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Fritz W. Up de Graff

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Fritz W. Up de Graff : Head Hunters of the Amazon: Seven Years of Exploration and Adventure before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Head Hunters of the Amazon: Seven Years of Exploration and Adventure:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. The "Mother" of all rain forest adventure storiesBy Roman NiesIf Alexander von Humboldt`s description of his Southamerican Journey is some kind of the "mother" of all rainforest adventures, then this must be a well done daughter.On his way back home to the USA Up de Graff only wanted to take a little detour on the forest river Napo when he left Ecuador where he had failed as an entrepreneur. A little holiday, a little adventure! Then he stayed 7 years. Compared with that Heinrich Harrers seven years in Tibet were nothing but a children`s game, because what the author experienced in the area blasts any power of imagination! Perhaps apart from some exaggerations he is dealing with facts.The author portrays the voyage in detail, although with knowledge gaps in natural science - not astonishing regarding the research then. He depicts the different peoples who he is meeting along the and its tributaries, their ways of life, their partly hair-rising customs; he is coming across gold-diggers and rubber-tappers, who were even more dangerous than the aboriginal head-hunters. Together with a companion he is facing countless exertions and dangers. For years they are excluded from the world outside, they protrude into totally unknown territory and naturally often have a narrow escape of death, be it in shape of a poison arrow, a malady, physical strain or the machete swinging contemporaries.It is an odyssey in the green ocean of the that time unexplored area, but often enough the author wants to continue it willingly. It is true, he also has his Ithaka, but the forest and his

still undiscovered wonders lure him with might. More than the return to civilization! I pay tribute in front of so much idealistic perseverance! The author puts it like that: "It was the longing for exploring the hidden secrets of nature, connected with the pure joy for adventure for the sake of adventure, which caused me to dare to advance... There in the biggest virgin forests known on Earth I spent my most captivating, but also the most miserable days of my life, together with the best companions". In describing nature he seems a bit ignorant. But he is no scientist. Rather a romantic and dreamer: "We lay in our blankets and listened to the voices of the forest; above us spread the nightly sky. The Indian girl taught us to interpret the stars. The knowledge of the forest dwellers is inexhaustible, a wonderful treasure which remains covered for us white people. She explained us which quadruped or which bird called and why it called, from what it lives off, how it catches its prey or searches its food. And likewise the comfortable part of adventure alternates with the uncomfortable: "But then, one day, the inevitable happened. We went short of nourishment as well as of patience. The mosquito - and sand-fly swarms were so dense, that Ed and I had to conceal our heads with nets; we saw the world only through a veil of haze. I became sick and weaker day by day, until I was hardly able to hold the rudder." One day strife fell upon the companions which almost led to shooting one another. "We stood there, furious, stalking one another..." Hardly imaginable for me are the tours without orientation the author undertook alone. Who ever trekked in pathless rainforests knows that one is depending on courses of rivers or other unambiguous direction signs, otherwise you get hopelessly lost without a compass. "I ranged the swampy woods three or four weeks and watched out for the mysterious Indian tribe. I pushed forward 50 kilometres in one direction and 50 in the other and so forth until I beat a great number of paths..." Oh well! In Tibet you wander 50 kilometres in 2 or 3 days and orientate with the help of the horizon which is missing in the rainforest. In the pathless forest you need for the same length one or two weeks, if there is easy walking!" Thus three more months passed by, no trace of any Indians!" Already in those times! Up de Graff must be an aficionado of special class, cause: "Truly, it would have been understandable, if I would have liked to go home after all these adventures. That was not at all the case. On the contrary, I was possessed by the spirit of the wilderness..." The only what he happened to see were mission stations, small settlements, a tiny town, but: "A nose full of civilization was sufficient to awaken my thirst for adventure!" It is always the same with those who retained the wilderness gene. They are always drawn out, hardly after they had been in dry clothes. The book also contains horrifying passages, for he is meeting murderous tribes, tormented by witchcraft belief and Shaman rule, wild people who foster a bloody, women- and children stealing relationship with the concurring Indian neighbours. It is worth mentioning that the author seems to have observed the Indians who had been crusaded by western civilization having a spiritual more alerted and more teachable mind than the Indians of the woods. No wonder considering their practises! But also no wonder that he comments the catholic missions very critically. That has not to be in stark contradiction to the before said. In his time there were hardly other Christian missions, who could have improved the impact, at least none the author got acquainted. In this respect the last one hundred years have changed. Be that as it may be, the influence of the West did not bring much good to the Indians, generally spoken. The author who had a deadly car accident in the twenties, did not live long enough to see the results of the forest exploitation through the whites. This is one of the best adventure books on forest areas, I read so far. Apparently others, among them the Nobel prize winner for literature Gabriel Garcia Marquez also saw that Up de Graff did here something very much recognizable. The book is best read when being driven in a canoe on one of the more peaceful tributaries of the Amazo, or - as a substitute - on one of the passenger steamers which are on their journey from Iquitos downriver, on the upper deck, with legs on the railing or dangling above the wake. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Advice for next summer's vacation By Guillermo Maynez You wouldn't survive for two weeks what this crazy guy endured for seven years. Luckily, he wrote his memories, they are back in print, and you can have the experience without getting bitten by any monster, big or small. Up de Graff is a young engineer from New York state, who is anxious for adventure. When a former schoolmate, a rich guy from a big time Equatorian family, invites him over to look for business opportunities, he eagerly accepts. During a year Graff runs a salt mine up in the Andes, surrounded by the Indians' intrigues and resentment, as well as by the unethical conduct of his friend's family. After some guys beat him up badly, Graff finally breaks up with his friend and decides to travel down the to reach its mouth in Brazil and then take a ship to NY. But as soon as he has stepped down the Andes, he meets another American adventurer, the great Jack Rouse, with whom he decides to explore the mysterious and unknown river Yasuni, to collect rubber-gum to sell dearly in Iquitos (this is 1896). The two men intern in the dark jungle along the river on a canoe, surrounded by treacherous and elusive aborigines, innumerable insects and other bugs, and not least by vampire bats who suck their blood at nights. After two years, they reach Iquitos with lots of rubber but almost dead. They spend six happy months there, meeting other adventurers from the US and Europe. Graff, Jack and two others, plus two Indians, decide to travel up the Peruvian to discover the gold of the Incas. Of course, they experience lots of misadventures among the Jibaros, the original head-hunters. They are unreliable and violent people. They return to Barranca empty-handed, but Graff still goes on in two more expeditions, each one more disastrous than the previous, until he and his associate Ed Morse cut short the last and return to Iquitos, from where this time Graff does travel back home. During his years in the jungle (imagine it 100 years ago!), Graff had to learn to find his way, semi-nude, in almost identical landscapes; to isolate fabrics with rubber to make bags and shoes; to improvise canoes; to build

shelters and cure wounds. He ate alligator, ant-bear, turtle, monkey (he liked them a lot), insects, birds and some vegetable flour preserved in (ugh) Indians' saliva. He suffered interminable fevers, was attacked by vampires and meat-eating ants, escaped the hug of anacondas, was defeated many times by tiredness and malnutrition. An episode that stands out is the time he and his comrades participated in a Jibaro battle, and then saw (and explained to us) precisely the way in which these guys used to reduce their enemies' heads to a third of their size. All of this written with a wonderful sense of humor, modesty, and grace. Even if Graff had added some spice of his own, they don't sound like hunter's stories, but like the humorous account of crazy years of youth. The last adventure ends with the story of Breginia, a young and brave girl travelling alone through the jungle in search for her kin, after escaping from kidnapping. Ironically, this survivor died in his fifties in a car accident. What nature couldn't achieve, the machine could. 3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. fascinating diary on jungle life in the 1890's By L. Martin So they finally reprinted this book! My copy is an antique that I found by pure chance at my local GoodWill store. I loved this book! It is the diary of a man who spent several years living in the jungle in the late 1890's. His encounters with nature, exotic animals, natives, tropical diseases (and more) fascinated me. The most well-known part of the book is how he got to observe first-hand the process of how headhunters shrink the heads. (It is a very precise process!) I'm surprised there are no other reviews of this book. Maybe it has been out-of-print so long that very few people know about it. If you like true life travel and adventure stories, I think you will like this book!

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