

This review is from: **The 13th Valley (Paperback)**

This book rates with the finest novels and films that portray the Journey of the Hero as presented by the great mythologist Joseph Campbell. The symbolism, layering, Jungian archetypes, foreshadowing, and journey itself make this much more than just one of the finest, if not the best, novels about the Vietnam War. I have been teaching this novel in my college English class now for six years, most often to students who have never even heard of this war. They don't like it at first, don't understand the military acronyms, don't like looking them up in the glossary, have trouble with the gruesome depiction and language of war, have little interest a time period that seems ancient to them. But watch the students change as they read two chapters a week and are assigned essays on the morality of the war and on the symbolic meaning of the soldiers' journey to the tree at the center of the valley, where an enemy awaits. The spider, the labyrinth of trails, the fog, the nightly dreams, the cave carved out of the elephant grass where the soldiers hide, the number 13 everywhere (what's that all about?), the philosophical discussions around the command post on the origins of war, and why....on and on it goes as the class is swept along and into the tale, building to an emotional climax that raises the hair on your skin, leaves you weeping...all the while following the steps of the journey: the call of the hero, the refusal of the call, the crossing of the threshold, the belly of the whale, the mentor, the refusal of the return, etc., you can take every step if you want to follow along in the same way you can choose to see the deeper layering's in the Star Wars films--meanings that may or may not be there--it's your choice--the enlightenment of Buddha, the crucifixion of Christ on the tree, and the indestructible massive tree that has existed from the beginning of time, long before the film Avatar ever was conceived. If you can find this novel, disagree with the author if you want; nevertheless, it is more than just a classic of the Vietnam War. I cannot wait to begin anew each semester as Cherry, Egan, Brooks, El Paso, and Minh embark on their epic quest.