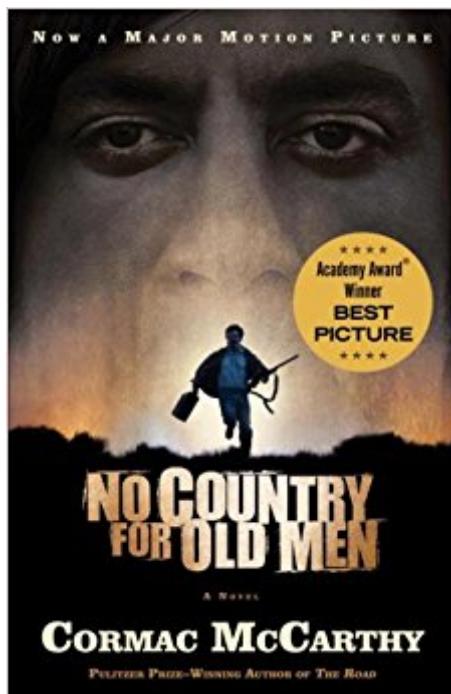


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No Country For Old Men (Vintage International)



Synopsis

In *No Country for Old Men*, Cormac McCarthy simultaneously strips down the American crime novel and broadens its concerns to encompass themes as ancient as the Bible and as bloodily contemporary as this morning's headlines.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Cormac McCarthy's first novel since completing the *Border Trilogy* in 1998 is a dramatic change of pace. Gone is the focus on the wild Texas plains and the encroachment of civilization. Gone are the lyrical descriptions of untamed nature and young love. Gone is the belief that love and hope have a fighting chance in life's mythic struggles. Instead, we have a much darker, more pessimistic vision, set in Texas in the 1980s, a microcosm in which drugs and violence have so changed "civilization" that the local sheriff believes "we're looking at something we really aint even seen before." Forty-five-year-old Sheriff Ed Tom Bell must deal with the growing amorality affecting his small border town as a result of the drug trade. The old "rules" do not apply, and Bell faces a wave of violence involving at least ten murders. Running parallel with Bell's investigation of these murders is the story of Llewelyn Moss, a resident of Bell's town, who, while hunting in the countryside, has uncovered a bloody massacre and a truck containing a huge shipment of heroin. He has also discovered and stolen a case containing two million dollars of drug money, which results in his frantic run from hired hitmen. Hunting Moss is Anton Chigurh, a sociopathic cartel avenger, a Satan

who will stop at nothing, the antithesis of the thoughtful and kindly Bell. A rival hitman named Wells is, in turn, stalking Chigurh. By far McCarthy's most exciting and suspenseful novel in recent years, the story speeds along, the body count rising in shocking scenes of depravity.

If you like your conflicts fully resolved, you may want to look elsewhere; if you're bothered by unconventional punctuation, you may be irritated by this book; if you despise jump cuts and point of view shifts, you may find yourself rereading sections of this book to catch your bearings. Otherwise, however, you may find this one of the most original books you've read in years. The story begins when Llewelyn Moss stumbles across the aftermath of a drug shootout while out antelope hunting. He follows a trail out into the desert at the end of which he finds a dead man and 2.4 million dollars. What he doesn't find (until it's too late) is the bug hidden in the money. Soon he has a dauntless hit man on his tail. The bodies pile up like cord wood. This part of the story is pretty conventional. Llewelyn Moss is likable and smart. He seems to anticipate the killer's every move, until he meets a fourteen-year-old, female hitchhiker, who proves to be too much of a distraction. About two-thirds of the way through the book, the focus switches from Llewelyn to Sheriff Bell, who's trying to save Llewelyn from himself. There's more quirky point of view stuff going on here as McCarthy has Bell tell us what he's thinking in first person, then switches immediately to third, still using Bell as a focus. Bell philosophizes about how he's never seen criminals quite as bad as these drug pushers. He never really believed in Satan until confronted with these people. McCarthy does like to preach occasionally and Bell is a willing stand-in; he indicts not only the drug pushers, but also the people who buy them, and he also seems to hint at some kind of organized crime syndicate that is intentionally chipping away at the American character, hence the title NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN.

There's so much to this novel that any review or description will fail to do it justice. McCarthy does many things with near perfection: dialogue (oh! his dialogue!), suffering, the American West, doom, beauty, humor, and violence, to name only a handful. All of these familiar, essential McCarthy elements are present here, but this is a different kind of book than McCarthy has written before. "No Country for Old Men" is a thriller but it resists so many of the temptations and cliches of popular thrillers. It is gritty and violent, without reveling in its violence; its bad guy is chillingly evil without being boastfully so; and Sheriff Bell is the right combination of admirable guy and flawed hero. It is also quicker and easier to read than McCarthy's previous novels, but to read it superficially would be a mistake, as you'll miss so many powerful literary allusions that dot the landscape. Even though

you know how this novel is going to end (more or less), McCarthy keeps you engaged with taut writing and mesmerizing prose. Not many writers have that ability. Cormac McCarthy isn't for everyone, with his disdain for quotation marks and apostrophes, the improper (but true to life) grammar that invades characters' speech, and the affinity he has for creating compoundwords. He gives few introductions to his characters and their circumstances, leaving much for the reader to deduce alone--quite a change from typical dumbed-down fiction. I think the best parts of McCarthy's books are the endings. Things don't fall perfectly into place and there's a lot of room for interpretation. I much prefer this to force-fed, off-into-the-sunset conclusions that are so appealing to writers. I wonder what those who complained so heatedly about it were expecting?

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