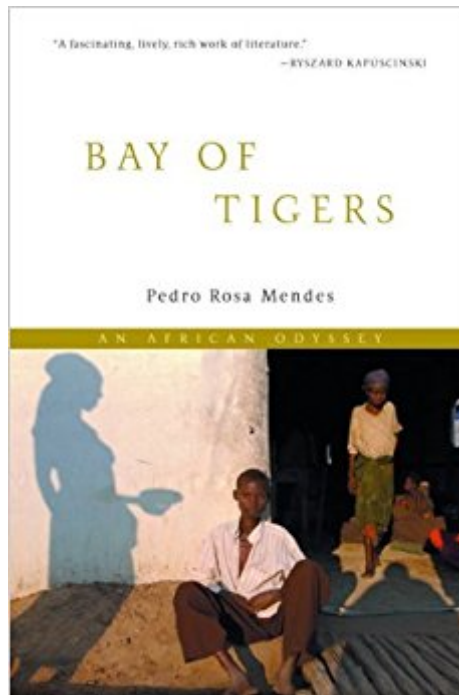




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Bay Of Tigers: An Odyssey Through War-torn Angola



Synopsis

In 1997, Pedro Rosa Mendes traveled across Africa--6,000 miles from the west to the east coast, from Angola to Mozambique--on trains with no windows, no doors, no seats, on wrecks of trucks and buses, on boats and motorcycles. In war-torn Angola, a country where land mines outnumber people, Mendes found long lines of villagers waiting for shock treatment to neutralize the phantom pain in amputated limbs, an apothecary's tent purveying boiled mucumbi bark to combat scurvy lesions in the mouth, and trains crowded with people eating salted fish and drinking beer, swapping tales of local sorcerers who can turn into snakes. He interviewed international relief workers and corrupt local officials, widows and orphans, soldiers and survivors, piecing together a rich portrait no history or travel book can match.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When Angola achieved its hard-won independence in 1974, rival rebel factions began to fight for control of the state. As in Latin America, the "liberating" rebel forces were often as brutal as the autocratic, established regime. The result is a country still ravaged by unspeakable violence, corruption, and an ongoing power struggle. Portuguese journalist/author Pedro Rosa Mendes tells the story of modern-day Angola in *Bay of Tigers: An Odyssey Through War-Torn Angola*. As Mendes's depiction makes clear, this is not the Africa of Elspeth Huxley or Isak Dinesen: "Through the night. There is no scenery, no villages, no people around fires, or elephants silhouetted against the sky. I could speak of such things, I was hoping to, but it would be a lie." Instead, we are presented with an array of stories and observations, often told in the voices of those Mendes

interviewed during his 6,000-mile journey from Angola to Mozambique. Although Mendes is journalist, he sustains a magic-realist tone throughout the book: "It was when the mine smashed into the road that Zeca realized he was dead." However, he punctuates his imagery-laden language and vignettes with chilling facts: "There are more than one hundred million mines buried in seventy countries, close to a tenth of them in Angola." The reader must tread uneven ground in the book. Mendes does not provide an easy-to-follow narrative. History mixes with the present, in this multi-voiced story of shifting alliances, unimaginable devastation and destruction. Mendes provides a glossary that supplies historical context for those who are not familiar with Angola's complex history. Considering the hardships that Mendes endured during the course of his trip, one wonders why he saw it through to the end. Then, one thinks of the long-suffering people of Angola to whom he gives voice and for whom these hardships are an everyday reality that will not soon disappear, and one understands why. --Silvana Tropea

Four decades of civil war have left Angola a shattered country, an unpublicized catastrophe where land mines outnumber people and children play with surface-to-air missiles. Mendes went there in 1997, a Portuguese journalist investigating his nation's former colony. This extraordinary, difficult book is a record of the horrors he found: an infant without a face, a young beggar who resembles a little five-year-old man, amputees lining up for electroshock therapy. The book's structure is as chaotic as the country. Mendes forgoes any kind of conventional approach, lurching backward and forward through time, switching points of view, quickly introducing then discarding characters. It would be frustrating if it weren't done with such evident purpose: the fractured, phantasmagoric depiction of a world gone mad. Mendes has a gift for wry observation (a colonel blissfully sleeping the sleep of his rank) and surreal imagery (a plush animal dangles crucified from the wire), both of which well suit his subject. Equally valuable is Mendes's evident compassion for those he encounters. His description of a blind musician patching a guitar with chewing gum, for instance, tells much about the musician, but also reveals Mendes's superb observational skills. The book's principal drawback is that it doesn't supply the context of postcolonial African history. Those who don't have that i.e., most people will find the book tough going. (A glossary offers some help, but it's not enough.) Still, Mendes has crafted a unique, frightening book. Composed equally of journalism, oral history and even magic realism, it shows how people can endure and even prevail despite their government's best efforts to keep them down. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Angola to Mozambique and everywhere in between--6000 miles of horrific history, hellish events

and broken lives--the pathetic remnants of man in a fog of smoke and ash. Mendes travels here--here where time stands still and the survivors who still remain cannot escape but must stand still with it--trapped in a land of misery, heartbreak, crushing sorrow, insanity and the unspeakable. In the course of his journey Mendes sees it all--and experiences it the only possible way a human being can--on an emotional guttural level, in the fibre of his being, in his heart--the only way possible--because one's rational mind is incapable of making sense of such things and would go mad trying. As he stumbles across Africa he happens upon an endless succession of pitiful, broken people who offer him their views on life and events--views that when you read them will help you to understand the horror and heartbreak of war and how the human psyche adapts itself for survival in such conditions--how it plunges into imaginative fantasy, the bizarre and irrational. Mendes' account is disjointed, erratic, at times non-sensical and frequently the reader will find himself lost, disoriented, filled with anxiety. And you will feel the fear, the hopelessness, the utter dread, panic and hysterics of one caught up in a brutal war. Everyone, from school children to the leaders of nations who advocate and make war, should be required to read one chapter near the end of this book that begins with a poem about "red strawberries". Once read, you will forever be one of God's soldiers for peace. Disjointed, erratic, non-sensical--this is exactly the way a book of such a blood-drenched, war-torn land should be written--perhaps the only way it could be written. Never before has a writer taken me so close to feeling, tasting, the actual reality of war. Mendes' writing is war--read it, experience it--then use the rest of your life to forcefully speak of peace and to denounce those who speak of war. A heartfelt "Thanks" and "Job well done" to Pedro Mendes--a man who now understands. DH Koester--"And There I Was" ã Æ And There I Was, Volume V: A Backpacking Adventure In Turkey, Georgia, Armenia

When trying to picture yourself Angola after having read this book, you probably would come up with just an empty land. But pretty much as the editorial review promises, that empty space is filled with stories. Stories from ordinary people who have extraordinary things to say. Stories about corruption, lost loves, lost limbs, lost homes and stolen cattle. The stories are being alternated with some of the harsh travel moments from the writer. Nothing seems to have a beginning, an end nor a goal, it all seems to come down to lost hope. The poetic and sometimes even surreal approach doesn't make this one a sad or a desperate read though. But it doesn't make the book a page turner either. (reader of the Dutch translation)

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