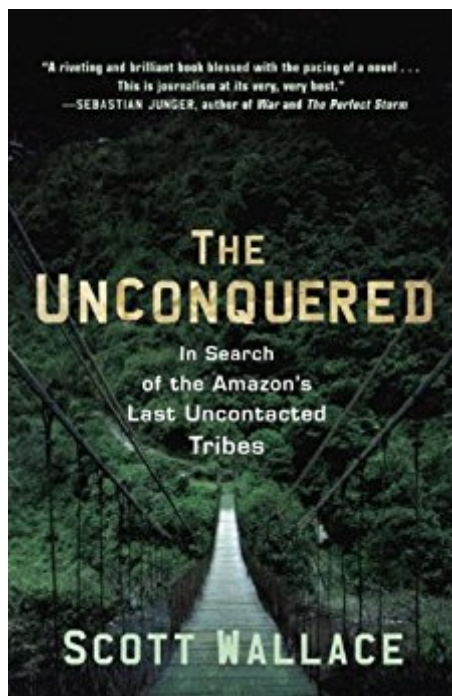


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The Unconquered: In Search Of The 's Last Uncontacted Tribes



Synopsis

The extraordinary true story of a journey into the deepest recesses of the planet to track one of the planet's last uncontacted indigenous tribes. Even today there remain tribes in the far reaches of the rainforest that have avoided contact with modern civilization. Deliberately hiding from the outside world, they are the last survivors of an ancient culture that predates the arrival of Columbus in the New World. In this gripping first-person account of adventure and survival, author Scott Wallace chronicles an expedition into the rainforest's uncharted depths, discovering the secrets while moving ever closer to a possible encounter with one such tribe—the mysterious flecheiros, or “People of the Arrow,” seldom-glimpsed warriors known to repulse all intruders with showers of deadly arrows. On assignment for National Geographic, Wallace joins Brazilian explorer Sydney Possuelo at the head of a thirty-four-man team that ventures deep into the unknown in search of the tribe. Possuelo's mission is to protect the Arrow People. But the information he needs to do so can only be gleaned by entering a world of permanent twilight beneath the forest canopy. Danger lurks at every step as the expedition seeks out the Arrow People even while trying to avoid them. Along the way, Wallace uncovers clues as to who the Arrow People might be, how they have managed to endure as one of the last unconquered tribes, and why so much about them must remain shrouded in mystery if they are to survive. Laced with lessons from anthropology and the author's own convulsed history, and boasting a Conradian cast of unforgettable characters—all driven by a passion to preserve the wild, but also wracked by fear, suspicion, and the desperate need to make it home alive—The Unconquered reveals this critical battleground in the fight to save the planet as it has rarely been seen, wrapped in a page-turning tale of adventure.

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Customer Reviews

I loved this book. It is a first-person account of the author's experience traveling into a remote section of the rainforest to track indigenous tribes living there. Contrary to what you might expect, the goal of the mission wasn't to actually contact the tribes; rather, the expedition sought to identify where the tribes lived so that the Brazilian government could later track the the tribe's movements and population by air. The book is great on several levels: First and foremost, it is a jungle adventure book. Accessing these tribes is a harrowing process by foot, since they are so deep into the rainforest. Along with the author (who was there as a reporter for National Geographic), there was a photographer, Brazilian citizens working for Brazil's department of Isolated Indians, and members of several "contacted" indigenous tribesmen. The expedition itself was led by a bizarre man named Sydney Possuelo, who has made it his life's mission to protect indigenous tribes from deforestation and crippling exposure to new diseases. Possuelo is a weird man; I spent the entire book trying to figure him out. I alternated between being appalled by him and fascinated by him. Interspersed throughout the jungle tale is a history of the white man's contact with indigenous tribes, a history of the department of Isolated Indians, and a history of the evolving theories on how to approach indigenous tribes. Where previously the government sought to "tame" wild Indians, the policy is now to avoid contact, since contact with the white man inevitably brings about loss of native culture and crippling epidemics of disease. (FYI, phrases like "wild Indians" sound extremely derogatory when I write them here, but the author is actually quite sensitive in his use of language throughout the book - whenever he uses words like "wild," "tamed," or "civilized," he is quick to provide historical context to explain his choice in language). The author's discussion of the issue of contact versus no-contact is even-handed and at times philosophical. He raises some interesting questions that genuinely made me think about both sides of the issue. The plight of the so-called "contacted" tribes is

eye-opening, with applications to our own tenuous relationship with Native Americans in the US. I highly recommend this book. It is an adventure book, complete with monkeys and sloths and fire ants, but also a very eye-opening look at our culture of consumption and the havoc we have wreaked on all the inhabitants of the rainforest - plants, animals, humans.

What a spectacular adventure! And so well-told. Scott Wallace's book was so compelling, I lost sleep over it. I thought about it during the day. On my second day of reading it, I caught myself thinking with excitement, "Tonight, back to the !" I learned so much, saw the interesting landscape and culture through his eyes, and now feel like Sydney Possuelo and I are old friends. I dug up a lecture on YouTube that Scott did as the book was coming out and found that interesting in a different way. This is truly a must-read for all of us armchair adventurers who would not be able to endure snakes that jump out of trees, biting ants or not being able to take a hot shower for all that time. Eeew. (Not to mention the diet sounds absolutely disgusting!) Bravo to Scott and his late photographer for being so incredibly brave.

Some people make tremendous sacrifices for others, such as myself, to read of the primitive conditions and arduous conditions to hike into the heart of the to find undiscovered tribes. The author did an excellent job describing the expedition's journey. Through his words we could visualize the fauna of the jungle, the lack of food and what they had to do to supplement their supplies. He portrays the dangers of the jungle and the helplessness of being isolated from the comforts we take for granted but most of all, the reader is able to get the reader to appreciate those who live away from a modernized society. Overall it was a good read although at times he went into a bit much detail on depicting his surroundings.

There's a lot to think about in this book, which, in itself is quite an achievement. The subject of the book, Sydney Possuelo, is a megalomaniacal tyrant with a noble mission--kind of a reverse White Man's Burden. Possuelo's mission is to successfully cordon off civilization, preventing modern society from reaching "uncontacted" tribes living in the forest. Think about that for a minute or two: his mission is to prevent modernity from reaching people who are living behind a veil of ignorance, in what can only be described as a primitive state. Meanwhile, the rest of us spend our days trying to do the opposite: lift our veil of ignorance. All of science is aimed at this latter goal. The argument for protecting them is that contact with modernity (characterized by greed where the white man is the devil) introduces disease, makes the indios bravos dependent on modern contrivances, causes

them to turn their backs on ancestral ways and leaves them in a state of poverty. Possuelo (and the author) posit that these people are not "primitive," that their ways are necessary and sufficient to their happy survival, so why disturb them? Plus, there is the added environmental benefit of leaving large tracts of forest intact as their habitat requires it to be left alone. But I wonder if this isn't just condescension in the same way that missionaries hell-bent on "civilizing" such people are so obviously guilty. Set aside the disease problem (it is a problem, but it's incidental, solvable with enough effort) and look at the often tragic history of these contacted tribes: they become dependent on modern contrivances, they leave their traditional ways and they are ill-adapted to succeeding in the modern world, leaving them poverty-stricken. This tells us that: they like modernity and its conveniences, they are perhaps not so interested in the old (arduous) ways, and that they have not been educated thoroughly enough to confront the challenges of modern life. Which way do you want to go with that? Should more effort be put into solving those problems or should more effort be put into preventing these problems from arising? Who should decide? Sydney Possuelo? Brazil's government? Brazil's government can't even take care of its own people. The intuitive answer is that the uncontacted people should decide, but how can an uncontacted group decide between two ways of living when the very act of learning enough to make a decision is, ipso facto, to obviate the decision in favor of selecting contact? I don't have the answers. I surely wish these people well.

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