



The Gun

C. S. Forester

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The Gun is a novel by C.S. Forester about an imaginary series of incidents involving a single eighteen-pound cannon during the Spanish Peninsular War (1807-1814) against Napoleon Bonaparte. It was first published in 1933. As the story begins, the huge bronze cannon is abandoned by the remnants of a Spanish army retreating after their defeat in Battle of Espinosa. The local people employ it in their rebellion against the French, but are eventually forced to hide it away beneath a pile of stone to prevent its capture. Years later, a group of guerrilleros learn of its location and conscript the locals to outfit it with carriage and train. Over time, the gun is used in battle with ever-increasing success. It falls under the control of a series of guerrilla leaders; each achieves strong leadership through his connection to the gun, and each is eventually killed in some way (captured and executed, killed in battle, killed by rival leaders), until the gun finally comes under the control of the 18-year-old Jorge, who emerges as an untrained but naturally gifted leader and tactician. The exploits of the Spanish irregulars under Jorge eventually lead to the diversion of a large body of French troops from their fight against Wellington and thus help win the war. The book vividly portrays the violence of combat and the brutality displayed by both sides in the Peninsular War.

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Willie Coffey:

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