemingly impossible to climb canyon wall and the other towards me. It was just our Pa, our Pa, I told myself, but I-

Damn it! I really will stop doing that. I just, I ran. Turned and ran at the sight of a shadow coming at me.

After that last night in our town I thought I'd, well, I'd thought I had become less of a-

Damn it all to hell.

(Gwen's Diary):

I'm frightened. I want to see what happened, if anyone's hurt but I'm still scared of Mother. I'm ashamed of this but I've seen what she's capable of. What Father is incapable of and what my brother-

And I realize this second that this is the first time I've truly been alone since we fled town and the first thing I do is write in my diary like one of those forlorn but beautiful girls in those laughable stories Mother tells me are proper literature for young ladies. For empty headed preeners without a single original thought in their doe-eyed heads is more like it, oh, but except of course they find their True Self and inner strength just in time to throw it away marrying some noble hero. But I could probably flip back through this diary and find dozens of pages with whining on that topic but what I'm really thinking about is not knowing what's going on out there, what's going on with my family and what am I going to do?

You've become my only friend, diary, and even though I thought it was a silly lark to anthropomorph...whatever, you, I still do it. Think of you as someone real I'm writing to. I'm the one that writes in this stupid thing and re-reads it so I guess I'm my only friend and does that sound pathetic, Gwen? But I don't know what else to do and there's no one to talk to.

Mother is horrible, so cruel, like a caricature of the evil aunt the forlorn girl has to gather the courage to confront (is this one of her hints?). If those girls had to confront Mother, they'd wilt under her stare, cry, and dissolve into a puddle, a forlorn puddle of failure.

Father is hopeless, brooding over matters of state, listless when it comes to us and ignoring how Uncle Samuel has practically taken over his life. Actually, our family is almost exactly like one of those novels! I miss my old brother. Space Captain to my First Mate. We used to play. He used to tell me stuff, even embarrassing stuff like one of his first PE classes when he couldn't climb the rope 'cos his body wasn't used to the increased gravity yet. That brother is gone, stolen by whatever faeries they have on this planet. They

replaced him with some smirking dopplewhosit intent on Trying To Be A MAN. So full of himself, he doesn't even realize how much it hurts to have him brush me off and refuse to talk about Mother and Uncle and about how wrong it is to have slaves and about how lonely I am. The way Mother treats him and Father ignores him I think maybe he might see that he doesn't have to be what he thinks they want. I had hope until the so-called Attacks. Until he showed how like them he already was. Too late.

I'm crying, diary, me, right now, thinking of that night and everything. The whole colonization thing and I know it was "decades before we got here" and that "the old must give way to the new" and it's "just the way things are" but when I think of what we've done to the Chikra.

And I know it's selfish when so many others are suffering but I'm crying for myself too because I feel so trapped and I'm so alone.

(end of first half of story)

Phillip says

For a Louis L'Amour novel, this one just doesn't reach the level of excellence I've come to expect. I don't know for sure, but this one reads like an earlier novel, because he just doesn't seem in the groove he was in his later works. The story is interesting and somewhat original, and focuses on the men who walked away from the Civil War with few homes to return to, and even less respect from those they left.

The novel focuses on Cleve Ellerson, a tough and determined young man who wants nothing more than to farm the land his parents left behind, and live a normal life. Of course, the wild ruffians he grew up with and who hate him, are quite ready to disrupt his peaceful plans. Cleve rides around on a mule, not a horse, which I found quite odd, but as the narrative continued, I began to realize that the archetypal cowboy we all know and love really didn't exist in the form we are used to back then. In fact, the art of the quick draw was simply an unknown concept to people at the time. Cleve mentions that men didn't draw guns from holsters, but rather just tucked into their pants. Well, eventually, Cleve is forced to learn the art of the quick draw, ultimately becoming...wait for it...the first fast draw.

Ultimately the writing is decent--nothing special or powerful, but effective nonetheless. The story was a bit "meh." The action is scarce, and the payoff at the end just doesn't have the emotionally and revenge-fulfilling power I've come to expect from L'Amour novels. I won't read this one again, but I will continue to read the novels from this author as I consider him a literary legend.

Michael Graeme says

My introduction to the western genre, passed onto me by my 14yr old son who's currently going through Louis L'Amour like a dose of salts. Thoroughly enjoyed it. A fairly short tale, about 150 pages. Very descriptive of the landscape, and quite insightful I thought, as well as being a book of action and of course lots of gunsmoke. The writing is easy to get into, very simple prose and dialogue style, but far from simplistic. It's easy to see why Louis L'Amour has the reputation he does. I'll be reading more of his stories.

Jeff says

This was my 2nd L'Amour book. His books are simple but they are not dumb. He did his research when it came to history, weapons, etc. Good stuff.
