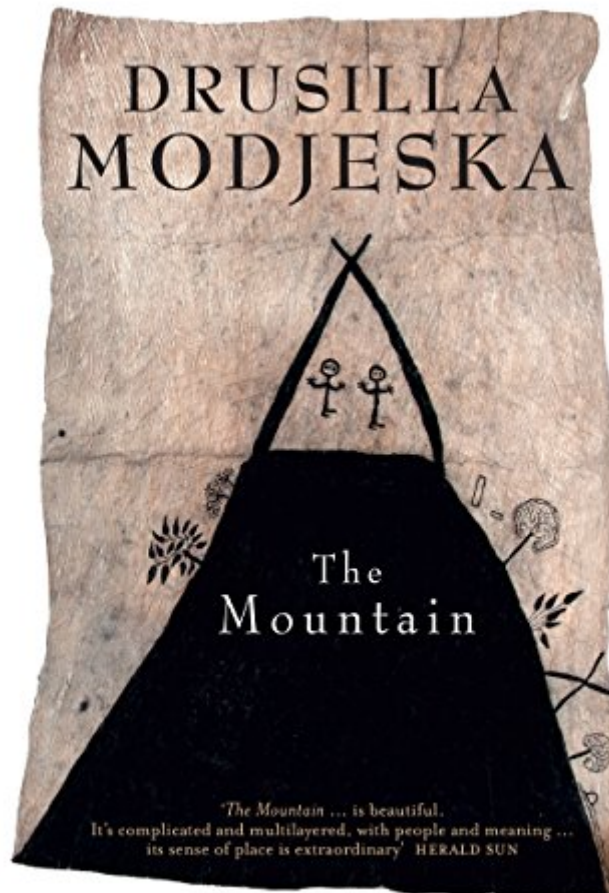




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The Mountain



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Synopsis

'A novel as intricate and powerful as the bark-cloth paintings at its heart' - Anna Funder
In 1968 Papua New Guinea is on the brink of independence, and everything is about to change. Amidst the turmoil filmmaker Leonard arrives from England with his Dutch wife, Rika, to study and film an isolated village high in the mountains. The villagers' customs and art have been passed down through generations, and Rika is immediately struck by their paintings on a cloth made of bark. Rika and Leonard are also confronted with the new university in Moresby, where intellectual ambition and the idealism of youth are creating friction among locals such as Milton - a hot-headed young playwright - and visiting westerners, such as Martha, to whom Rika becomes close. But it is when Rika meets brothers Jacob and Aaron that all their lives are changed for ever. Drusilla Modjeska's sweeping novel takes us deep into this fascinating, complex country, whose culture and people cannot escape the march of modernity that threatens to overwhelm them. It is a riveting story of love, loss, grief and betrayal.

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Customer Reviews

I have lived and worked in Papua New Guinea on and off since 1978 and am very familiar with the customs, mores and cultures across this fascinating country. I was looking forward to reading this novel, *The Mountain*, both from the perspective of the evolution of a country emerging from colonialism and from the point of view of a woman caught up in the romance and drama of an emerging and developing nation. I found the first chapters very ponderous and difficult to read as the story did not flow smoothly. I also felt that the depiction of the issues faced by the Papuans in the story were too romanticised and not believable in their representations of how they really felt about their interactions with western people, especially during the intra-independence years and even subsequently. While the main story line offered an insight into cross cultural love and family relationships and the consequences of such relationships and tugged at the heart strings in respect of the struggles faced by crossing cultures (especially the issues of infertility and cultural implications) it failed to provide the expected climactic conclusion - it just seemed to peter out at the end. It was a pleasant journey with formulated highs and lows. I finished it without feeling a lingering sense of satisfaction or of knowing the characters very well.

Although I have always enjoyed Modjeska's writing I found the characterisation in *The Mountain* difficult. Her main protagonist (Rika) is bland and very two dimensional. Modjeska gives us a little background information on her and then places her in PNG where she stays lifeless and difficult to understand. How can a married woman in the early 1970s accept an offer to go off walking with a young man on her first day in a new country? Naive? yes. Adventurous? Probably, but she is never portrayed as such. Modjeska writes about the movement toward Independence in PNG brilliantly and this kept me reading. She views it from different perspectives through her characters. The novel is in two parts: written from two different time periods and people's perspectives. This break in the middle of the book also kept me reading as I wanted to see whether it got any better.

This book is for a reader who enjoys a book with depth and insight into a subject. The book beautifully describes the cultural conflicts in Papua New Guinea during and post, independence. The modern world meeting the primitive artistic spiritual world. Modjeska tells the story through a developed portrait of several characters, indigenous people and the Europeans they become involved with, she is able to bring the characters to life and express the complex colorful spirit of the place and its people. I personally feel I have gained a greater knowledge and sympathy for the amazing indigenous people's of PNG.

I am a big fan of Drusilla Modjeska. The Mountain is, I think, not only the best of hers, but about the best book I have read in the last year. I found it filled with interesting and believable characters and quite a gripping story. Hard to put down.

I could not finish this book and most of our book club didn't either. Very predictable who was going to have an affair. Shame it started off well in the first pages, I thought I would get an insight to New Guinea but no personal issues spoiled it.

A beautifully written book, as you would expect from Drusilla Modjeska, keeps you wanting to read more, the characters are so well constructed. really nice read and has enough history to be able to learn some facts from.

A really good book, very well written, full of previously unknown (to me) information about New Guinea. At times I felt I was in the tropics, feeling hot & uncomfortable. The description of the love affair between the main characters was very moving.

very disappointed...the author didn't seem to know whether she was writing a novel or a work of non fiction....it ends up as neither.

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