
Fiesta en la madriguera

Author: Juan Pablo Villalobos

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Reader: **Rosalind Harvey**

Fiesta en la madriguera is a short (104 pages) but gripping novel that tells the story of the precocious Tochtli and his drugs-boss father in Mexico. The book is a refreshingly different addition to the so-called narco-literature genre, and would work well in translation.

The story is divided into three parts and is told as monologue entirely from Tochtli's point of view. In Part I he introduces the characters, including his father and hero Yolcaut, a violent and indulgent man. The 'warren' of the title refers to the luxurious palace the family live in, but one that too often becomes a prison for Tochtli due to his father's dangerous business and extreme paranoia. Tochtli is aware that his father is powerful but the connection between this power and the decapitated bodies he regularly sees on the television is one that, at first, only the readers make. Tochtli idolizes his father until he discovers a secret gun room in the palace and realizes he has been lied to, and in response he decides to stop speaking.

Part II tells of the family's trip to Liberia, Yolcaut's indulgent response to Tochtli's demand for a dwarf hippopotamus to complete his private zoo, but one that ends traumatically for Tochtli with the animals being shot after they fall ill. The boy cries, painfully aware that he is unable to live up to his father's expectation that he 'be a man'. Part III, back in Mexico, and Tochtli is still silent. Yolcaut's business is going badly, more and more bodies appear on the TV screen, including one that seems to be Yolcaut's girlfriend, and Tochtli learns that much of what happens is his father's fault. Towards the end of the novel father and son are reconciled, however, when a parcel arrives with the stuffed and mounted heads of his two dwarf hippos. It becomes clear that one day Tochtli will take on his father's mantle and the cycle of violence will continue.

Fiesta is a highly readable, poignant and funny story, the claustrophobic setting and tender age of the narrator allowing for a condensed view into an extraordinary world. There is some slang, but certainly not enough to put a translator off, and the language is as you would expect from a young child, simple and direct, making for an easy-to-read style, yet one that reveals painful truths about how a culture of violence affects children indirectly. It is one of the most interesting books from Latin America I have read all year, and calls out for translation in order to give English readers a fresh view on an often-tired theme.

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