

## Ghost Riders of Cumberland Gap

**Ron Chandler**

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*Ghost Riders of Cumberland Gap is thoughtful when tackling both its historical subject matter and adolescent concerns.*

In Ron Chandler's coming-of-age novel *Ghost Riders of Cumberland Gap*, chronically ill teenagers travel through time and learn about the natural world with the help of the native Monacan tribe.

Colter is in remission from cancer when he returns home for the weekend. He hears strange noises coming from the forest and decides to investigate. Crossing through a split in the rocks, he enters into the seventeenth century and encounters the Monacans.

Colter shares his time portal adventures with his friends Demetri and Lilly. Together, they experience the Monacan way of life and learn about the natural world while trying to forge peace with the English ancestors who covet the land.

There are two main characters: linguistically talented Colter and his scientifically inclined best friend, Demetri. Both teenagers battled cancer and are in different stages of remission, though both are still weakened because of their illnesses. Through their time with the Monacans, both build strength and learn to appreciate the simplicity of preindustrial America.

Secondary characters include Standing Tall; Colter's romantic interest, Hummingbird; and Lily, in whom Demetri is interested. All evolve over the course of the novel, although Hummingbird and Lily initially play the roles of damsels in distress. Later, the young women rival their counterparts in quiet strength and while facing mental adversity.

Detailed descriptions of seventeenth-century Native American culture and an emphasis on sustainability carry the book. Monacan life is captured through Colter's acculturation: hunts for bison, herding wild horses, planting and harvesting with the seasons, and ritualistic games that function to turn boys into men. The openness with which the boys take to this lifestyle stands in direct contrast to the responses of their ancestors, who show little reverence for the land and people they conquer.

It is not explained why the Monacans are so open to the time travelers, though. Given what transpires between them and early American settlers, they are surprisingly welcoming to the boys, and do not question their motives or their modern attire. Only Lily's revealing clothing is ever commented on.

Evenly paced chapters follow a clear narrative sequence. Each chapter opens with Colter, or Colter and Demetri, crossing through the time portal into Monacan time to embark on adventures with their Monacan friends. They experience action-packed incidents and learn life lessons that help them to grow. Detailed descriptions of Monacan daily living and character introspection balance with brief moments of tense action. The narrative is cohesive, and the accessibility of the language makes it a comfortable fit for younger audiences.

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concerns.

NANCY POWELL (May 15, 2019)

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