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Stranger: A Rainforest Chief Battles Big Oil



Synopsis

One man obsessed with the Ecuadorian jungle and desperate to save it and its people chronicles the struggle of the Cofan people against Big Oil.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A naturalist's paradise, the Cuyabeno wildlife reserve in eastern Ecuador was set aside for tourists, scientists and indigenous Indians. Then oil reserves were discovered near the Aguarico River. One band of natives, the Cofan, moved deeper into the forest and has been fighting the petrochemical companies under the leadership of an American, Randy Borman. Tidwell (The Ponds of Kalambayi) spent several months with the Cofan observing the degradation of the environment wrought by the oil companies. He tells an engrossing story of a primitive people and their remarkable leader. Born in the jungle to missionary parents, Borman chose to stay; he married a Cofan and has fathered two sons. Tidwell paints a vivid picture of the rain forest and its people, of the battle between conservation and exploitation. Author tour. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Tidwell (The Ponds of Kalambayi, LJ 8/90) so vividly recounts this story of Ecuador's Cofan people and the American who led them that readers will long remember this tribe. Tidwell spent considerable time with the Cofan, learning about their culture and lifestyles. He describes their continuous struggle, headed by Randy Borman, the son of missionary parents, to protect their homeland from oil company invasion. Even though the Cofan live in a preserve, oil explorations are

a constant threat. Hidden in the jungle are toxic dumps from previous explorations, roads cut for equipment that serve as effective barriers to wildlife, and the ever-present politics of oil. An extremely involving story from all perspectives: anthropological (the tribe and its indigenous culture), political (rich oil reserves and what people do to get them), environmental (the enormous problems of oil exploration in the rain forest), and human (Borman, his family, and other individuals). Urged for all collections. Nancy J. Moeckel, Miami Univ. Libs., Oxford, Ohio Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a fascinating and disturbing story - but unfortunately a familiar one. Economic and political elites gang together to steal land from local native peoples in order to 'develop' it - in this case for oil to sell on the global market. What makes the book unusual and fascinating is that the native people - the Cofan indians - have a white American as chief. Randy Borman - the son of a missionary family who failed to adjust back to American life - moved back to the jungle and 'went native'. His odd combination of indian wisdom and craft plus his American education and skills as a negotiator and when necessary, a crafty rebel, makes him the ideal chief for these endangered people. The book recounts how he has led the effort to restore land rights for the Cofan.

This book is at once an adventure story, a profile of a fascinating individual, a heartbreaking account of one of the greatest environmental crimes taking place in the world today (the destruction by oil companies of one of the world's richest ecosystems, Ecuador and Colombia containing the greatest biodiversity of the entire Basin) and a David-and-Goliath story of a tiny indian tribe, the Cofan, battling for survival against multinational corporations. As all of those things, it bears comparison with Joe Kane's "Savages," but the Cofan have already dealt with much more destruction than have the Waorani, and this book spends more time on first-hand descriptions of both the riches of the Ecuadorian rain forest and the consequences of oil exploration. (I would recommend this book not only to activists who are trying to save the , but also to those who are working to save the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil exploitation, to explode to smithereens the notion that oil exploitation would not devastate the ecology there.) The editorial reviews here cover just about everything else I would say about this book, so I won't repeat their comments, just direct the reader to them. ...One factual error this book makes repeatedly that I would like to correct: although they speak the same language as the Indians of the Andean highlands, and although they expanded northward into Cofan territory relatively recently, the indian Quichua are NOT migrants from the highlands and NOT newcomers to the rainforest. They are true indian people, distinct syncretic cultures

created from the remnants of various destroyed ian tribes who blended together and adopted their lingua franca (Quichua) as their first language. Though the ian Quichua have been influenced (=weakened) by missionaries for much longer than the Cofan, their roots in the rainforest are every bit as deep.

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