



Bruce Springsteen's music has always been timeless but on "Devils & Dust" his continued obsession with the American Southwest fuels an album of songs that could have been written over a hundred years ago. The bare bones rootsiness sets the stage for twelve campfire stories and the dog-eared cd case is there to give you the impression the tales have been told many times.

The title track is about a soldier "a long, long way from home" killing in the name of God. While it's an obvious reference to the war in Iraq, it could be about any soldier in any war. "All the Way Home" is the album's only rocker and except for the reference to "some old Stones song the band is trashing", it could have taken place in the old west. The same is true for his story of an encounter with a prostitute called "Reno" (earning the song a warning of "adult imagery" on the cover!), a day laborer who can't wait to get home to "Maria's Bed", a professional street fighter in "The Hitter" and the illegal immigrant who ends up dead on the "Matamoras Banks." By the time he starts singing about his "Golden Palomino" you think you're back in "Deadwood" (he even throws an f-word into his lyrics for the first time in his career.)

Maybe he has been watching too much HBO with his wife and three kids, but like "The Ghost of Tom Joad", which drew its influence from "The Grapes of Wrath", "Devils & Dust" taps into the Mexican-American experience in ways he has only hinted at in the past. Except for a few twentieth century references, the characters he creates could all be from the old west. It's funny how the challenges they face are the same as in this modern age. Timeless indeed.