



PUTTING THEIR WHOLE HEARTS INTO THE GAME

REVIEW by [PETE CROATTO](#)

In **This Love Is Not For Cowards**, Robert Andrew Powell admits that he doesn't know what he's looking for in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, the border town defined worldwide by its reputation for nonstop violence. Ostensibly, it's to follow the city's beloved soccer team, the Indios, one of the few good things the Juarenses can hold on to.

This is not an understatement or rah-rah gibberish. Owner Francisco Ibarra views the Indios as a social program. The team provides escape and shelter in this unforgiving world, one that Powell calls home for months. He uses the Indios as his base for a wide-ranging, intoxicating narrative that examines the people who aren't part of the death toll, who haven't made screaming headlines.

In the midst of the Indios' floundering season, we ride with El Kartel, the partying, benevolent pack of fans that follows the team. We meet Marco Vidal, the Indios' talented young American midfielder, who chooses to ignore the bad and embrace Juarez. We hear from a dentist convinced that his faith in God protects him from bullets, which is just as well since the useless Juarenese authorities are all connected to either La Línea or the Sinaloa Cartel, the city's two rival drug cartels. And we learn that Juarez's infamous reputation for violence against women is skewed. Everyone is a target.

Humanity and generosity exist here. Powell makes friends and memories, though both come at a steep personal cost. The biggest revelation in **This Love Is Not For Cowards** is how easily Powell becomes immune to the horror. A neighborhood shooting frustrates Powell because he can't get to the laundromat. He watches an Indios game in a bar, the blast from a nearby bomb barely interrupting his activity. If you're not a gangster, love and indifference have the same pull in keeping you here.

By immersing himself in the everyday rhythms of Ciudad Juarez and eschewing objectivity, Powell does more than provide color or authenticity. He's fashioned a memorable, clear-minded piece of first-person journalism that ranks up there with Bill Buford's *Among the Thugs* or [Susan Orlean](http://bookpage.com/author/susan-orlean) (<http://bookpage.com/author/susan-orlean>)'s best work. The people's passion, the city's decaying condition, the cries for help—they all leap from the page, vivid and sober.

No votes yet

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By Robert Andrew Powell

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