



The Cave

By Jose Saramago, Margaret Costa

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Cipriano Algor, an elderly potter, lives with his daughter Marta and her husband Marçal in a small village on the outskirts of The Center, an imposing complex of shops, apartments, and offices to which Cipriano delivers his pots and jugs every month. On one such trip, he is told not to make any more deliveries. Unwilling to give up his craft, Cipriano tries his hand at making ceramic dolls. Astonishingly, The Center places an order for hundreds, and Cipriano and Marta set to work—until the order is cancelled and the three have to move from the village into The Center. When mysterious sounds of digging emerge from beneath their apartment, Cipriano and Marçal investigate, and what they find transforms the family's life. Filled with the depth, humor, and the extraordinary philosophical richness that marks each of Saramago's novels, *The Cave* is one of the essential books of our time.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

José Saramago is a master at pacing. Readers unfamiliar with the work of this Portuguese Nobel Prize winner would do well to begin with *The Cave*, a novel of ideas, shaded with suspense. Spare and pensive, *The Cave* follows the fortunes of an aging potter, Cipriano Algor, beginning with his weekly delivery of plates to the Center, a high-walled, windowless shopping complex, residential community, and nerve center that dominates the region. What sells at the Center will sell everywhere else, and what the Center rejects can barely be given away in the surrounding towns and villages. The news for Cipriano that morning isn't good. Half of his regular pottery shipment is rejected, and he is told that the consumers now prefer plastic tableware. Over the next week, he and his grown daughter Marta grieve for their lost craft, but they gradually open their eyes to the strange bounty of their new condition: a stray dog adopts them, and a lovely widow enters Cipriano's life. When they are invited to live at the Center, it seems ungracious to refuse, but there are strange developments under the complex and a troubling increase in security, and Cipriano changes all their fates by deciding to investigate. In Saramago's able hands, what might have become a dry social allegory is a delicately elaborated story of individualism and unexpected love. --*Regina Marler*

From Publishers Weekly

The struggle of the individual against bureaucracy and anonymity is one of the great subjects of modern literature, and Saramago is often matched with Kafka as one of its premier exponents. Apt as the comparison is, it doesn't convey the warmth and rueful human dimension of novels like *Blindness* and *All the Names*. Those qualities are particularly evident in his latest brilliant, dark allegory, which links the encroaching sterility of modern life to the parable of Plato's cave. Widowed Cipriano Algor is a 64-year-old Portuguese potter who finds his business collapsing when the demand dries up for his elegant, handcrafted wares. His potential fate seems worse than poverty—to move with his daughter, Marta, and his son-in-law, Marçal Gacho, into a huge, arid complex known as "The Center," where Gacho works as a security guard. But Algor gets an order from the Center for hundreds of small ceramic figurines, a task that has Marta and Algor hustling to meet the delivery date. Saramago's flowing, luminous prose (beautifully translated by Costa) serves him well in the early going as he portrays the intricacies of Algor's artistic life and the beginning of his friendship with a widow he meets at the cemetery. The middle chapters bog down as the author lingers over the process of creating the dolls and the family's ongoing debate over Algor's future. But Saramago makes up for the brief slow stretch with a stunning ending after the doll project crashes, when Algor becomes a resident of the Center and finds a shocking surprise in a cave unearthed beneath it. The characters are as finely crafted as Algor's pottery, and Saramago deserves special kudos for his one-dog canine chorus, a stray mutt named Found that Algor adopts as his emotional sounding board. Saramago has an extraordinary ability to make a complex narrative read like a simple parable. This remarkably generous and eloquent novel is another landmark work from an 80-year-old literary giant who remains at the height of his powers. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

In another of Saramago's haunting fables, an elderly potter has turned to making dolls for sale at the Center, a huge complex of shops near his village. But a chance discovery at the Center sends him and his family fleeing in terror.

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Users Review

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William Martin:

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