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# Tortuga: A Novel



RUDOLFO  
**ANAYA**  
Author of *Bless Me, Ultima*  
**TORTUGA**  
A NOVEL



## Synopsis

This American Book Award winner by the author of *Bless Me, Ultima* is a novel of a New Mexico teenager's journey of physical and spiritual recovery. When the story opens, the eponymous hero of Rudolfo Anaya's novel is in an ambulance en route to a hospital for crippled children in the New Mexican desert. A poor boy from Albuquerque, sixteen-year-old Tortuga takes his name from the odd, turtle-shaped mountain that is rumored to possess miraculous curative powers. Tortuga is paralyzed, and not even his mother's fervent prayers can heal him. But under the mountain's watchful gaze, with the support of fellow patients, he begins the Herculean task of breaking out of his shell and becoming whole again. Drawn from personal experience and imbued with the magic realism and phantasmagorical vision quests that distinguish Anaya's work, *Tortuga* is a joyful, life-sustaining book about hope, faith, friendship, and love that celebrates the triumph of the human spirit in the physical world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is one of the best novels I have ever read, and I read a lot. But that probably means little to you

without some context, so here are a few of my top picks in literature: Jane Eyre - I especially enjoyed the lively dialog in this book, but there is little not to like. Lolita - for many years this was my favorite, and I love Nabokov's writing style, even enjoying his introductions. 100 Years of Solitude - a magnificent intellectual and imaginary achievement, building and bringing to an end an entire universe of its own. The most obvious comparison here to Tortuga is 100 Years, since both are stories of societies living in isolation and infused with magic, and both are self-contained. But like Jane Eyre, Tortuga is full of lively and subtle conversation, beautifully written throughout, and shows the power of faith in and acceptance of others including their "flaws" - it is a fully human story. It's more difficult for me to find a similarity in the story line or the characters to Lolita, but there is an intellectual match in the way both books invite you to look beneath the surface of people who commit unspeakable acts, and again both are books where I often reread passages just to enjoy them again. All of these books bring smiles, laughs and tears, and it is impossible for me to say which of the four I like best - probably it is the one that is freshest in my mind at the time. I won't tell you much about the story itself, because it is really something that you should (yes you really should) read for yourself without the baggage of some inadequate retelling. I will tell you that while I just compared it with three other novels, it is really very different from any of those or any other book I have ever read. It has changed my view of the world and it can probably change yours as well. And it does that without telling you what you should do or think, but by helping you see more deeply into life and relationships with others. And at the same time it brings you an entertaining and heartfelt story filled with pain and joy, laughter and tears, loss and overcoming - in short everything that life offers. In case you have not figured this out yet, I really think that you should read Tortuga, so do yourself a favor.

Couldn't engage with this. Some beautiful prose but too lacking in character depth and true plot. Much of it seemed like an adolescent wet dream (sex without meaning except arousal), also much like One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest in many scenes (especially the bus ride, the "townies," the mean nurse, escaping etc). Characters not well enough developed for me, two-dimensional, females especially shallowly drawn. No real chemistry between Tortuga and "girlfriend" except it just sort of happened, never explained why they were special to each other. Voices a little messy, the "ah, Tortuga" in italics got tiresome. Unlikely that complex surgeries would be performed in such a marginal facility. Really -- no warning bells on the life-sustaining electricity? No night watch or night nurses? No phones for family to call? Just too unfinished, unexplained, underdeveloped, unbelievable, messy.

Tortuga follows in the footsteps of *bless me ultima*, one of the best novels covering the new Mexican experience. Mr. Anaya is in a league of his own when it comes to mixing folklore, myth, youth, the desert, our past, our future, all the while weaving his tale into one beautiful adventure we can readily identify with...gracias, hermano.

I can't begin to describe this book; I don't have Mr. Anaya's ability to bring the reader into my heart, to truly convey how the story makes me feel. I can describe the plot and the events, but other reviewers have done that better than I could. I can say that I spent short stretches of my childhood in hospitals, where I encountered other children who were misshapen and disabled, and I had my own physical challenges (though nothing approaching Tortuga's), and that I recognize the characters he weaves into us as we read. I can tell you that Mr. Anaya was THERE, and he takes the reader back with him---back to experience all the pain, suffering, humiliation, and also triumph. This is not a tale for the faint-hearted, nor for those who like everything to be sweetness and light throughout. There are moments of confusion, of pain and agony; moments of laughter and of sheer horror. And there is the laying bare of the human mind, psyche, heart, and soul, and finally, the dawning of understanding. And with the understanding comes the acceptance and ultimate triumph of Tortuga, the Turtle-boy becoming a man. Tortuga wins the fight to recover physically, but it is his recognition and acceptance of the responsibility he's been destined for that ennobles him and transforms him into a man to be reckoned with in the world. You won't soon forget this story or these characters. It will burn itself into your soul with a fiery brand.

Fascinating story and part allegory about the journey of healing. A young man is injured in some type of accident and is sent to a sanitarium for surgery and recovery. Part poetry, dreams, reverie, and novel, this book weaves the story through the eyes of this young man, nicknamed "Tortuga," the name of the "Turtle Mountain" that he can see from his window. The cast of characters is both vivid and heartbreakingly real, with the voice of wisdom coming through a severely affected polio patient. Bittersweet, wise, and insightful, this book challenges the reader to consider what health and healing means, on a physical, emotional, and spiritual path.

I had problems with this book. Despite Anaya's reputation in the Chicano literary world, this novel was problematic for me: The pace of the plot was too slow. I didn't get a sense of the protagonist's age; if he was a teenager, his philosophical musings seemed to be those of a much older, mature

person. The novel seemed a little too self-referential and self-indulgent. I liked "Ultima" much better. I suppose one should read this if one wants to read the New Mexico trilogy. I had a hard time getting to the end of the book.

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