



The Magic Journey

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Boom times came to the forgotten little southwestern town of Chamisaville just as the rest of America was in the Great Depression. They came when a rattletrap bus loaded with stolen dynamite blew sky-high, leaving behind a giant gushing hot spring. Within minutes, the town's wheeler-dealers had organized, and within a year, Chamisaville was flooded with tourists and pilgrims, and the wheeler-dealers were rich.

Spanning forty years, *The Magic Journey* tells the tale of how progress transformed a rural backwater into a boomtown. At first, it was a magic time for Chamisaville—almost as if every day were a holiday. But the euphoria gradually dissipated, and the land-hungry developers, speculators, and interlopers moved in. Finally, the day came when Chamisaville's people found themselves all but displaced, their children no longer heirs to their land or their tradition. With mounting intensity, *The Magic Journey* reaches a climax that is tragically foreordained. A sensitive, vital, and honest chronicle of life in America's Southwest, it is also an incisive commentary on what America has become on its road to progress.

The Magic Journey is part of the *New Mexico Trilogy*, which includes *The Milagro Beanfield War* and *The Nirvana Blues*.

The Magic Journey Details

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From Reader Review The Magic Journey for online ebook

Stan Pedzick says

The weakest of the New Mexico trilogy, but still enjoyable.

Matt says

Takes place in the same location as the Milagro Beanfield War, but after a few years have gone by. It's a little bit more sarcastic, desperate, and serious than the first book, but the style stays mostly in tact. Just as good as the Milagro Beanfield War, but with a little less time for whimsy.

Rosco Betunada says

(Whew! Where to begin?) ? it's like I've been living another life besides my own this past 566 pages. There's now a brief void to fill in my day for the short time before I decide on what book to immerse myself in next.

Mr. Nichols does an amazing job of not only promulgating (okay, that word may be a trifle extreme and invalid) the life history of the transition of a place, a town, a region from a bucolic "laid-back" (but by no means lackadaisical) close-to-the-land life and ethic to a glitzy touristy leaning-towards-upper-scale economy – while intertwining the stories and lives of the main characters. 40+ years of history is inscribed in these 566 pages.

Magic Journey takes place (mostly) in Chamisaville – which is close to where the author lives (Taos,N.M.). I'm only superficially familiar with that region. But I used to be in awe, aware of the nearness of adjacent dimensions, slightly more-dimly cognizant of some immense Nagual aspect, when on trips down from Colorado through that area. Ojo Caliente, Tres Piedras, finally Española, by-passing Taos en route to Santa Fe. So, I have advice for my future (and/or alternate-dimension selves) – early in the book the "lay of the land" is detailed, laid-out. I should have sketched a map, so I could reference (as – numerous times later in reading the book I would have felt better-grounded) where the main landmarks and towns and such were with respect to each other. Also, darn it, (a big chore, but ...) a note-pad with NAMES OF THE PLAYERS, with the relationships to each other, jobs, where they lived, etc., to refer to later – because there are many. Many dozens – there could be over 100 characters and players to keep track of. What keeps it easy is that there are a few (perhaps 10 or less) which are easy to keep track of ...

Again, the story of how a bucolic idyllic location transitions from an out-of-the-way region where everyone has been there for generations, not much more than living-off-the-land – to what we Coloradans might call the "Aspenization" (or just about any other ski town – Steamboat? Summit County?) of the place. Detailed. Inning-by-inning. It ain't pretty.

Nichols inserts the threads (or should I say "wisps" and "etheric force-fields" and such) through-out the story – massaging the reader's understanding with the underlying currents. Emotional currents, the dead are restless (not entirely nor totally 'dead' – they appear on occasion, so to speak, as if you're attached to the

land, perhaps you can never really leave), spiritual malaise, and yes, frequent moments of absolute joy and wonder. Not to last. The battle never ends. Guess I should read book-3 of the series – Nirvana Blues.

Tim O'Neill says

2nd in the New Mexico Trilogy with a vast array of characters notably April McQueen/Delaney, Virgil Leyba and host of others. Small town and surrounding area loved by locals as it is but greed and progress of Anglo powerbrokers want to change it for their benefit at the cost of its Mexican culture.

Ad says

I believe this is probably my favorite book. The book is my favorite because the story reflects my society where I'm from the terrain as well is so fitting having been here for 34 years to have seen these exact changes as in John Nichols' fictional Chamisaville. There is so much incredible depth amongst the rotation of characters. I love the main character April Delaney she's so dynamic as is the lawyer Virgil Leyba both incredible humans. I just finished this book a second time and probably will give it another in years to come because it always reminds me of life with environment, political and cultural facets where the viewpoint is from people experiencing the consequences in a lifetime. In addition to the seriousness of topics in the novel Nichols provides a humorous unbelievable side to the story with the citizens doing crazy things such as embalming a whale and putting it on display. I really like his inclusion also of deceased people or dead ex-revolutionaries acting as ghosts and omens to the living. This is a great companion to "Milagro and the Beanfield War." I think he should've stopped there because Nirvana Blues is a disappointment in the New Mexican Trilogy.

Brandon says

The Magic Journey is a frustrating novel because the last third has so many true character developments rarely written elsewhere. But the first half of the novel rarely captured me with the humanity of *Milagro Beanfield War*.

The title comes from the development or "betterment" of Chamisaville: "The valley was perched on the brink of magic journey" (37). A magic journey is also taken by April McQueen, daughter of Rodey McQueen, the land baron set on bettering Chamisaville (79). As families go, so goes the land...to a point. April does not share her father's ambition for transforming the agricultural valley into a resort area, and author John Nichols probably gets the most drama from this conflict.

But *Magic Journey* is more like a Capra fantasy with a cohesive community than a classic hero's odyssey. But Chamisaville divides too; too many characters emerge to cohere. But what is a community if not populated with diversity? From reading so many classic narratives, I find myself growing weary when a novel moves into the realm of ideas without round characters, even when the characters are engaged in political skullduggery that comes closer to reality than most of neo-westerns.

Moe Stryzpk is the land developer who knows the municipal, state and federal government so well that he can manipulate any competition out of business with total legality (95). Moe talks free enterprise but lives oligarchy. Yes, Moe becomes a paraplegic and that gives him a social shield regardless of the damage he does to Chamisaville. But the accident happened during the heat of swinging a deal with nasty details. In some ways, Moe is like Capra's Potter from *It's a Wonderful Life*. Nichols writes a much different ending, though.

Another character more interesting for the ideas he embodies than for the life he lives is Icarus Suazo, a pueblo Indian who goes into business with Moe, Rodey & Co. for a keep-your-friends-close-your-enemies-closer reason: Icarus wants to return sacred land to his tribe and will sell his soul if it saves his tribe. "There are laws," Icarus says, "however, there are other laws" (124). What follows is one of the more trenchant speeches on how genocide by land acquisition has been accomplished in the U.S. But it is a speech punctuated as dialog. I probably wouldn't have liked it so much if Nichols hadn't plotted it into the mouth of a character.

Don't get me wrong; few novelists write speeches as good as the one Chamisville's dirty mayor J.B. LeDoux delivers behind closed doors when the tax-exempt leaders propose public spending to subsidize their development (276-279). *Magic Journey* might have been published in 1978, but its mood is pure October '08, which seems bent on repeating itself.

But it is April's amazing life that seems to serve as an objective correlative for the valley. April's liaisons make her a kind of mother figure to the world. It is with some irony that she never practices birth control, has a couple of abortions and a couple of children and never consciously considers how rising population contributes to the cultural genocide of the valley she loves. I mean, the most revolutionary step would be to connect the nexus between rising population and overwhelmed social systems. Defunding Planned Parenthood when employment hovers near 10% is like shutting off the water to your next door neighbors' burning house because you think a double crisis will inspire them dig a well quick and build moral fiber in them.

The magic realism in *Magic Journey* isn't very real. Some of this comes from Nichols' commitment to articulating political ideas: while we never miss his point, the poetic symbolism of Marquez or Allende does not appear. Perhaps everyday magic can't survive north of the U.S.-Mexico Border. But using religious hucksterism to describe the initial Cipi Garcia Shrine denies it any eternal force. If the opening magic is characterized with cynicism, it makes it difficult to accept the spiritual forces near the end of the book. (view spoiler)

But perhaps I'm not giving enough credence to April's notion that we are all on a magic journey whether or not the local angels speak to us or not. Perhaps I'm relying too much on the novelist to characterize the angels for me.

Eldaa says

Though all the books I enjoy do not necessarily have to have a happy ending, I generally enjoy happy books. This is not a happy book. It's a good book. But it's a sad book and I wouldn't say I enjoyed it. Though it is worth reading.

Paul Peterson says

This is the second book in the New Mexico trilogy and I did enjoy the historical perspective, spanning about 3/4 of the 21st century, into the 1970's. There was the Native American/Latino/Anglo angle, the agricultural economy passing into the service economy (bypassing the manufacturing economy in this locale) and, of course, the Capitalist/Socialist struggle all intertwined in the plot.

The writing had it's moments of near brilliance, but very few, and the characters lacked that personal appeal that allows one to really empathize with them.

I will read the 3rd book (The Nirvana Blues) because I have it on my shelf, but am in no rush to get to it.

Karen says

The Magic Journey is the second novel in John Nichols' New Mexico Trilogy. Although it may have been his intention, the story felt dense and unwieldy, almost as if he'd lost his own way through the cynicism and despair that can come with living. It was far less humorous and sparkling than The Milagro Beanfield Wars.

Using the same stunning backdrop of the High Mesa and the indigenous populations of Native Americans and Mexicans, I imagine it told the largely fictional (perhaps?) origination tale of Taos. Nichols deploys ample cautionary examples of "Progress, American Style" by the capitalistic "Anglo Axis" and the determined, though eventually thwarted, efforts by stalwart patriots to stop the wheels of development.

In the end, The Magic Journey paints a detailed picture of natural resource exhaustion, man-made dependency and cultural genocide of this once sustainable heritage.

skye says

A heartbreaker and fight-maker. An amazing novel that completely sucked me in. Actually, the first time I tried to read it I couldn't get past the first chapter. On the second try, while on a trip back to the Southwest, I got into it and couldn't stop reading it. Heartbreaking over and over and over - true stories of the destruction

of the West and long-running sustainable cultures of farmers and Pueblo peoples by "progress" (greed) - and great characters. Virgil Leyba in particular has stuck with me, among the very few greatest fictional characters I know.

I look forward to reading #3 in the series and seeing what happens to Chamisaville. I may re-read "Milagro Beanfield War" first to refresh those characters before heading into the conclusion...

In some ways, this trilogy reminds me of Cormac's "Border Trilogy" - two novels with different casts, amazing Southwest border lands. Will the third novel also bring the two first together?

Coalbanks says

I enjoyed both books - The Magic Journey & The Milagro Beanfield War. I could see that what had happened to Chamisaville was happening to my province of Alberta as the oil/gas/coal/real estate interests took over & ran the gov't, the economy & anyone who needed a job. Locals were co-opted into doing "the right thing for the community", used when they useful to the ruling class, discarded when they had served their purpose, rewarded or punished by those in power, public input requested, manipulated & discarded if it did not toe/tow the party line. It was the handwriting on the wall for me, especially in the influencing of local politics to produce the goods and the steady erosion & reduction of the individual's rights & liberties in favour of corporate needs & power. Been going on long before I started squalling & will likely be going on until "the last politician is hanged with the guts of the last lawyer." Ha Ha !

Karin says

To be honest, this probably deserves a 5 star rating. The magic journey of Chamisaville and the Chamisa Valley is captivating and thoughtprovoking. The story within the story could have been published separately with the title: Scarlet O'Hara Does the 20th Century. April may be essential to the story in as much as she becomes the mouthpiece for the peasants; to me she is a distraction, hence 3 stars.

John Orman says

In this heartbreaking chronicle of life in a small southwestern town, there is a disturbing commentary on where the road to progress has taken America.

Because of a freak accident, Chamisaville goes from sleepy backwater to tourist destination town. Then the greedy outsiders take over, and the townspeople are on the outside looking in.

Chamisaville is drawn from Nichols' hometown of Taos, NM, but this is not a regional novel, but a metaphor for life even in the big cities of the US. Nichols notes that this is his favorite book, and that it "depicts the advance of climax capitalism in the twentieth century as an ongoing ecological and human disaster."

A moving pastiche of the glorious past, difficult present, and intimidating future.

Andrew says

I hoped this book would be as good as Milagro Beanfield War, but it has disappointed.

There's all kinds of interesting anthropological type of stuff about all the characters who live in the little town of Chamisaville, but there's no discernable plot or even a protagonist. I suppose the community itself could be construed as the protagonist, but it's difficult to relate personally to anyone. It reads like a well-written news article, not like compelling fiction.

lisa says

this book is blowing my mind. topical, well written. a knock out of a book.
