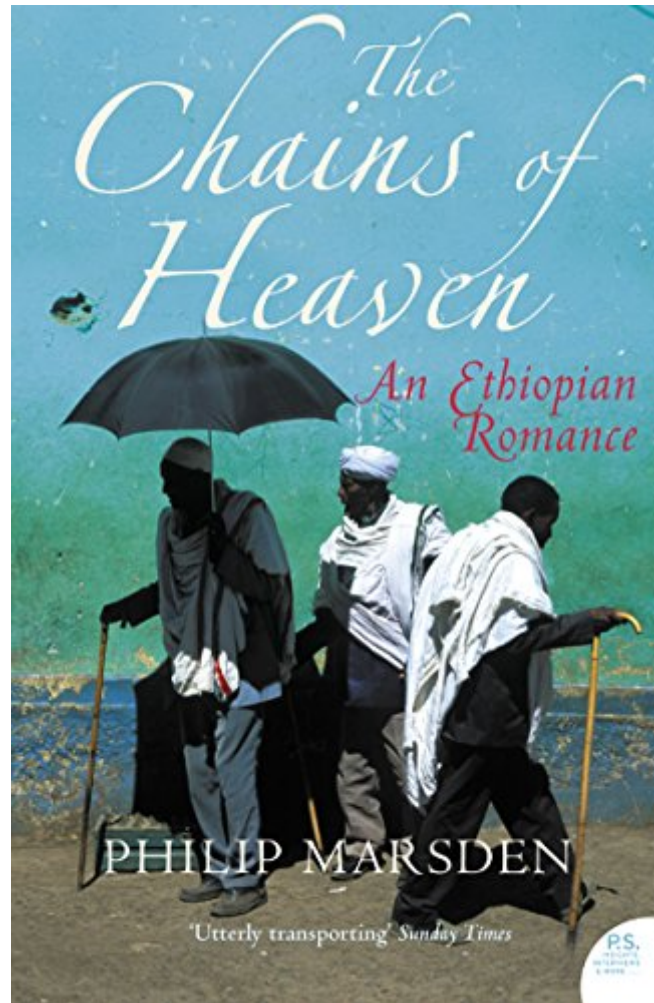


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The Chains Of Heaven: An Ethiopian Romance



Synopsis

Philip Marsden returns to the remote, fiercely beautiful landscape that has exercised a powerful mythic appeal over him since his first encounter with it over twenty years ago. "Ethiopia bred in me the conviction that if there is a wider purpose to our life, it is to understand the world, to seek out its diversity, to celebrate its heroes and its wonders" in short, to witness it. When Philip Marsden first went to Ethiopia in 1982, it changed the direction of his life. What he saw of its stunning antiquity, its raw Christianity, its extremes of brutality and grace prompted his curiosity, and made him a writer. But Ethiopia at that time was torn apart by civil war. The north, the ancient heartland of the country, was closed off. Twenty years later, Marsden returned. The result is this book "the account of a journey deferred. Walking hundreds of miles through a landscape of cavernous gorges, tabletop mountains and semi-desert, Marsden encounters monks and hermits, rebels and farmers. And he creates an unforgettable picture of one of the most remote regions left on earth. As in his award-winning book "The Spirit-Wrestlers", Marsden reminds us of the brilliant heights that travel writing can attain, whilst celebrating the ageless rewards of the open road and the people for whom the mythic and the everyday are inextricably joined.

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Customer Reviews

A lot of readers are coming to this book because Lonely Planet Ethiopia says it is the one book to read if one is planning a visit. This is an account of Marsden's travels on foot (with mules and guides) around Northern Ethiopia. He first went to Ethiopia when he was 21 years old, but had to leave because the Derg had made the place too dangerous for young backpackers. He returns to Ethiopia a few times after that, but most of this account is based on the trip he made 21 years after his first trip, when he was 42 years old. As a reader, you get a sense of how tedious and difficult the trip was - constant heat every day, high altitude, interviewing older peasants about their Derg resistance as young men - these are simple people who give him simple answers without any analysis of the role they played. Then there is the Ethiopian food that doesn't agree with him, the immense weariness of the dry season, the semi-starvation of Ethiopian Lent, etc... Marsden is a great prose stylist - he makes a tedious trip interesting, and his research into Ethiopian lore is fascinating - he includes wonderful vignettes on Prester John and The Book of Enoch. Lonely Planet Ethiopia borrowed heavily from this book. The book has the same slow, gracious, almost worn-out pace that I imagine he encountered in many of the people. (NOTE: I am reviewing after reading only 150 pages, and I have not been to Ethiopia myself.) Marsden also does a great job of exploring Ethiopian Christianity, whose believers put a far heavier emphasis on demons and demonic possession than do most western Christians. Mary is heavily venerated in Ethiopia - not at all surprising in an atavistic Christianity full of demons.

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