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In The Time Of Madness: Indonesia On The Edge Of Chaos



Synopsis

In the last years of the twentieth century, foreign correspondent Richard Lloyd Parry found himself in the vast island nation of Indonesia, one of the most alluring, mysterious, and violent countries in the world. For thirty-two years, it had been paralyzed by the grip of the dictator and mystic General Suharto, but now the age of Suharto was coming to an end. Would freedom prevail, or was the 'time of madness' predicted centuries before now at hand? A book of hair-raising immediacy and a riveting account of a voyage into the abyss, *In the Time of Madness* is an accomplishment in the great tradition of Conrad, Orwell, and Ryszard Kapuscinski.

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Customer Reviews

Between 1996 and 1999, British foreign correspondent Parry repeatedly forayed into some of the worst strife rending the islands of Indonesia, a nation emerging tumultuously from the dictatorship of General Suharto. This boldly reported, introspective account is "a book about violence, and about being afraid" is his attempt to make sense, however incompletely, of what happened in Java, Borneo and East Timor. In Borneo, Parry saw seven decapitated heads, among other horrors, when he went to report on "an ethnic war of scarcely imaginable savagery." He witnessed the collapse of the rupiah and the 1998 mass student protests in Jakarta on the occasion of Suharto's reappointment. As the East Timorese agitated for independence from Indonesian rule, Parry ventured into the East Timor jungle to meet with rebels. And when the independence referendum soon thereafter brought Indonesia's military might down on East Timor, a Portuguese colony until 1975, Parry holed up in the U.N. compound at the vortex of the violence. He laments his self-protecting decision to leave the compound, though, comparing himself unfavorably to fearless

Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski "doused in benzene at the burning roadblocks." Holding Parry's writing to Kapuscinski's gold standard reveals it to be a little light on analysis and heavy on self-reflection, though it is clipped, vivid and honest. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"[A] boldly reported, introspective account . . . Clipped, vivid, and honest." "A deeply felt account . . . his elegant, understated prose preserves a bubble of sanity amid the madness; he's particularly adept at capturing the moments when history is about to be made." -- Bryan Walsh "If you want to know what it feels like to be asked the question, 'Do you expect to be killed tonight?' then read this terrifying testament from the epicenter of ultraviolence in Indonesia. Richard Lloyd Parry frightens and educates by turns in the best tradition of reportage." -- Aidan Hartley "In this extraordinary book, Lloyd Parry's language, humanity, and courage are inseparable, a single strong wind of decency blowing hard against the mayhem on Earth, but given the way things are these days, and the world's flirtation with darkness, one can't help but read in the Time of Madness as a forecast of worse to come." -- Bob Shacochis

Having lived in Indonesia throughout the crisis period covered by the author, this book really hit the spot, bringing back so many memories. The book works at two levels. Firstly the tragic story of Indonesia when it was right on the precipice and could so easily have fallen into total anarchy, before slowly clawing its way back to at least a semblance of democracy (sadly still a long way to go, in the face of overwhelming entrenched corruption). Secondly, the story of the author and his growth as an individual over the years of crisis. It was pleasing to follow him moving beyond his disturbing initial enjoyment of the crisis as a 'Boys Own' adventure, witnessing the horrors of headhunting and cannibalism in the ethnic turmoil of Kalimantan and the after effects of rioting and rebellion in Jakarta, to finally realising that a crime against humanity was taking place and people's lives were being destroyed in every sense in the chaos and bloodshed of East Timor. It is not possible to put the book down without feeling disgust with the disgraceful behaviour and appalling brutality of the corrupt and cowardly TNI (the Indonesian army) in East Timor. As an Australian, it also rekindled memories of our national shame, with our complicity in initially accepting Indonesia's invasion of East Timor, fortunately redeemed as the author relates with the Australian army and UN-backed intervention to rescue the new nation's citizens from massacre by the Indonesian army and militias. Not perfect, but a fascinating read at both levels.

Absolutely stunning eyewitness account of some of Indonesia's most grim and most recent events. I would recommend this to anyone who's living in Indonesia, just to understand the country a little better. I would consider it essential reading for expats, and I hope it will be translated into Indonesian some time soon. What really happened in East Timor? What legacy has Suharto left the nation? Is it true there was cannibalism in Kalimantan, against the Madurese? Reader gets the full scoop on these incidents, in a fast-moving, eyewitness-style reportage. Lloyd Parry does his best to be the cool-headed journalist going after the facts, but as he witnesses more and more inhumanity, we see his own humanity struggling to shine through the reports. His writing is crisp and to the point, and so his moments of shock and horror are written without embellishment. These were times of madness for Indonesia, but also for anyone who had to witness it. So that would include the author. He introduces the book with a passage about nightmares in a quiet, safe bungalow in Bali. What, reader wonders, has he seen? Format is a bit like each chapter being a good, thorough news magazine essay. Unfortunately, his publisher probably wanted to grab readers with some really sensational and gruesome stuff and so graphic bits about massacres and cannibalism make up the first chapter, even though it is out of sequence with the timeline of other events he writes about for this book. Once I made my way out of that dark jungle, I quite enjoyed the book, and I would call this the best read that really sums up what's been happening to Indonesia since the mid 90's. People out of the line of fire depend on our journalists to report on what's happening in the trouble spots of the world. I remain grateful to RLP for his courage, tenacity, and excellent writing. And I thank him for retaining his humanity and his concern for justice and simple goodness. I'd like to see more reporters like him, and more editors who let their reporters be themselves. Interestingly, the recent documentary film *The Act of Killing* (about men who assassinated enemies of the state in the 60's) depends to a large degree on the element of the personal viewpoint. In the west, there's growing concern and fascination with Indonesia's odd political realm. Anyone who's seen that film and been intrigued with THAT madness, can now pick up *In The Time of Madness* and get more insight on how this country has been dealing with its declared or imagined enemies.

The author was there, and he bears witness. Throughout the time I spent reading this book, I was reminded again and again of all the journalists who go into the war zones around the world and tell us what happened there. The risks they take are terrible. But like this author, those who take the greatest risks typically don't brag about it. This is a book about a particular slice of Indonesia's history. It begins with blood and violence in 1997 in Kalimantan, and it ends with more blood and

violence in early 2000 in East Timor. Less than three years, and how many lives ended so horribly? Indonesia is a complex society, a nation with a huge and diverse population spread among thousands of islands, and Lloyd Parry doesn't try to tell its whole story. He weaves in some background and some history where possible, but mostly, he tells us what he saw on the ground. I really appreciated his accounts of interviews with people in villages, people who are not "the official voice." I marveled again and again at the image of him riding around in the countryside, in a truck or on the back of a motorbike, unarmed, unprotected. But how else would he have been able to talk to people under the conditions that existed then? To get these stories, the journalist must expose himself. It's brave and it's crazy. I really admire people who do this. I'm grateful that they tell us stories like this one -- as horrible as they are, these things must be told.

A pretty intense account of the turmoil that was Indonesia in the late 90's.

I read this book on a recent trip to Indonesia because it was one of the few of its type available on Kindle. It gave me an engrossing window into some important moments in modern Indonesia. It gives a narrow, rather than broad or complete, account of conflicts on Kalimantan (Borneo), the fall of Suharto, key events on Java, and the situation in East Timor. Although I did not feel I was getting the complete picture, the picture I did get was vivid and engrossing. As a reader you feel like you're there. I thought the author dwelled a little too much on accounts of beheaded bodies, cannibalism, etc., especially in the early parts of the book. I also found it mildly annoying (but bearable) when the author drifted into introspection. But this book was full of fascinating information on situations that aren't well covered in many other sources. I'd recommend the book to anyone interested in its subject matter.

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