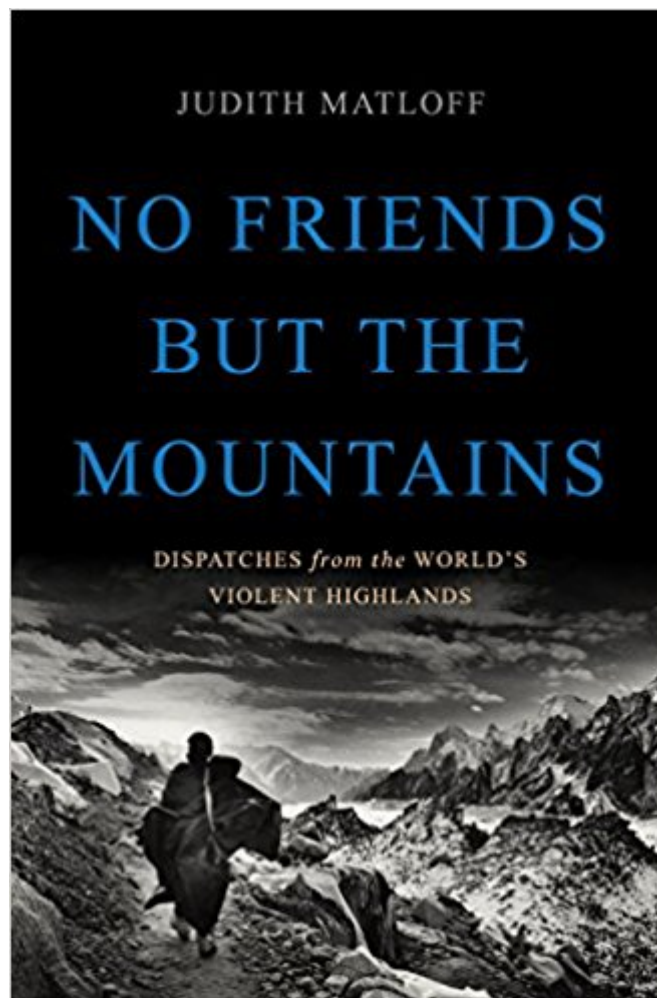




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# No Friends But The Mountains: Dispatches From The World's Violent Highlands



## Synopsis

A veteran war correspondent journeys to remote mountain communities across the globe—from Albania and Chechnya to Nepal and Colombia—to investigate why so many conflicts occur at great heights. Mountainous regions are home to only ten percent of the world's population yet host a strikingly disproportionate share of the world's conflicts. Mountains provide a natural refuge for those who want to elude authority, and their remoteness has allowed archaic practices to persist well into our globalized era. As Judith Matloff shows, the result is a combustible mix we in the lowlands cannot afford to ignore. Traveling to conflict zones across the world, she introduces us to Albanian teenagers involved in ancient blood feuds; Mexican peasants hunting down violent poppy growers; and Jihadists who have resisted the Russian military for decades. At every stop, Matloff reminds us that the drugs, terrorism, and instability cascading down the mountainside affect us all. A work of political travel writing in the vein of Ryszard Kapuscinski and Robert Kaplan, *No Friends but the Mountains* is an indelible portrait of the conflicts that have unexpectedly shaped our world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"No Friends but the Mountains is Matloff's globe-hopping, more-often-than-not crushing investigation into mountain mayhem. She has the experienced intrepidity to go get the story behind these murderous frays without coming across as a flake with a death wish. She returns with chromatic stories, which can't help but be chromatic as they are smeared blood red, from the Sierra Madre, the Caucasus, Jammu and Kashmir, the Himalayas, and the Andes. As well, she returns

with the cultural and socioeconomic rubs that help us to grasp the bellicosities." --Christian Science Monitor "NO FRIENDS BUT THE MOUNTAINS travels straight to the heart of eight mountainous regions as distinctive as their surrounding terrain... Matloff's lively writing keeps the dense subject matter from getting bogged down, and her accounts of perilous trips into hot zones are akin to an adventure novel... an essential work on the fundamentals of high-altitude warfare."--Shelf Awareness "[A] chillingly enlightening account of those who live in mountain regions in order to elude or destroy authority, and whose blood feuds are handed down from one generation to the next." --Geographical (UK)"This trip to some very different corners of the globe is recounted in clear, visceral language... Matloff's investigation is a worthy read for foreign affairs and anthropology buffs alike, and her conclusion provides insight into current global affairs." --Publishers Weekly, starred review"Impressive and necessary... Matloff approaches her topic with a magic combination of wisdom and empathy, and it is impossible to not be moved." --Booklist, starred review "A tightly focused study." --Kirkus Reviews"Through thoughtful vignettes, [Matloff] weaves personal narratives alongside relevant historical and present-day circumstances to relate regional stories that consistently refer to and affirm the global tale she seeks to tell." --Library Journal"In No Friends But the Mountains, Judith Matloff has delivered a vital, deeply revealing book of political travelogue and intrepid correspondence. She is the ideal witness - learned, dogged, skeptical, but always listening out for new and credible voices. This is classical international journalism of the highest order."--Steve Coll, Dean of Columbia Journalism School and staff writer for The New Yorker "Americans discount geography precisely because they have been the beneficiaries of it. People elsewhere know better. Judith Matloff's book is an indefatigable journalistic exploration of how mountains shape, sustain, and even determine war and culture around the world. Her argument, which her reporting makes undeniable, is at once obvious and original." --Robert D. Kaplan, author of The Revenge of Geography"Matloff is a skilled and courageous journalist, adept at sketching the realities - often grim, sometimes lyrical - of remote highland regions." --Ed O'Loughlin, Times Literary Supplement"Judith Matloff's book is a political geography of mountains, once the haunt of witches, now-in many parts of the world-strongholds of outlaws and rebels, told with a sense of drama by someone who has clearly done her fieldwork." --Yi-Fu Tuan, author of Romantic Geography "The most spectacular heights on earth hold mysteries, not least why conflict so often shadows their vistas. Judith Matloff-a brave, engaging, keenly observant guide-rides shuddering buses, boards decrepit helicopters, and hikes through mud and checkpoints in pursuit of answers and solutions. Along the way, as history and present-day circumstances intertwine, Matloff reveals the rich, surprising and perplexing life of places too often diminished by the flat imagery of war."

--Sheri Fink, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and author of *Five Days at Memorial* and *War Hospital* "Vistas, vainglory, vengeance and violence mark Judith Matloff's engaging voyage across mountainous terrains. She reports with empathy on religious charities, anthropologists, guerrillas, and state armies all attempting to pacify some of the world's least governed spaces."--David D. Laitin, professor of political science at Stanford University and author of *Nations, States and Violence*

Judith Matloff teaches conflict reporting at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. Her articles have appeared in numerous publications including the *New York Times Magazine*, *Economist*, and *Christian Science Monitor*. Matloff lives in New York City.

What a gripping narrative from an author who has been on the front lines and is also well versed in the culture and history of every place she's been. Once I started it, i couldn't put it down. Matloff is a great storyteller, her reporting is amazing. If you want to learn about the forgotten folks of the highlands, read this. If you want to learn about issues that impact foreign affairs right now, read this. You will not be disappointed

This book is a little hard to rate; the quality of the writing leads me to rate 5 rather than 4 stars. My ambivalence is because her thesis seems to be that mountainous regions tend to generate violence, and I don't think that is a reasonable conclusion on the basis of the cases she describes. More likely, I think, is that mountains are easily defensible, and that they have functioned as a refuge and that natives of mountains are better able to resist encroachment than flatlanders. That said, Matloff visits a number of mountainous regions and provides a lot of information. The maps are minimally helpful, and the book could have used some photos. The book starts in the mountains of Northern Albania, where an ancient code of honor leads to generation-long feuds, claiming 10,000 lives in 20 years, which is huge given the small populations. One intriguing detail, apparently there is an old concept called "sworn virgins," who sear an oath of chastity and can take up men's roles if all the men of a family are wiped out, exempt from honor killings. Chapter 2 looks at the Maya Zapatistas in Mexico's Chiapas. Chapter 3 is far better than 2, when Matloff visits the Colombian mountains to interview rebels and government troops--decades of rebellions and violence has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives..Chapter 4 looks at Nepal, mostly the Rai people (2.8% of the Nepalese population) who may soon all be flooded out by a major dam financed by India (which will mostly benefit India). For anyone interested in Nepal or the problems development causes, this

is an excellent chapter. Chapter 5 considers the Caucasus, particularly the Chechens. It provides a lot of informational context that most readers will not know, including the Tsar's wars against the Caucasus, Stalin's deportation of Chechens and others during World War 2 (both at heavy loss of life); it's the best short consideration of the Chechens I have ever read, and includes current politics, which appear to be utterly corrupt, so it's as much about politics as about violence. Chapter 6 is about Kashmir. It strikes me as harshly anti-Indian, saying the Indian authorities are responsible for thousands of disappearances and routine repression of the majority Muslim population.

Nonetheless, if the Kashmir problems interests you, this is close to a must read. Chapter 7 looks at the US Army mountain school, training soldiers for mountain fighting--it appears to be good at training but Matloff says US capacity for fighting in the mountains is badly flawed. The next chapter goes to Norway and Norway training NATO forces in high altitude fighting in the Arctic. The last chapter ends on something of an upbeat, in Switzerland and how the diverse Swiss (four languages) have managed to create a real democracy. I'd rate the best chapters as those on Colombia, the Caucasus, Kashmir and the military mountain school. Throughout, Matloff interviews people and experiences the climate, altitude and areas, with vivid character sketches and interesting historical context, as well as some current political context. I had to read it a chapter at a time rather than straight through as I normally do, I'm not sure why. Each chapter is really a kind of participatory journalism and can stand alone.

This was a rip roaring read...and really introduces one to a detailed account of many violent conflicts that occur in mountainous regions. I do not care if her thesis is correct: that mountains breed violence. This may be true, or somewhat true. I do care that I am fascinated and a book changes how I perceive the geographic world. Starting with the blood feuds in Albania (where the marked hide out like Holocaust victims) to peaceful Switzerland, from the Sierra Madre to unstable Kashmir, this book has a lot to offer the reader. Peppered throughout are her own interviews with locals and their perceptions of what causes violence and foments danger. The chapters on Mexico and South America did remind me somewhat of "God's Middle Finger," another fabulous read. The author also does excellent work describing these places. I found myself, phone in hand looking at images, and saying to myself: Yes, it (that place) does look like that. I read a lot, in fact, I read a ton. This book was worth the adventure, and made me just a little glad to live in my own peaceful, and flat, corner of the world.

Matloff nicely weaves the telling details of her travels into a broadly analytical investigation of

mountain people, their travails, and their insurgencies. Vital reading for flatlanders!

Slow moving and too much trivia about details of base camp life.

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