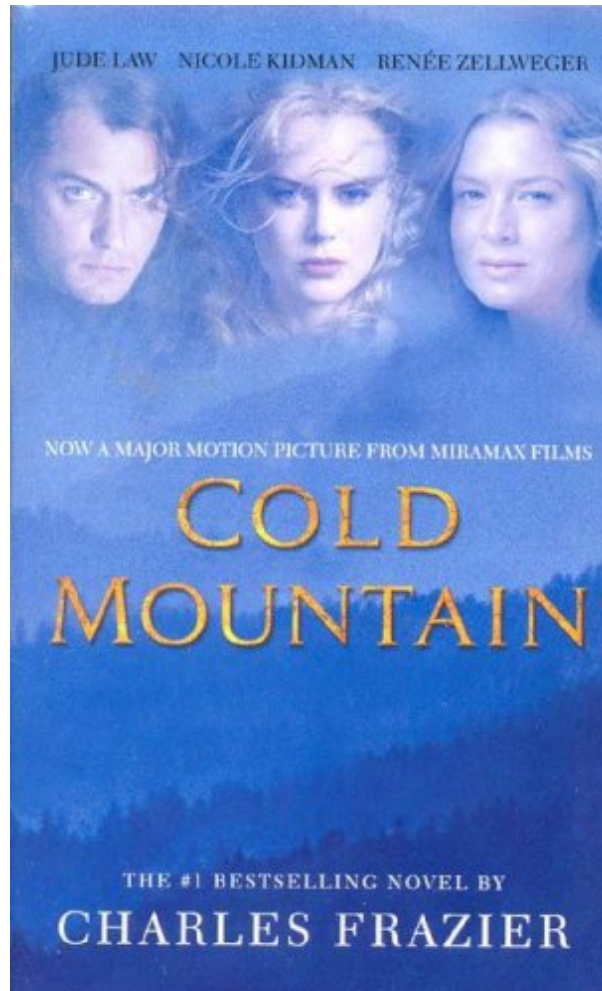


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A Smoky Mountain Odyssey

By Linda Linguvic

The story is simple. A wounded confederate soldier decides he has had enough of war and slowly makes his way home, hoping the woman he loves, Ada, is waiting for him. The book chronicles this journey and reminds me a little of The Odyssey as well as Don Quixote.

Based on the author's first hand knowledge of the smoky mountains and his family legends, the book transports the reader to a Civil War scenario that has little resemblance to Gone With the Wind. Details of death and destruction are described in gruesome clarity and the long road home is rife with them. Inman, the lead character encounters cruelty and kindness, starvation and capture, rogues and victims. The author uses words well, and some of the images will haunt my mind for a long time.

The heroine, Ada, has been gently raised in Charleston and is not prepared for running a farm when her father dies and the hired help run off. She almost starves until another young woman of about her age, Ruby, moves in with her and teaches her how to survive. Ada's growth into competency and self-sufficiency is rendered with the same detailed descriptions as Inman's journey and I was left with a new appreciation of what farm life is all about.

The book is good and I understand why publishers were thrilled with it. It has a big theme, is well written, and gives its readers a fresh new way to look at the Civil War. Many of the scenes made me flinch, but it also deepened my understanding of this very important period in history and what it is to be an American.

46 of 47 people found the following review helpful.

Beautifully crafted, difficult, but above all amazing

By Alysson Oliveira

Charles Frazier's debut 'Cold Mountain' received a deserved National Book Award in 1997. One of the best American novels of the 90s, this book is not for everyone. Part an unconventional love story, part a War story, but above all, the study of the human condition, the novel requires patience from the reader.

To experienced readers, who like literary works, it is not difficult to fall in love with this narrative. The story is slow, the writer builds his characters and situations bit by bit --that's why people who are looking for a war adventure or a conventional love story should stay away from 'Cold Mountain'.

The focus on three main characters: Inman, a soldier who deserts the battle and embarks in a journey to meet Ada, his beloved who's trying to keep going the farm left by her father, and Ruby, a mountain-girl who helps her with the farm. Through his journey, Inman meets a different cast of characters --some people help and some not-- that more than anything exemplify the human condition, mostly in war times. Meanwhile, Ada,

who can't keep in touch with him, tries to survive in the farm her father left. She will count on the help from Ruby, a simple girl who knows a lot about nature and farming and wants to help Ada, as long as she is treated like an equal, and not a maid.

After the story is set, and the characters introduced, Frazier is free to let the three main characters dominate the narrative. Although they are not the narrators, we're allowed to see their most inner thoughts, fears and joys. Every character is believable, in my opinion. Everyone has his/her life changed because of the war, and all of them are wounded souls.

The narrative is very descriptive therefore many parts are static. And although the story seems not to be going anywhere, it actually it --but it is very subtle. For some readers, this kind of device is a problem -- while for others this is truly beautiful. Not many writers have the ability that Frazier does to do such device. What in many narratives could be a bore, in his is simply wonderful to take a time off and look around, to see how much the environment has changed with the war.

Inman, Ada and Ruby are unforgettable. While he has one different supporting character every chapter; the two girls become close friends, in a beautiful friendship of mutual need. While Ruby can teach the mysteries of the nature; Ada helps her friends to learn things like arts.

All in all, Frazier has written one of the best novels published in the 90s. This is the kind of book that requires a lot from the reader, but it gives back much more. It is very rewarding to follow Inman, Ada and Ruby in their journey, however long and difficult it is.

91 of 103 people found the following review helpful.

The best 356 pages I've read in a long time!

By Gail

I bought Cold Mountain a couple of months ago and, thinking I wouldn't be able to put it down once I started it, have been saving it for a time when I'd be able to read without interruption. A four-day February beach trip provided the perfect opportunity.

This is a wonderful book! From the very first line - "At the first gesture of morning, flies began stirring.", I was hooked, and stayed with Inman, Ada, Monroe, the Swangers, Sara, Ruby, Stobrod, the Preacher, and the Goat Woman, right to the end. No, it's not a "pretty" story - war and what it does to people isn't pretty. Sure, I'd have preferred an ending that brought tears of joy, rather than tears of pain; but there really wasn't any other way for the book to end.

I'm neither an historian, nor a Civil War buff, but I loved this book! The word imagery made me "see" the trail that Inman followed, and "feel" what he and Ada felt. Surprisingly, this former English teacher loved the way Frazier punctuated the dialogue - understated, but effective, and just the way a storyteller would write.

So why do I give it a "9", instead of a "10"? I was a little confused by some lack of detail, like Monroe's church affiliation - just what was an "assembly" in 1864? A map covering the land Inman walked would have been helpful for the geography enthusiasts (I had to get out a map of North Carolina to find Salisbury); and a glossary for Frazier's mountain terms would have been a real bonus for those of us not from North Carolina.

Did these minor complaints keep me from enjoying the book? Heck no, and I can't wait for Frazier's next novel - I may even reread Cold Mountain, or one of his travel books - and I'll surely read his next book before reading any of its reviews. I am so glad I read these reviews AFTER I read the book!

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