



**ALL THINGS MUST
FIGHT TO LIVE**

STORIES OF WAR AND
DELIVERANCE IN CONGO

BRYAN MEALER

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In 1996, the fighting in Rwanda spilled over the Congolese border, sparking a conflict that would eventually claim more lives than any other since the Second World War. In the course of his three years as a reporter in Congo, Bryan Mealer was the witness often the only witness to almost unimaginable scenes: entire cities laid waste by teenage gunboys with machetes and ball gowns; an obsessed UN commander locked in a fight with a shadowy militia leader named Cobra Matata; local heroes who resurrected a defunct rail line to ferry supplies to war-choked villages.

All Things Must Fight to Live: Stories of War and Deliverance in Congo Details

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Cathy says

It took me quite some time to get into this book. I have read quite a lot of books concerning Africa and all that happens in many of the countries in that part of the world. This was my first book about the Congo so I was not familiar with much of the history of the country. I do have to say that I really enjoyed the last half of the book when the author traveled through the jungle on bike as well as his trip on the trains. Those two adventures really made the book.

Chris says

No one gives a shit about Congo; that much is abundantly clear. Bryan Mealer has the good sense to realize that there's far too much chaos and disorder to try to impose any kind of broad narrative here, so he shows us only what he can--smaller stories. Senseless slaughter, staggering brutality, implacable disorder--it's a lot to shoulder, and you can tell Mealer's still a little staggered by it. He can't seem to let Congo go, and you can feel him trying to honor it and purge himself of it with each page. He served as an AP correspondent for several years, documenting the "daily blood" because someone had to, because it would not even exist unless he put it on the page. Village slaughters, street battles in Kinshasa, gunboys hell-bent on violence roaming the streets fully stoned and fully charged--Mealer puts it all on the page. When he's recounting his experiences as a stringer amidst the conflict, it's riveting stuff. After his years in country, he returns twice to undertake long voyages, once by river barge and once by train. The voyages themselves are predictably fraught with failures large and small and prove less interesting (and more Mealer-centric) than the stories of the Congolese, but the first half of this feels important.

Judy says

I just visited Uganda, which has played a huge role in the DRC, so this book was a personal portrait of the horrors of life in eastern Congo. A brave and honest book that reads like a novel - only it is all true. It helps unravel some dizzyingly complex history of the Rwanda/Uganda/US/French/Burundi/Congo wars.

Eileenpahl says

Full disclosure: Bryan is married to my cousin. Even if I didn't know him, I would recommend this book. It is extremely well-written and the horrific violence is tempered by many instances of humanity which Bryan draws out of the extreme situations. The book was also a good education in what is going on in the Congo.

Lora says

This is about that is War in Congo that is going on today and has killed more than the Earthquake in Haiti and the World is doing so little to help them. This book is intense, heavy, deep, and real. Written by a journalist who has seen the killing first hand. My hope is that this book will touch the depths of your soul and you will dive in to do something for the people in Northern Congo. There is history included and some of the places he describes I have seen and know to be accurate to his description.

Jody says

The first chapter has the unimaginable horrors. I wasn't sure I was going to be able to read this book after reading that one chapter. The rest was more travel and journalist memoir and recent Congolese history, especially details of some key players in the area. The book is good for giving the reader the personal stories of life in Congo that helps us to connect to the people who are so far away that we find ourselves forgetting or ignoring what is happening over there.

Dave says

Bryan Mealer has penned a brutal memoir of his three years as a reporter in the Congo, three years when teenage gunboys roamed the countryside and city streets, when UN peacekeeping forces faced mystical leaders operating from jungle mountaintops, when rebel militias and government forces alike pillaged their own nation. It was a horrible time in the history of a country that has seen little else for the last hundred years.

While Mealer writes about the bloody atrocities he witnessed, the real story he tells is about himself. He's drawn back to the Congo three times, apparently addicted to the extreme discomfort and random violence he endures. His travels cover nearly the entire country from the capital of Kinshasa to the mineral-rich southern provinces to the guerilla-infested eastern region where an alphabet-soup of militias, foreign armies, and UN forces fight a never-ending war of terror, rape, and mutilation. He rides a newly-reconstructed rail line and even follows Conrad's trail up the Congo River via barge. At one point, he and his adventure-junkie buddies take off through the jungle on bicycles.

While Mealer tells us the names and stories of many Congolese he meets along the way, he never really gives much insight into them as anything other than victims. He says as much when he reflects on his bicycle journey:

“...once in the jungle, my own basic needs and level of comfort had stood in the way of learning anything. I didn't even know my riders' last names or anything about their families. I'd simply been too exhausted and hungry to care. It wasn't my proudest moment, and even now, those last days on the trail leave a sting of regret.”

Still, All Things Must Fight To Live puts the reader close to the action and accurately reflects the aftermath of war and colonialism in one of the world's greatest humanitarian catastrophes. Many similar incidents are described in my novel, Heart of Diamonds: A Novel of Scandal, Love, and Death in the Congo.

Barbarac says

This book was a great account of the horrors in happening in Congo (DRC) in the 90s and early 00s, of which most westerners never even heard. I appreciate Bryan Mealer's account, and while I really wanted to like it and initially loved, after a while made for a dry book. I don't know if it was all the violence, or the large amount of characters, or the political talk, or maybe all three, but after a few chapters I was numbed by it all. I would have probably had a better time if this was a series of short-stories, but I tried reading it front to back and I couldn't take it all.

Too bad, because half-way through the book is what would have probably been my favorite story, of the reporter taking some time to travel the Congo river by boat. It read more like a story than a newspaper article, and therefore I enjoyed it a lot.

But I do have to say that learning about this author has made me curious about another one of his books, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope*, and I will check it out.

Nissa Rachmidwiati says

Review saya lebih dari setahun yang lalu :

Di Drodro, kepala desa meminta diadakan pertemuan dengan petugas PBB. "Bagaimana anda bisa menghabiskan begitu banyak waktu dan sumber daya untuk memeriksa orang-orang mati, tapi tidak melakukan apa pun untuk melindungi orang yang masih hidup?" tanyanya.

...

Suat pagi setelah baku tembak seru malam sebelumnya, dua karyawan PBB berdiri di luar Hotel Hellenique sambil merokok. Salah seorang berkata bahwa tadi pagi dia terbangun karena seorang gadis kecil menggedor pintunya.

"Gadis itu bilang orang Lendu ada di rumahnya dan akan membunuh orangtuanya," kata pria itu, "Memangnya apa yang harus kulakukan? Aku lalu memanggil petugas keamanan untuk memeriksa."
"Kita di sini bukan untuk melindungi warga sipil," sergha temannya. "Kau tidak bisa menyelamatkan dunia, Sobat. Menurutku, biar saja keparat-keparat itu saling bunuh."

Pria satunya mendongak dan berkata, "Lalu, apa yang kita sedang lakukan di sini?"

PBB hanya memiliki kontingen kecil pengamat militer tak bersenjata di wilayah luas itu untuk melindungi empat juta orang.

...

Pengamat-pengamat militer PBB tak bersenjata merupakan kehadiran pertama PBB di Kongo dulu pada tahun 2000, dikirim untuk memonitor gencatan senjata antara fraksi-fraksi yang sedang berperang. Seperti tugas PBB, mereka efektif di tempat-tempat yang perangnya telah usai, tapi di Ituri, penyebaran mereka sering seperti melempar daging pada sekandang anjing.

Aku berkenalan dengan seorang pengamat minggu itu di Hotel Hellenique, orang Uruguay bernama Juan yang baru-baru ini kembali dari misi panjang di perbukitan sebelah utara. Dia menjelaskan bagaimana dia diturunkan bersama tiga prajurit lain jauh dalam semak-semak hanya dengan ransel dan radio mereka. Mereka diberi peta kasar dan sedikit informasi, dan tak seorang pun dari mereka bisa berbicara bahasa lokal. Mereka diperintahkan untuk mencari pemimpin lokal dan meminta izin mendirikan sebuah pos

komando kecil. Kalau si pemimpin menolak, ceritanya, mereka harus memberitahunya bahwa PBB sudah mengirim sisa peralatan mereka naik helikopter. "Dan kalau kami diserang," ucap Juan, "mereka berkata, 'Pakai radio kalian'."

...

Tapi warga sipil selalu terjebak di tengah siapapun yang berperang, dan selama sembilan tahun perang itu merenggut lebih dari lima juta nyawa, sebagian besar tewas akibat penyakit dan kelaparan saat melarikan diri dari perang. Korban kematian dari perang Kongo melampaui jumlah korban dari konflik lain mana pun sejak Perang Dunia II.

Beberapa bulan yang lalu, saya membuat sebuah paper tentang intervensi kemanusiaan dan membuat saya membaca banyak tentang perang yang terjadi di Kongo. Dan payahnya, saya baru sadar sekarang, setelah membaca buku *All Things Must Fight to Live* (karya Bryan Mealer— reporter dan staf koresponden Associated Press) bahwa tragedi kemanusiaan di Kongo bukan semata-semata merupakan perang saudara, namun perang ini merupakan perang yang dirancang sepenuhnya oleh pihak luar, peperangan antarsuku bisa dibilang merupakan salah satu mata rantai dari perang multinasional yang terjadi di Kongo.

Pembantaian Drodro menjadi berita besar di koran-koran tapi hilang keesokan harinya. PBB mulai berkata bahwa korban kematian itu sangat dibesarkankan, meskipun PBB sendiri tidak melakukan investigasi serius.

Dari buku ini juga saya baru mengetahui bahwa usaha PBB dinilai gagal dalam mengantisipasi pembunuhan besar-besaran itu.

Alangkah baiknya bila perang-perang yang terlupakan dapat dipublikasikan dan dirilis dalam bentuk buku untuk memberikan informasi kepada para pengamat sosial amatir. Pembuatan buku dengan adanya unsur dokumentasi yang ditulis oleh reporter membuat informasi yang terdapat didalamnya memiliki netralitas tanpa adanya keterpihakan pada salah satu pihak. Lain halnya dengan suratan-suratan yang yang dibuat dalam unsur kenegaraan atau organisasi-organisasi besar karena mengandung unsur keterpihakan dan tidak adanya runutan kejadian di dalamnya.

This book is highly recommended for those individuals who are interested in history, humanitarian, and social-and-world issues..

Jim says

Why is it that so many books in my "Africa" category also find a spot in the "craziness" category? The instant Belgium pulled up stakes in Congo the place went into a downhill slide, and it's not for lack of industrious and honest people who would like to work on the place. No, Congo's big problem is the fact that the country has been abundantly cursed with natural resources and conflict minerals and since the sixties the place has been plundered by any group that had the wherewithal to obtain arms and didn't mind killing a few folks in order to enrich themselves.

Bryan Mealer spent a good deal of time travelling around Congo and seeing the carnage firsthand. He explains the crazed alphabet soup of acronyms used by each group of armed maniacs in a manner that is easy

to follow, and he is a master at getting your attention and leaving the reader with a solid (if condensed) understanding of how the Congolese shit went stringy.

Mealer put his neck on the line to interview the Congolese "man in the street", so to speak...except that there are few streets left in Congo. This required some Quixotic journeys, such as travelling on various vessels up the Congo River and risking his life on the suicidal rollercoaster that is all that remains of the national railway. He saw the bodies and spoke to parents whose children were chopped into pieces in front of their eyes; he experienced the shameless shakedown of customs officers who hadn't been paid for months. He acquired a wealth of knowledge, some of which caught me by surprise. As an example, I had no idea that more people have perished in the Congolese conflicts than in any other conflict since WWII...something like 5 million, the overwhelming majority of whom were noncombatants.

In the midst of the carnage and insanity, Mealer was able to find many Congolese still laboring away in a doomed attempt to maintain a sagging and unfunded superstructure. Most touching were the men who worked on the railway, their last paycheck a distant memory, toiling long hours at cannibalizing a shrinking fleet of locomotives in an attempt to keep two engines functional. A common lament was that they wanted the white man back to run things. As Mealer put it:

(P.270-271)I'd been hearing it all week, starting with Fabien. I'd heard it again from a pastor going to Kongolo, standing outside during the long Lusengi breakdown, asking me 'When is the white man coming to fix this train? When is he coming back to fix this mess?' Then again from the old man who rang the breakfast bell, who told me with those same pinched eyes, "The black man can't run this company because he lacks compassion. The black man lacks love." 'Whites have the same problem,' I said. 'Believe me'. "No, no," he shot back. "A black man laughs at his countryman who's suffering. White men would never do that. If a black man continues to run this company, the end is certainly near."

Everyone had his own history. Ask an old man in Kinshasa what he thought of the white man, and he'd spin you a picture of Stanley snapping a whip and taking heads, ol' Bula Matari, the rock breaker, or show you the statue of Leopold now facedown in the city dump. The white man was the UN, the fleshy figure behind the tinted glass with a weakness for Tintin and tight, young girls. And on the river he was l'étranger, the thief and mercenary, the cloaked shadow who controlled their leaders with fingers that pulsed with war. But in Katanga, the bejeweled trough of empire itself, where the international firms took their 80 percent on the straight, and where that strange, warm breeze at midnight was the anxious breath of hundreds more waiting to pounce - well, the people couldn't wait to bring them back."

I learned a lot from this book, but I can't say that it left me with any hope for the future of this forsaken country. My one criticism is that there are no photos in the book, an unusual shortcoming for a fellow who wandered the country in the company of photographers. I don't say I need pictures of dead folks, but Mealer met a lot of good struggling people in his travels; I think he lost a chance to show us their faces.

Raegan Butcher says

On Africa: To quote the War Nerd, "In the movies sometimes the good guys win. In Africa, never!"

Julianne says

I wanted to like this book.

After the first chapter, I was fully expecting to assign Mealer's account of his time spent in the Congo a full five stars based on his brutal and honest description of the horror no one seems to be talking about. Perhaps my mistake of taking the subtitle "War and Deliverance in Congo" at face value--expecting a thoughtful investigation of the life of the Congolese survivors of this terrible violence. Instead, I encountered >100 pages of Mealer's personal experiences as a journalist trying to navigate through the devastated nation. While I can certainly appreciate this was no easy feat for the young reporter, Mealer nevertheless left a bad taste in my mouth. In places where he could have exposed the plight of the displaced and desperate Congolese citizens, he instead chooses to bemoan the difficulty of slugging through the thick jungle on a bicycle (after ignoring recommendations to hire more riders) and recount periodic stops in villages where he would demand food from local chiefs to refuel before another long day. It seems difficult to understand how someone capable of writing such compelling descriptions of human suffering as seen in the first chapter of the book could be so indifferent to native people living in a state of chronic starvation, the likes of which he could never experience in his comparably privileged first-world life. Bringing attention to the unrest in the Congo is an admirable endeavor, and for that I give Mr. Mealer credit, however he seems to fancy himself some kind of hero, and I simply cannot hold in high esteem an individual who, at the end of the day, spends more on drinks in the hotel bar than many of his interviewees likely make in the course of a week.

All Things Must Fight to Live is the work of an ambitious and brazen journalist, but ultimately, it fails to pay homage to the beautiful, strong, and resilient people of the Congo who have endured unimaginable hardship yet soldier on in the face of absolute poverty, corruption, and devastation. Mealer describes numerous close calls with bullets and certain death, but I think it's important to remember that countless native Congolese don't have the UN headquarters or wealthy, well-connected European friends to call on when the going gets tough.

I wanted to hear the voices of the true heros of the Congo, and I simply didn't get that here.

AJ P says

Whew, this one took me a very long time to read! I had a hard time getting into it in some places, and was also reading it on work breaks so it took quite a while.

This book is firmly in the travelogue genre, which I wasn't really expecting when I picked it up - I thought it would have a lot to do with the history of conflict in DRC and the current events and players in the conflicts, albeit from a journalistic point of view.

It was not that at all. Although the first several chapters did attempt that at times, it was really the weakest parts of the books in my opinion. Some of the stories were interesting, and I liked the people the author chose to speak about, but it really didn't add much to my understanding of the conflict there. I know now that that wasn't the goal of the book, but at times the author seemed to try to lead it there but not very well.

Where the book really took off for me was when the author decided to leave all the conflict stuff behind and really travel through DRC via river, bike, walking, and train. The author really should stick to travelogue

writing, because he did a much better job at that than describing the fighting in the east and in Kinshasa (though there were a few high points in those chapters as well, I'll admit). I really did enjoy the last two or three chapters about his travels through the middle and south of the country. I would have been fine with the book being just those things.

I guess the good thing is that I'm also reading a really excellent book that covers the history of the conflict, so missing that in this book wasn't so disappointing since I'm getting that elsewhere.

Recommend the second half definitely! First half is hit or miss, but still worth reading if you like reading journalist memoirs of their time in warzones.

Aurora Cole-reimer says

This book is written by a friend of my brothers. I knew he was in Congo and seen an article he wrote for Harpers. Now my brother informed me that he'd written this book. I read it in no time and had trouble sleeping sometimes when reading before bed. The book was very important in helping me understand what is going on in Congo, why the peacekeeping missions are not effective, why people are starving in the midst of foreign aid. The level of violence and total lack of governmental infrastructure is beyond comprehension. I still would like to read the story from the perspective of someone, maybe one of the characters in the book. It's important that Western reporters are going to Africa and reporting on the war, on the helplessness of the people there, and of the impotence of the UN peacekeepers, but I feel uncomfortable constantly getting information from Western journalists. However, I'll get what I can take and Bryan did a great job of bringing the reader to Congo.

nanto says

Baca tejemahan Indonesianya yang diterbitkan oleh Elex. Untuk sebuah karya memoar jurnalistik atas pengalaman penulisnya di Kongo buku ini memberikan gambaran bagaimana jurnalisme mendalam itu dibangun dari keringat dan kerut penderitaan wartawan sebagai saksi dari peristiwa tragis yang ada dihadapannya. Namun dari sekedar memberitakan kedukaan dan tragis yang paling brutal, di titik baliknya Mealer pun dihadapkan pada sebuah pertanyaan, "masih adakah harapan bagi Kongo?" Dari sana memoar ini juga bergerak, bukan saja dari kegetiran dan kengerian, tetapi dari hal yang sama mampukan jurnalisme menyuarakan sisi positif dan harapan meski dari kebrutalan yang telah menjadi keseharian.

Terbagi menjadi empat bagian utama, yang dialami oleh penulisnya sendiri mulai dari saat pecahnya konflik di Kongo yang terkait dengan intervensi negara-negara tetangganya termasuk persoalan konflik etnis. Upaya rekonstruksi PBB, hingga titik balik harapan yang dimiliki Kongo yang mendorong Meayer merasakan sendiri denyut dinamika penduduk di negara yang terkoyak konflik yang buas itu. Dari empat bagian itu kita bisa melihat bahwa realitas jurnalisme tidak melulu dilandasi drama kekejaman, tetapi juga harapan. Sekecil apapun harapan itu bagi sebuah negeri yang terkoyak sedemikian parahnya, jurnalisme patut mengangkatnya sebagai bagian dari berita yang sampai ke meja pembaca. Hingga kita katakan perimbangan kengerian dan harapan itu adalah sebuah realitas. Jurnalisme bukan semata kengerian yang bermuara pada skeptisme, tapi juga harapan yang mendorong semua untuk berbuat sekecil apapun itu.

Mealer yang akhirnya setelah mengakhiri tugas reportasenya di Kongo menetap di Malawi dan menyaksikan

sisilain Afrika yang lebih memiliki harapan, ingin mengatakan bahwa benua hitam itu tetap memiliki harapan segetir dan sekelam apapun yang dialaminya. Seperti alur buku ini yang berangkat dari kengerian yang demikian sangat (mengingatkan saya pada gambar-gambar di film tentang Rwanda, bahkan lebih sadis lagi), namun Mealer tak berhenti berharap dan kehilangan kemanusiaanya saat menyaksikan kengerian itu. Akhirnya ia tahu, Afrika pun punya harapan.
