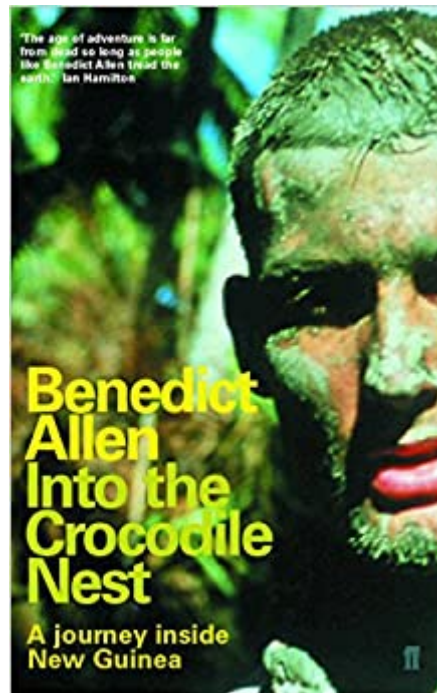




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Into The Crocodile Nest



Synopsis

Benedict Allen travelled through Papua New Guinea in search of a tribe that would let him participate in an initiation ceremony into manhood. He was finally admitted to the ceremonies of the Sepik tribe, whose totemic god is the crocodile. With fifteen other young males, Allen was secluded from the village in a large nest-like enclosure. Crocodile marks were carved onto their bodies with sharpened bamboo. Grey mud was applied to stop the blood-flow from their wounds, and they were beaten every day for six weeks. This book is the story of Allen's initiation experiences - a tale of love, community through shared pain and of sudden death.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Benedict Allen is one of the UK's most prominent explorers. For the past twenty-five years he has conducted solo expeditions through the jungle, along Namibia's Skeleton Coast and across Mongolia's Gobi Desert without the use of GPS, satellite phone or other means of outside support, as well as having written ten books of his adventures and editing The Faber Book of Exploration. He was the first explorer to bring the full experience of remote travel to television - taking the genre to its limits by not using a camera crew and so bringing an immediacy to his experiences. Allen regularly gives lectures at the Royal Geographic Society.

This book had all the promise of being interesting and revealing - New Guinea and Papua New Guinea and a white man's initiation into local culture. However, it went awry and somehow got lost

in the jungle. I feel like the author did not really let us in on what he actually felt. The author wanted to respect the secrecy of his experience, but still misses sharing with us some simple things. He is given crocodile scales, but never tells us exactly where, how many, how they felt to the touch (when he was eventually allowed to touch them) and whether he was proud or not of his scales in the years following. I was also confused as to what the author expected from his experience. He keeps indicating that he wants a spiritual experience, but feels let down when he does not encounter real "magic". On the whole, I felt disappointed when I reached the end of the book, because I could not clearly tell what the author got out of his adventure.

I must say that I would be very interested in how the author views this experience from his perspective in 2011. Although he is not the only explorer to go through tribal initiation rituals, the ritual of scarification he submitted to seems quite extreme for even the best of them! Returning to England with a raised pattern on his skin resembling that of a crocodile must have shocked more than a few people! Having read several of his books, I admire his approach to adventure, relying on his ability to enlist the aid of people he meets along the way. His comfort zone is very large, and his openness no doubt appeals to the indigenous populations. He does not present himself as a larger-than-life character, nor does he adopt a macho facade. He is a human among other humans, which is precisely why I enjoy traveling with him.

With little preparation and information, the author flies into West Papua where he first treks from mission to mission in 10 days among the Yali and Kim Yal people of the eastern highlands. Then he makes a more adventurous trek in the southern foothills to visit the remote Obini people. However with lack of understanding of their culture and no means to communicate with them he gets chased away after 4 days. Disappointed, he gives up on West Papua and flies back to more civilized Papua New Guinea, where he manages to take part in a traditional initiation ceremony along the Sepik River.

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