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Venture To The Interior (The Collected Works Of Laurens Van Der Post)



Synopsis

Adventure, discovery, and tragedy teem in this famous account into the sinister, primeval heights of Mount Mlanje and the cloud walled uplands of Myika.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Adventure, discovery, and tragedy teem in this famous account into the sinister, primeval heights of Mount Mlanje and the cloud walled uplands of Myika.

This is one of van der Post's earliest books written in 1952 about his post WWII journey by "aeroplane" across Africa and to Nayasaland (Malawi) to survey the highlands of Mt. Mlanje and the Nyika Plateau for the colonial British government. Anyone that has read Laurens van der Post knows that he is a master of description both of the land and the people he encounters. I had wanted to read this book for years. It was very highly recommended to me by a fellow Peace Corps volunteer while I was in Botswana in southern Africa. After many years I found this one and finally read it and had a very difficult time putting it down to attend to the other demands of life. It is a very good, engaging book. As you read this you will have to look beyond the colonial perspective that van der Post had regarding the British and the Malawian "natives" and see the riches of the country and its people of that period. van der Post reflects often on the people and his recent return from his ordeal as a prisoner of war.

I used to live in East Africa and so was interested to see what it was like in 1952. Van der Post includes a lot of philosophizing in with the exploration, which I would have preferred less of. Malawi is a country that is not heard about a lot. I didn't know it had high mountains and I since went on the internet to see where he was and it is still the same. On the whole I found it very interesting and I learned quite a bit about the old British colonial system from it

No comments.

This remains one of my favourite books by one of my favourite authors. On the surface this book is about a true, post WWII adventure and exploration -- philosopher Sir Laurens van der Post's incredible and dramatic journey into the interior of Africa to survey certain areas for the colonial British government. However as always with van der Post's writing his meaning is deeper and is woven so beautifully throughout the text. As the title eludes, this is a bold and grand venture into the interior of our human selves. In the Preface he sets up this venture when he refers to 'an unresolved conflict between two fundamental elements in my make-up; conscious and unconscious, male and female, masculine and feminine... On one side, under the heading "Africa", I would group unconscious, female, feminine, mother; and under "Europe" on the other: conscious, male, masculine, father'. And further in the text he states for example: 'For this unreality starts in an incomplete awareness of ourselves... out of this dark gorge... between the two halves of ourselves, out of this division between the Europe and the Africa in us, unreality rises up to overwhelm us... The human being... is strangled in his own lack of self-awareness.' And again, "The problem is ours; it is in us, in our split and divided hearts... We hate the native in ourselves; we scorn and despise the night in which we have our being ...before we can close our split natures we must forgive ourselves. We must, we must forgive our European selves for what we have done to the Africa within us.' This is a highly-recommended prophetic book prompting much-needed reflection on our human condition; that we do indeed all suffer from this split personality and that a deeper awareness of it is critical to our future. In terms of a solution, van der Post laments in the book '...could there be... some magic somewhere, some medicine that could redeem all?' In other words can our split natures be reconciled?? Is there something out there that can reconcile these depressingly divided 'African' and 'European' selves? Unbelievably, there is. An Australian biologist -- who himself frequently draws upon the work of Sir Laurens van der Post, including 'Venture To the Interior' -- Jeremy Griffith has produced a biological explanation of the human condition that does just that. Our human condition is logically explained in first principle terms and the outcome is

truly wonderful and transforming for the entire human race. A breakthrough of monumental significance. See website, [...]

Thanks to the Vine Program I recently read Paul Theroux's latest work, *The Last Train to Zona Verde: My Ultimate African Safari*. My review is posted; one of my criticisms was the seemingly petty way that he attacked a number of other writers, including this work's author. Theroux called van der Post a "mythomaniac," a "fantasist" and "fake mystic." Theroux specifically mentioned this work, which I had first read some 40 years ago, and I was impressed with it then. Gulp! Had I been taken in again, thinking about *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Journey to Change the World... One Child at a Time (Young Reader's Edition)* by Greg Mortenson, and *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* by Steve Ambrose, both of which I enjoyed when I first read them, and then was sadly disappointed to find out the authors fabricated portions of their works? I checked Wikipedia, and there seems to be some substance to Theroux's charge; there is even a book that chronicles his deceptions: (*Storyteller: The Lives of Laurens van der Post*). So, I decided to re-read the book, in part to determine if I had not been critical enough the first time, as I had not in the books cited above. For me it remains a fascinating time, and a journey I much envy. Britain had emerged on the victorious side in World War II, but was still recovering. The political leadership realized that the colonial era was drawing to a close. They had already recognized Indian independence. Yet one strain of the leadership remained deeply attached to the fate of the world beyond its shores. The British "Locust Control Board" funded Wilfred Thesiger's trip across the Empty Quarter of Saudi Arabia, in 1947, in part, to determine if that was the origin of the locust when they swept across India. Concern over food production, and the increasing world population led them to fund Laurens van der Post's journey to two remote highland areas of Nyasaland, (present day Malawi) which had been part of a federation with Rhodesia. (Ironically, in light of the '82 war, he mentioned that food concerns occurred due to "problems with Argentina.") He departed Heath Row (so spelt, with the space) on May 10, 1949, on an old-fashioned air journey, on a plane bound for South Africa, but with lengthy ground stops, to re-fuel, and feed the passengers, on the ground. The plane sat 24, in comfort. The plane had landing stops near Tripoli, Libya, Khartoum, in the Sudan, and then Nairobi, Kenya. He then commences on an even smaller plane to Blantyre, in Nyasaland. The first third of the book is devoted simply to this air journey. He also gives a brief account of his ancestors, all of whom are of Dutch origins, who had immigrated to South Africa, thence being known as "Afrikaners." On one of their treks in the 19th Century, to the "Free State," his grandmother, who was a small child at the

time, narrowly escaped with her life, in a massacre by the natives, of the trekkers, that killed all the other members of the party, including her parents. He describes a "sleepy" Nyasaland, with no real anti-colonial movement, ruled by 2000 British whites (and that figure includes the wives!). The "sweet-spot" in the book is his description of his trek on Mt. Mlanje, in the extreme south of the country, in an area that bordered Portuguese East Africa (now, Mozambique.). It is a highland area, 2000-3000 meters, which looked, in many ways, like Scotland. The British actually had a forestry service there, and van der Post is repeatedly warned that they are deeply devoted to the cedar trees which grew on the mountain. Val and Dicky Vance, in their late 20's, with their young daughter, live an isolated and idyllic life high on the mountain. Their concern is that van der Post is on a mission to take their small place in "paradise" away from them. And in an unintentional way, he did: on their trek over the top of the mountain, Dicky Vance was swept away, and killed, while trying to cross a stream. Van der Post had to return with the grim news for his wife. The last third of the book was not as dramatic, and described his journey along the high Nyika plateau, in the far north of the country. In terms of the "re-evaluation," I still found the description of the journey fascinating. I was uneasy with his account of Dicky Vance's death; first of all, there were the endless "premonitions" which seemed to be constructed with hindsight. Likewise, his need to fault Dicky Vance for his death seemed to indicate that van der Post was hiding some inner guilt. And it should be noted that van der Post was a friend and an adherent of the philosophy of Carl Jung, and he weaves his outlook towards the African native from that perspective. At time, he seems to have progressive views, for example, his willingness to shake their hand, when others would not (OK... so, in a relative sense), but he also repeatedly uses the term "bearers," as indeed they were. Perhaps, that is merely "quaint", as is the use of some terms by Faulkner. Finally, he never says what the result of his two treks in the highlands was. Did he even file a report? So, with moments of unease about the veracity of certain points, I'll give it 4-stars.

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