

Into the Heart of Borneo Study Guide

Into the Heart of Borneo by Redmond O'Hanlon

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Plot Summary

Into the Heart of Borneo is a comical but non-fiction book written about the trip British authors and journalists Redmond O'Hanlon and James Fenton took into the middle of Borneo through the Malaysian state of Sarawak. Borneo is the third largest island in the world, next to Greenland and New Guinea. It also contains some of the world's most unique wildlife. The protagonists are middle aged writers who have few survival skills but are travelling to Borneo in order to explore and observe rare plant and animal species.

The book is written by Redmond O'Hanlon and contains numerous references to previous guides to Borneo written by earlier explorers. These books extend back in time over one hundred years and O'Hanlon often quotes from them extensively. Fenton, on the other hand, spends much of his time reading books like *Les Misérables* during the trip.

When the two men arrive in Borneo they use a letter of introduction from Oxford in order to acquire the necessary guides. They are not only travelling to Borneo, but to areas of Borneo not fully mapped by even British intelligence. They have been advised on the extensive methods of taking care of themselves in the jungle and acquire three reliable and good-natured guides Leon, Inghai and Dana, from the Iban tribe in Sarawak. The worst experiences they suffer, however, are nearly falling into river rapids, exhaustion, diarrhea and being covered with leeches.

O'Hanlon and Fenton engage in wild antics whenever they can. The peoples of Borneo are up for drinking whenever O'Hanlon and Fenton are, and so many days are full of the two getting incredibly drunk and acting foolish. When they are travelling, however, they are usually intent on observing various rare plant and animal species, which O'Hanlon discusses in detail in the book. One of the reasons the two went to Borneo was to try to see the legendary Borneo Rhinoceros, an animal that may well be extinct.

The book contains seventeen chapters, most of which cover a single day in Borneo. Most of the book covers Fenton and O'Hanlon's travels from their arrival in Borneo, their navigation up the river and their final arrival at the Bukit Batu Tiban Mountain near the Sarawak-West Kalimantan border. After their return, however, Fenton and O'Hanlon have still not seen the Borneo Rhinoceros, and so travel to see the nearly extinct and mostly nomadic Ukit people. Once they arrive, they find that the younger generation of Ukit have mostly abandoned their nomadic ways and are sharply divided from the older generation. After some serious social difficulties, Fenton and O'Hanlon prepare to leave, but before they do, they ask an old Ukit man if he has seen the Borneo Rhinoceros. He confirms that when he was a young man, he killed eight of them by himself. There the book ends.



Chapter One and Chapter Two

Chapter One and Chapter Two Summary and Analysis

In *In the Heart of Borneo* begins with the author describing himself as a former academic and natural history book reviewer. He is surprised about, upon being threatened with a two-month exile to Borneo, how fast a man can learn to read. The author, Redmond O'Hanlon, is a young British author at the time and is terrified of all the diseases he might catch and poison he might run across in Borneo. Part of his preparation for his trip involves reading accounts of men who travelled to Borneo from decades before. It turns out that O'Hanlon's uncle had spent time there as part of the pre-World War II intelligence service. And so O'Hanlon decides to learn more about Borneo from current members.

O'Hanlon had never come close to a tropical rain-forest before. His partner, poet James Fenton, had, however, since he had been a correspondent in Vietnam and Cambodia. They arrive near British Intelligence's (the Special Air Service, specifically) training facility in Hereford and see men engaged in war games. One of the advisors there warns O'Hanlon and Fenton about various physical threats to them when staying overnight in the training area, such as quickly rising river water and termites, which in fact have killed several of their men. They are also assigned a travel kit with various knives, torches, parachutes, and so on.

Before taking off into the jungle, the camp's major warns them to travel light, constantly take care of their skin, never shave, and so on. The slightest mistakes can bring death and disease. They will have native guides, the Iban, however. This will help some. Fenton and O'Hanlon are scared.

In Chapter Two, O'Hanlon opens by noting that he and Fenton often consulted travel guides and pay a lot of attention to John Hatt, author of *The Tropical Traveller*, written in 1982. Hatt advises that one must prepare to interact with the people of Borneo, for instance, by taking gym shoes, because visitors are asked to dance and it is incredibly rude to refuse. You must also drink, and rice-brandy gets one drunk very quickly. During the night, sometimes the people will pierce a man's penis, which will add to the sexual pleasure of women. An earlier traveler notes that, in his experience, it does just this.



Chapter Three and Chapter Four

Chapter Three and Chapter Four Summary and Analysis

Fenton and O'Hanlon are at the Singapore airport. O'Hanlon is carrying a gun as they pass through Customs. He tells the customs officer that he and Fenton are attempting to reach the Tiban mountains in the heart of Borneo, but no one has been there since Mjoberg in 1926 and he travelled from the other side. O'Hanlon half-seriously jokes that they may see a Borneo rhinoceros. The Customs officer is incredulous and has no idea why anyone would travel in a land of cannibals.

That night in Raffles, O'Hanlon reviews another guide. Borneo, it says, is that third largest island in the world and is five times the size of England and Wales. It is mostly one giant forest. In the center is a spinal mountain chain which is largely inaccessible.

The partners first arrive in Kuching in Borneo over the muddy Sarawak river. They were immediately hit with the sweltering heat of the Equator. When the author arrived, he was pressured to give up his gun on pain of insulting the people of the island. A Malaysian taxi driver takes the two into Kuching to a cheap hotel. Even the city is covered with plants and undergrowth. When they arrive at the hotel, they are greeted by the Land Dyaks, among the most docile and friendly people in Borneo. O'Hanlon is already acclimating to the constant presence of roaches and geckos.

In the evening, Fenton and O'Hanlon wander around the half-deserted streets of Kuching. It is Chinese New Year, so the streets are mostly empty. They walk near the waterfront where an English explorer of Borneo in the nineteenth century had travelled. O'Hanlon then describes how he came to rule a province of the island. The story is interrupted when Fenton and O'Hanlon are accosted by a deaf-mute pointing to his penis and leading them to a Chinese temple. It turns out he had led them to a Holiday Inn. After the deaf-mute leaves, the two men discuss their dreams, as O'Hanlon had dreamed that his tutor had appeared to him. He was worried that he had ingested a chemical that made him hallucinate.

Two days of resting follow and then the Chinese holiday ends. Kuching then bursts to life. Fenton and O'Hanlon continue to travel the city.

Chapter Four starts the next morning. They take a taxi to the Sibuh Wharf and board a Chinese launch full of Malay soldiers. After reaching Sibuh, they check in at a Chinese hotel. Early the next morning, they take two places on the roof of a small Chinese passenger boat, stopping at every settlement on the way. They then arrive in Kapit, where the journey really begins. The town had a variety of forts to prevent Iban war-canoes from travelling into the city, but they were not successful. O'Hanlon then returns to describe the travels of James Brooke and Charles Brooke. Charles Brooke had tried



to integrate the various religions and ethnicities in the city into a working order, with Chinese traders, Muslim rulers, Christian farmers, and so on.

The men fall asleep in the hotel. O'Hanlon shaves and showers and then goes alone to take his passport to immigration and the police. The passports carried the seal of Oxford University, assuring the locals that the two men are travelling to Borneo for scientific purposes. He then tells the young Iban immigration officer he meets that he and Fenton want to rediscover the Borneo rhinoceros. The officer is named Bidai, and only when seeing O'Hanlon's passport does he allow them to travel. He then assures O'Hanlon that he will find in the best trackers in town and the best boat crew.

That night, Biadi brings two educated Ibans from his department, named Siba and Edward. Their Tuai Rumah, the Headman of the Iban in Kapit, will accompany them as well. He knows the rivers and was once a great soldier. His name is Dana and he's picked two other young men to travel with them, Leon and Inghai. That night the men drink and work out a fair wage, along with how much gas and food they would need, along with other supplies.

The next night, the men pack and leave for the jungle. O'Hanlon then describes some local birds. They then arrive at Dan's giant longhouse. Dana is no ordinary Iban and was probably named for his famous pirate and headhunter ancestor who Charles Brooke mentioned in his memoir. They meet Dana and are welcomed by him and his wife. O'Hanlon and Fenton's companions must then perform a religious ritual to ensure that they will be safe on their journey.

Leon tells them that Dana is happy to take them on the journey to Bukit Batu Tiban, where none of them have ever travelled. Apparently the spirits like O'Hanlon and Fenton. After some more discussion, then men all get drunk. At the end of the night, O'Hanlon and Fenton stumble pack to Kapit.



Chapter Five and Chapter Six

Chapter Five and Chapter Six Summary and Analysis

The fifth chapter starts with O'Hanlon and Leon discussing the Iban practice of head-hunting. When the Iban would kill men, they would take their heads back to camp and let them rot until only the skulls were left. Head-hunting occurs increasingly less frequently. At midday, the team climb into their canoe and started to travel up the Rajang River. After about ten miles, the primeval jungle began. The river becomes narrower and winds more; the rapids also increase. Along the way, O'Hanlon observes a variety of rare species, including birds and fish.

Eventually, the men decide to make camp; the clearing they find is covered in animal life. O'Hanlon takes pictures of various rare butterflies. Next, James and he teach the Iban how to fish like Englishmen, although it turns out that James never learned. O'Hanlon is stung by a giant hornet while they fish. Dana and Leon then join them fishing and the men set up their tents. Dana builds a small tent for smoking fish. Then dusk comes and new insects appear.

Eventually it is time to sleep. O'Hanlon has to clear massive amounts of Elephant and Army ants from his tent and clothes. Eventually cicadas start to scream with brain-shredding force, and then frogs join in. Sleep is impossible.

With Chapter Six, dawn comes and the jungle is covered in mist. They quickly pack and dress before the mist clears and the heat of the sun begins to beat down on them. As they board their canoes, James and Redmond spot a beautiful eagle. In the river, the rapids become worse. The Iban are lean and strong but they have a disadvantage because they believe their ancestors were large, strong and white and so expect James and Redmond to be as well.

By noon, it is time to stop to eat and so they go fishing again and swim to cool down. Dana is very impressive and clearly able to endure great pain. At forty, he is quite old for his tribe, and he leads them well. He regards Redmond and James with great amusement. During lunch, Dana is able to successfully kill a massive turtle. Then he cuts open the turtle's belly and throws the guts into the river to attract fish.

When they get back into the canoes, the rapids become even worse. White water appears later, and canoeing becomes truly dangerous. A waterfall has to be avoided, and James almost dies in the process, nearly getting sucked under the current. Dana decides that they would camp where they are since James is so shaken by his experience. After resting for a time, Dana goes to hunt wild pig and Leon and Inghai fish with their harpoons. Redmond and James relax. When Dana returns, he complains that the cartridges didn't work.

Night comes quickly and many of the animals go to sleep. The team changes fast and hides from the torrential rain. There is a lightning storm but O'Hanlon falls asleep.



Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight

Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight Summary and Analysis

The next morning, everything is soaked and misty and the river has risen several feet. They make good progress on the river, observing animals along the way, including a Maroon leaf monkey and two black eagles. As the day progresses, the river becomes more shallow. During lunch, Leon catches another river tortoise and Inghai catches fish. They are also shocked by large hornbills, birds larger than swans. They then cook the turtle. O'Hanlon then describes details of the Hornbill and cites an earlier traveler in Borneo for more details. When O'Hanlon falls asleep, he has more nightmares, particularly of Chotty, his sister, berating him for almost letting James die.

On the next day, the river is even harder to navigate, particularly with the 120 degree heat. There is little merriment at lunch because the men are tired. The river is too low. Only Leon is unaffected. For lunch, they eat a large water monitor, a black and yellow prehistoric dragon, which Leon catches. When they are back in the canoes, they see a young woman on the riverbank. She is not Iban and Leon cannot communicate.

The river continues to become difficult but they eventually reach a long straight stretch. An inland kingdom appears to them, with bananas, palms and coconuts, along with a large roundhouse. Amused men greet them and help them navigate to the bank where the longhouse is. This is not Iban country. There are around sixty children watching them and many of the mothers have large brass rings in their earlobes. They discover that the settlement is well-organized and the people appear healthy. The longhouse is massive, about three hundred yards long.

The people speak Kayan and Leon must translate from Dana, who would translate from them. The son of the chief apologizes because the chief is away at the great Mahakam basin. O'Hanlon realized that they are near the Ukit, the wild, nomadic people who could tell them whether the Borneo Rhinoceros could still be found. O'Hanlon privately tells Leon to ask James to dance when the party begins that night; he also uses antibiotics to cure some of their infections. He and James also distribute postcards of the Queen. They then demonstrate the miracle of the Polaroid camera.

While taking photos of the tribe, O'Hanlon realized that the families had many children. But it turns out that they simply adopted the children whose parents had died. O'Hanlon remarks that the health of the Borneo tribes people is the result of natural selection "in its crudest sense." At dinner, there is the hindquarters of the monitor lizard. It turns out later that most of the tribe are Roman Catholics, converted by missionaries.

Next the musicians assemble with a variety of handmade instruments. The chief's son enters and has an elaborate costume on. He then engages in a ceremonial dance, moving in time with the music of the musicians. Next, some young girls place some of



the garb on O'Hanlon and have him go next. At first he falls, and the tribe laughs at him. After embarrassing himself, he and Leon call for James. James had an incredible theatre background, and dances and sings an improvised song about his and O'Hanlon's travels. The crowd then demands more, and as the night goes on, it becomes clear to O'Hanlon that James knows basically every popular and music-hall song back to 1910, and could adapt them to the music with ease. When he finishes, the longhouse clown takes over.

After the clown finish, a variety of young unmarried men and young unmarried women come together to new tunes. They then dance together. One of the girls remains on stage and engages in a dance of great skill. She then pulls Leon on stage, apparently expressing the tribe's admiration for saving that great white song-man, James. Then Leon dances for his new love. Eventually, the formal gathering breaks up into small groups. James tells stories to a large group. O'Hanlon feels sick and wanders outside, falling asleep.



Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten

Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten Summary and Analysis

O'Hanlon awakes suddenly, long before dawn. Everyone is asleep. A young girl appears and goes to Leon, asleep next to him, and lifts him up. They are engaged in some sort of sexual activity before long. Then the dawn comes and O'Hanlon makes his way to the river. He wades into the river, in the men's bathing area. He goes to the bathroom and washes off. But as he waded, he came upon the women's bathing place and was naked, barely concealed from them. He walks away and returns to the Kenyah longhouse. Everyone is awake and breakfast has been cooked. O'Hanlon has to deal with diarrhea for a while.

O'Hanlon falls asleep after breakfast for awhile and is awoken by an old man who wants medical aid, and who takes him to a far away end of the longhouse to see his wife. Her foot is incredibly infected, for she had stepped on a fish-spine. She apparently had gangrene and needs a great amount of penicillin, far more than they had. O'Hanlon gives her some multivitamins that he knows won't cure her and feels terrible about it.

O'Hanlon, then distracted, walks off into a secondary jungle and observes animals. He also realizes that the people of inner Borneo often died from septicaemia, from simple infections. This was why the population was so young and beautiful. Every micro-organism was a threat. They were stable societies and this may have been why.

When O'Hanlon returned, he speaks with Leon about the old woman and Leon says that everyone knew she was dying and that nothing could be done because travel is too difficult. O'Hanlon's team is concerned about not helping her because they would show ingratitude. Next, a woman wants to trade with O'Hanlon with beads. James really wants the bead necklace. Dana and the woman then negotiate for it.

Leon and O'Hanlon begin to have a discussion about the palangs. Borneo men receive it when they are twenty-five, "when you no good any more. When you too old. When you wife she feds up with you." The men then go down to the river and wait until they are completely flaccid. Then the tattoo man pushes a nail through their penises. Sometimes they get painful boils and die.

The Iban decided to perform some magic to insure good luck, and so Dana leads the procedure. James participates. They then return to the longhouse and are concerned about coming rain. They then prepare to leave. Before leaving, O'Hanlon shows some elder members of the tribe pictures of native birds, and they recognize some of them. They then discuss which birds are lucky and which aren't. Then the rain comes quickly. O'Hanlon has Leon then ask about the Borneo two-horned rhinoceros. They had heard of it but none had seen it. O'Hanlon is disappointed and so they stay to wait out the rain. While the storm goes on, O'Hanlon receives advice about which sorts of waters could be drunk without worries about leeches. O'Hanlon fell asleep and began to dream.



Chapter Ten begins at dawn. O'Hanlon hurries down to the witching ground and grooms. The bank is crowded with canoes and everyone is preparing to return to their farms. Dana supervises the team loading the boat. The team then sets out down the river. The Kenyah fields gradually disappear and the primary jungle returns. O'Hanlon observes that the balance of species had changes. There are too many plants and animals to identify, but they do see Sentuku, large, black-winged birds with long plumed white tail feathers.

The team stops for lunch and catches fish, Makai specifically. They then observe some brown spinetailed swifts. That afternoon, they turn their motor off and float slowly down the river. They often stop to rest and Dana finds a place to camp. When they find a place, they find food and prepare their camp. James finds some food and teaches Redmond how to cook, for he had found onions and garlic, mixing it with terong pipit. The Iban feel competitive and cook their own food. James's food is terrible. The Iban go next and had secretly made spaghetti for them, but the lengths were made out of worms.

After dinner, they decide to try to find a Ukit girl for Inghai. They are in Ukit country and are kings of the jungle. Leon then tells a story of how hard it was to get them into the civilized world. One time a Ukit man was captured and decapitated a policeman. The Ukit tried to escape and was almost successful. O'Hanlon asks more about the Ukit and Leon says they were the world's greatest hunters but they were too hard to find and don't like the water. It is also said that the Ukit do not bury their dead. But Leon says that they are ultimately civil. The Ukit girls are apparently very beautiful and somewhat white.

The team then prepare for bed and they all take their medicine. While they are trying to sleep, a mouse comes, a subspecies of Borneo stinking shrew. O'Hanlon then discusses the two species of python in Borneo, citing some earlier guide notes.



Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve

Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve Summary and Analysis

O'Hanlon wakes up itching horribly; his bare arm is covered in small moving dots. James has the same problem, but on his butt. They cover themselves with cream. The Iban are still asleep. Now awake, James and Redmond make small talk. The Iban eventually wake up, telling them that they heard their whole conversation; James and Redmond were embarrassed.

The day starts well, with Redmond confronting a tree-shrew early in the morning. Sebarau and sticky rice comprised their breakfast, and they decide to sit tighter for the day and hunt. James and Redmond read pieces of *Les Misérables*. They feel happy, reading and watching the wildlife. They then speak with Leon about Iban dating and mating practices. Eventually, O'Hanlon decides to look at his map that he received from British Intelligence; they are currently located in an area that the map says is unsurveyed. But Bukit Batu Tiban is supposedly close. O'Hanlon is excited by the prospect of seeing the rhinoceros.

The team would leave a lot of their equipment behind because the mountain is so close, but O'Hanlon takes many of his books so the Ukit wouldn't steal them. He then discusses the many types of Borneo snakes. There are over 150 unique species of snake in Borneo, but less than a third are poisonous and only six are so poisonous that they can cause death.

The next day, the team wakes up and packs. After breakfast, they don their packs and wade across the Baleh. Dana leads and Leon and Inghai keep up the rear; they have shotguns to protect everyone from the Ukit, although Leon thinks that they won't be bothered. The men must then confront a series of hills, but it is very difficult for James and Redmond, particularly in the insufferable heat. O'Hanlon then thinks of the SAS Major's advice, that when climbing the hills, think of sex or home or something in that vicinity rather than the next hill. O'Hanlon thinks of sex. After three more hills, they stop for a drink.

When they stop, James and Redmond realize that they have leeches. The Iban have them too. Their bites are painless and so are hard to detect. When they take off again, O'Hanlon powders himself with zinc which keeps the leeches off. They are therefore off, but at a slower pace. Gradually moving southeast, they continue to avoid leeches and Dana makes marks on trees as they pass by. On the way, the Iban hack branches and shape them to hang on trees in order to tell the Ukit and that are there in peace, five of them, and that they will be leaving soon.

After more hiking, Dana stops them and they make camp. The Iban go swimming while James and Redmond sit under the rocks in the water to get some of the heat out of their



bodies. Inghai starts to cook fish and the Iban make a shelter. Leon becomes agitated and tells James and Redmond that the Iban, while Christian, cannot go to the top of the mountain because they will thereby agitated the mountain spirits. Only James and Redmond will go to the top. This reflects a common fear of the Toh, or dangerous spirits in the jungle that brought various types of death. After this conversation, they all go to sleep.



Chapter Thirteen and Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Thirteen and Chapter Fourteen Summary and Analysis

The following day the team decides to rest, recover and eat. O'Hanlon reads and discusses the odd views on evolution defended by Beccari, a great botanical explorer in the nineteenth century. After reading awhile, O'Hanlon is starting to fall asleep when he sees a small bird, which he identifies as the very rare Bornean blue flycatcher. This makes up for him not encountering another rare species.

After seeing the bird, the team eats lunch; following lunch, the Iban go on a short fishing expedition while James and Redmond rest, trying to gather energy for the next day. Redmond then describes some of the past records of the Borneo rhinoceros to the reader, along with descriptions of other animals. He transitions into an extended discussion of Darwin's contemporaries and their theories about the origins of man.

The day after their rest, O'Hanlon awakes to gibbon calls. He finds a huge scorpion in the left pocket of his pants and large centipedes in the other. After clearing them out, Redmond tells James that this is the day that they will climb the mountain, but James says that he won't be going too far with him. Following breakfast, the team leaves James to read. Dana and Leon take their shotguns. They speak only in whispers. On the way, they see a large Kijang, the Borneo muntjac, or Barking Deer. Other animals of note are observed as well. They eventually reach a small bare plateau where they stop for lunch. After lunch, they climb more plateaus until they stop again to rest. They then pray to the mountain-top spirits for success and safety. This allows the Iban to feel safe going to the top. When they are almost there, they are cutting trees out of the way when they find snakes in a tree, but manage to avoid them. They then see where they are, at the heart of Borneo.

After looking across the country from their elevation, they return to camp. After a nine-hour return hike, they reach the shore of the Ulu Baleh. When they return, they deliberately terrify James and get a kick out of it. James then claims he had seen incredibly beautiful black-naped orioles, which were among the eight rarest birds in Borneo.

In the evening, O'Hanlon scans smaller maps of Borneo and finds the Ukit longhouse on the map. O'Hanlon wants to go, but James does not. Dana and Inghai must return to their jobs, so Leon elects to go with them. He will ask his friend Thomas, a Lahannan of the Kayan people whose longhouse is near the Ukit.



Chapter Fifteen, Chapter Sixteen and Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Fifteen, Chapter Sixteen and Chapter Seventeen Summary and Analysis

Chapter fifteen shows O'Hanlon waking up early in the morning; it is raining, and the Iban encourage him to quickly cross the river with them. On the other side, they find their way back to base camp. In the morning, the rain eases. They store their things in the camp dugout and then get in the boat and push off into the river. They move quickly downstream. The boat seems unstable.

After a while, they enter the Kenyah lands and the river became more manageable. They start to see people again. The sick old woman is now too sick to move. They pass by the Kenyah and have a violent descent into the Baleh. The Iban are energized and struggle to keep the boat from capsizing. Eventually they reach the shore and James rushes off the boat to find cigarettes and beer in a shop. It is managed by a Chinaman who quickly calculates their bill. They quickly gather as many supplies as they could.

Next they traveled to the longhouse where Leon's parents-in-law had lived. The team quickly fills up with food and falls asleep. The next day, they divide their food, enter the river Rajang and return to Kapit.

After leaving the boat with their Bergen sacks, they arrive at Rajang Hotel and get rooms for the night. The beds and showers are wonderful after their long journey. When O'Hanlon gets out of the shower, however, James had stolen his towel, causing him to run around the hotel with a codpiece to find his clothes.

In the afternoon, Leon arrives at the café with Siba and Edward to go to the longhouse where they would hold Dana's welcome home party. Siba reports that they can't get a doctor to the Kenyah; they can't afford it. The people are also technically illegal immigrants. Doctors often fly out to longhouses once a month, but the government restricts them when money is tight.

Edward then sadly tells Siba, Leon, O'Hanlon and James that the Japanese and Chinese are conspiring to bring in new dams and clear the forest. Soon it will be gone. But Siba is adamant that the dam should be built so that their people can be educated and have hospitals. James wonders why the forests can't be replanted, and Edward says that scientists say jungles with similar ecologies wouldn't grow back for one thousand years.

They then walk to the longhouse; it was in mourning because an old man died, so the party must be small. They go to Dana's room and he greets them, leading them to



supper. He then tells other headmen the official story of their journey. James and O'Hanlon begin to get drunk. Then they fall asleep.

On the following day, James and Redmond wake up at noon and find their way back to the hotel. They then meet with Thomas and go to dinner. Thomas is another Iban, small, handsome and aloof. Leon, Redmond and James work out a deal with him to buy the gas they need to reach Rumah Ukit, along with the presents they need to buy. Their bill is \$3,050, and they have to auction some of their unique goods.

Three days later, Leon, James and O'Hanlon leave on a Chinese cargo boat down the Rajang River. The longhouses they

see are large and semi-modernized. Chinese shopkeepers are everywhere. James and Redmond read along the way.

Near the evening's end, they get to Belaga, a small market-town with a Government rest house. They find rooms above a Chinese café and eat dinner. The next day they carry their Bergens down to the jetty to find their boat, which is a wide dugout with high sides and an awning. The Kayan boatman is the first fat man they'd seen in Borneo, and this is a bad sign. They probably had grown fat on stolen gas. James sees that they'd been conned already.

Eventually they reach Kayan, the land of the Borneo tribes. They stop at Long Murum to eat a lunch of pork and rice. Thomas then discussed the compensation payments that would need to be made to the government. After lunch, they set off upriver. In the evening they reached Rumah Lahannan. Thomas's parents greet them. That night, much carousing is to be had. That night they eat in the lounge where they are staying. Many of the locals are excited to see James and O'Hanlon, and this adds energy to the room. Many in the room sing, and then the party breaks up into smaller groups. James and O'Hanlon begin a drinking contest but eventually have to stop.

O'Hanlon leaves the bar and meets a local teacher who speaks perfect English; he learned that O'Hanlon went to Oxford and wished he could have gone, but for Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who cut off funds. Back in the longhouse, James and Leon sat in the middle of a group of young men and girls. The conversation with the schoolmaster continues, but soon becomes a monologue when the teacher starts to explain how World War II actually proceeded among the peoples of Borneo, and then he begins to discuss Charles Brooke and how their history in the nineteenth century mattered more. Eventually, O'Hanlon throws up. Afterward, he immediately falls asleep.

In the last chapter, O'Hanlon awakes just before dawn and has a terrible headache. He eventually finds James and his Bergen. Leon is in another room sleeping next to Thomas's sister; apparently they had slept together.

After breakfast, Leon, James and Redmond set off to find the Ukit. The bank-side hills grow steeper and the jungle richer. They stop for lunch at a Kayan longhouse. Leon and O'Hanlon talk there and Leon is happy that Thomas's sister likes him, but he would prefer a Ukit girl.



In the afternoon, they reached Rumah Ukit, and steps lead up the bank to the longhouse. There is a young Ukit boy there who is well dressed and an excellent English-speaker. He wants them to teach him the seven-step disco. The boy demands, upon hearing James's reputation, that he teach them to dance. It turns out that Rumah Ukit is not a large settlement. The longhouse is split into several sections, and clearly the hunter-gatherer Ukit had not settled into civilized life.

The three men meet some young Ukit girls and make jokes with them; one seems to want to sleep with James. They also speak more with the young Ukit boy. He has quit school and wants to go to Europe. He rejects the lore of the elder generation as well, and thinks the elders are stupid. Afterward, they started to prepare for the party. The Ukit boy and the girls continue to ask James and O'Hanlon to teach them the disco. O'Hanlon gives in and helps them.

Later, older members of the tribe show up. The young Ukit boys suggest that, out of respect for custom, they invite the elders to join the party. The young continue to emphasize to them privately that their fathers are nomads but they are educated. The boy wants a job in England. But then the party is interrupted when a woman falls off a pole and smashes her ribs. James and O'Hanlon try to heal her. After she is taken away, they return to the party, which has grown more intense.

The young Ukit come back and report that the woman is still in pain. James wants to take her to Belaga first thing in the morning to get help. The Ukit say that it is not of their concern, but James feels responsible because she got hurt on the way to the party. The Ukit are disgusted that James is breaking his promise to take them on a picnic the next day. Leon emphasizes that if they leave, they won't have the money or gas to come back.

The party became more intense and Leon says it was bad news and was trouble. But the Ukit say it was only the old men. James then deliberately stops the music. The Ukit then calm James and say he would teach the old men how to behave. Below, the young and old Ukit confronted each other, and there is a sound of raised voices, a scuffle and a thump. Then everything goes silent.

The Ukit returned, his face dark and covered in bruises, crying. The old men punched him and wouldn't listen. He was so angry he wanted to kill them. This, O'Hanlon realizes, would be their last evening among the least-studied of all the jungle nomads. He then quickly opens his guide to birds in Borneo and asks if they knew about them. The young men did not, but an elderly Ukit did, knowing the name of all the birds but one.

Finally, O'Hanlon asked him about the Borneo rhinoceros. The old Ukit claims that when he was a young man, he killed eight of them with his own spear. O'Hanlon notes that their search ended.



Characters

Redmond O'Hanlon

Born in 1947, Redmond O'Hanlon is a British author who went to school at Oxford. In 1982 he became a member of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History and in 1984 part of the Royal Geographical Society. He edited the Times Literary Supplement for fifteen years. O'Hanlon is famous for his travel books, the first of which was *Into the Heart of Borneo*. In the book, O'Hanlon was a young rising star naturalist journalist, at the age of thirty-five.

O'Hanlon is the book's author and protagonist. The book is written entirely from his perspective and any conversations had when he is not present were later reconstructed. He is an avid reader and has prepared for his trip to Borneo by reading a large number of travel guides written by previous English explorers of Borneo. Often he describes their observations in great detail, particularly their descriptions of animals. O'Hanlon spends much of the book describing the animal and plant species he actually encountered and describes them in detail as well.

As a character, O'Hanlon appears to be a mostly fun-loving, respectful, and adventurous journalist who is an unusually serious lover of nature. He displays little character development throughout the book, but the book ranges over only a small period of time. O'Hanlon rarely gets angry, does not engage in any underhanded behaviors, and generally does his best to treat the Iban and other tribal peoples with respect.

James Fenton

James Fenton is an English poet and former Oxford professor of poetry. He was born in 1948, and as an adult quickly became known as a literary critic and journalist as well. His early poems won numerous awards, such that by the time that *Into the Heart of Borneo* was written, he was widely renowned. Like O'Hanlon, he is an adept comic writer, but he is also a serious student of theater and song.

In Borneo, Fenton seems to be the lazier of the two protagonists and his own internal narrative is rarely featured. He is less adventurous than O'Hanlon and also seems to be less interested in both the flora and fauna of Borneo but also in the people. While he sticks it out during the trip to the heart of Borneo, he sometimes complains and does not carry his own weight all the time. When they reach the mountain, he declines to climb with O'Hanlon and the Iban. All the while, Fenton is reading books and poems, mostly *Les Misérables*.

That said, Fenton is incredibly amusing and entertaining throughout the book. He is a great player of pranks and has a sharp wit. He is also greatly admired by the tribal peoples that they encounter when O'Hanlon tells them of his practically legendary



stature in England. At various parties, Fenton displays his theatrical talent and deeply impresses the local party goers.

The SAS Major

When O'Hanlon and Fenton are getting ready for Borneo, they travel to Hereford for instructions on navigating the jungles of Borneo. Their main advice comes from the SAS Major.

Charles Brooke

The Rajah of Sarawak who lived from 1829 to 1917. He was the head of state of Sarawak from 1868 until 1917 and had an enormous impact on the country. He followed his father, James Brooke, as the second white Rajah. Brooke is mentioned at various points throughout the book for various reasons.

Leon

One of the young Iban guides that accompany and aid Fenton and O'Hanlon. He is young, kind and speaks decent English.

Tuai Rumah Dana

The Iban Chieftain who also accompanies O'Hanlon and Fenton. He is old (forty, which is old for Iban) and wise. He also knows the land well.

Inghai

A friend of Leon's and the third Iban guide.

The Iban

The Iban peoples Dayak peoples of Borneo, most of whom live in Sarawak. Leon, Dana and Inghai are all Iban.

The Kayan

The Kayan are another indigenous tribe for Borneo, also part of the Dayak people. They are similar to the Kenyah tribe, both of whom are important parts of the book.



The Kayan Chief and his son

The Iban guides, Fenton and O'Hanlon visit the Kayan longhouse and meet the Kayan Chief and his son.

The Ukit

A third indigenous tribe from Borneo that is still partly nomadic within the rain forests of Borneo. Some lived at Rumah Ukit and were visited by Leon, O'Hanlon and Inghai. Their population is very small and they are widely regarded as excellent hunters. In the book, O'Hanlon travels to the Ukit to ask about the Borneo Rhinoceros.

The Ukit Boy

A young Ukit boy guides O'Hanlon, Leon and Fenton during their stay in Rumah Ukit.

Chinese Merchants

Chinese merchants and shopkeepers popular Borneo. They are the main commercial people of the island.

Young Girls

O'Hanlon often mentions beautiful young tribal girls in the book.



Objects/Places

Borneo

Located in the Maritime Southeast Asia, it is the third largest island in the world.

Sarawak

A sovereign nation in the northwest corner of Borneo. Almost all of the book takes place here.

Travel Guides

O'Hanlon and Fenton acquire three Iban travel guides to help them find the Borneo Rhinoceros.

Rare Species

The purpose of the trip to Borneo is to see rare species of plants and animals.

Kuching

The capital of Sarawak.

Kapit

A town in Sarawake near the Rajang River founded by Charles Brooke. It is full of Iban.

Bukit Batu Tiban

The location of the mountain range near the center of Borneo.

The Rajang River

The river that O'Hanlon, Fenton and their guides travelled down.



The Iban Longhouse

The long, narrow, single-room building where various tribal peoples live. The Iban longhouse is the home of the Iban tribe.

The Kanyan Longhouse

The Kayan had a longhouse as well; an excellent party was held there.

The Ukit Longhouse

The Ukit Longhouse was smaller, since the tribe was partly nomadic.

The Borneo Rhinoceros

Also known as the Sumatran rhinoceros, it is one of the five extant rhinoceroses. It has two horns. One of its six substantial populations is found in Borneo and seeing it is the reason that O'Hanlon and Fenton travelled to Borneo in the first place. The species is critically endangered.

Alcohol

Alcohol is a major part of the antics in the book.

Bergens

The backpacks used by the protagonists.

Insects and Rain

Insects and rain are a constant present in the Borneo rainforests.

Dancing, Parties and Stories

During periods of rest, O'Hanlon and Fenton often participate in amusing local parties where dancing and story-telling are prominently featured.

Novels and Poems

Fenton is a connoisseur of novels and poems and writes them himself. He also reads them in a lot of his down-time in Borneo.



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Description



Themes

History and Travel

While *Into the Heart of Borneo* is described as an antic-filled journey to the center of an exotic land, it contains many passages that the reader picking up a book with this description would not expect. It is full of historical themes, excerpts and descriptions from previous English travelers in Borneo. Redmond O'Hanlon is a naturalist and a journalist. As such, it makes sense that he would read guides to Borneo written by travelers from decades ago and sometimes even a century or so ago.

Often these books will contain descriptions of the unique plant and animal life in Sarawak and in the jungle specifically. On other occasions, these excerpts will mention unusual dangers in the jungle or give great detail on native peoples. In still other cases, the guides will generate biological and evolutionary theories from their observations, just as Darwin did from his observations in the Galapagos Islands. However, some of these authors have unusual theories; one scientist was a follower of Lamarck over Darwin, who believed that traits were acquired within single generations.

History matters in another way, however. The people of Borneo often greatly admire the English. However, this is not only because the English fought with the Borneo tribes against Japan in World War II but because the English often brought people from the island to England to educate them. Further, English missionaries had converted many of the island people to Christianity. However, the most major historical influence was Charles Brooke, the English Rajah of Sarawak who ruled the country in the mid to late nineteenth century.

Animal and Plant Life

James Fenton and Redmond O'Hanlon are both members of what one might call the literati. O'Hanlon is an accomplished journalist, while Fenton ranks among the greatest living British poets. As such, one might be initially surprised to learn that both men had an interest in travelling to Borneo. It turns out, however, that the two men also have a strong interest in nature, particularly Redmond, who is a naturalist journalist, or someone who writes stories about animal and plant life.

Borneo contains a variety of rare species of plant and animal due to its isolated location. It also contains great biodiversity due to its large expanses of rainforest. The book is filled with reports about animal and plant life, though mostly animals. Plants are often discussed at first, but after awhile Redmond focuses mostly on animals. The most prevalent animals of interest are species of monkeys and birds. However, the reason that the two men travelled to Borneo in the first place is to locate a rare species of rhinoceros, the Borneo rhinoceros, which has rarely been seen in the wild.



In many ways, the hunt for the Borneo rhinoceros gives the book a mystical element. Fenton and O'Hanlon never find the Borneo rhinoceros for themselves. When they reach Bukit Batu Tiban, they have not seen the rhinoceros. Thus, they return somewhat empty handed. However, when O'Hanlon and Fenton are about to leave Ramuh Ukit, they ask an old Ukit if he has seen a variety of rare bird species and the Borneo rhinoceros. He has seen several of the unusual birds and claimed to have killed eight Borneo rhinoceroses himself.

The Intersection of Primitive and Modern

Redmond and James hail from Oxford, England. While it is the 1980s, to the peoples of Borneo, they still represent the British Empire, particularly in light of the presence of the British Rajah of Sarawak, Charles Brooke, who led Sarawak for nearly four decades. They also admire the British because of their fighting World War II together and because London is seen as the paragon of all that is civilization, unimaginably far-away and advanced in the minds of the Sarawak tribes. On occasion, Sarawak tribes people are given scholarships to travel to England for education, and those who return are changed.

In the eyes of Redmond and James, however, the primitive peoples of Sarawak appear very different. On the one hand, they are extremely poor and often die from easily curable diseases. On the other, James and Redmond find the people incredibly beautiful, strong and good-hearted. They live simple lives but seem extremely happy. They have tight-knit communities and live largely ignorant of many of the world's horrors. However, deep sadness is cast on this image of the "noble savages" of the Sarawak tribes when Redmond discovers that the Iban Chief, Dana, is considered old and wise at the young age of forty. The Iban see James and Redmond as very old, although neither at that time were forty years of age.

Surprisingly, Fenton and Redmond are able to bridge the cultural divide. They not only studied the cultures of the Sarawak tribes but gladly participated in their rituals, dances and songs. While they were perhaps not the most helpful travelers, the Iban were so happy to have them that they seemed not to mind in the slightest.



Style

Perspective

The author of *Into the Heart of Borneo* is Redmond O'Hanlon, a journalist and naturalist writer who travels to Sarawak on the island of Borneo in order to see rare species of plants and animals and to seek, in particular, the sight of the Borneo rhinoceros, a legendary, several endangered species of rhinoceros with two horns. O'Hanlon brings with him the perspective of a late twentieth century resident of Oxford College. He is a deeply committed naturalist and humanitarian but is also an atheist who nonetheless tolerates the tribal religions of the Sarawak tribes and their combining their traditional faiths with those Christian missionaries imparted to them.

O'Hanlon is also a great lover of animal and plant life and an admirer of those that share his interest and that went long before. The book is filled with references to earlier travelers and naturalists who went to Sarawak and explored the jungles. O'Hanlon reads the guides religiously before travelling to Sarawak, and continues to do so while on the island. He also discusses the scientific theories they derived from their observations, despite their being incredibly dated.

Finally, O'Hanlon is deeply good-natured and fun-loving. Despite their journalistic and scientific purposes, James and Redmond have a blast. They drink heavily whenever they are staying in a town and longhouse. They party incredibly hard, dancing, singing, smoking and carousing. All in all, the picture O'Hanlon paints of his travels in Borneo is mostly light-hearted and fascinating.

Tone

Redmond O'Hanlon is an excellent journalist, science-writer and writer generally. The tone of the book is light-hearted, moderately fast-paced, silly and scientific. First, the tone is light-hearted because O'Hanlon does not seem to be after any particular social or political point, and there is no serious plot development in the book, but instead a description of a simple, though challenging journey to find an endangered rhinoceros and the fun he, his friend James and their guides had along the way. The men often get drunk and party and the tone of the book reflects their good time, even when they drink too much.

The book is also moderately fast-paced. The tone certainly doesn't feel rushed, but each chapter covers many events of the day and describes often intense scenes, such as handling river rapids in the Rajang River. The chapters usually begin with Redmond waking up and end with him going to sleep, and the seventeen chapters mostly cover a series of hectic and intense three to four week journey.

Into the Heart of Borneo also has a somewhat silly tone. Not many issues are taken seriously, save scientific discovery and the possibilities of sickness and death. While



these latter two issues are sometimes worried, Redmond only seems intermittently frightened. Most of the time, he seems to be enjoying himself. This enjoyment is had not only through partying but through taking in the great degree of rare biodiversity in the Sarawak rainforest.

Finally, the book has, at times, a strong scientific element. Redmond often describes his scientific observations in detail and cites various previous naturalist writers who have observed the peoples, animals and plants of the area. Sometimes long stretches of the book are covered.

Structure

Into the Heart of Borneo is not a long book, ranging a bit under two hundred pages. It is written clearly and engagingly with around seventeen relatively short chapters. The chapters typically open with Redmond waking up for the day and end with Redmond falling asleep, wherever he might fall asleep.

The book begins with James and Redmond in Hereford, being trained to survive in the Sarawak jungles. They find the struggles ahead daunting and are particularly concerned with the possibility of serious sickness and death. However, once they arrive, they immediately start enjoying themselves. Early on they must deal with bureaucracy and settling into a new environment, but once they meet up with their Iban guides, they seem satisfied and ready to travel.

Much of the book covers the team's journey to Bukit Batu Tiban at the center of Borneo and on the far edge of Sarawak. The team gradually makes its way up the Rajang River, which constantly winds and is full of wildlife on its banks and in the water. Further, they must stop for lunch and camp each day, which often brings unpleasant and/or hilarious encounters with the unusual native wildlife. The Iban and James and Redmond often play tricks on each other and tell stories to pass the time.

Eventually, they reach the heart of Borneo, but do not see the Borneo rhinoceros. They then go back, although they do not seem disappointed. Before leaving, O'Hanlon decides he wants to go see the Ukit to talk to them about whether they have seen the rare animals that he is interested in. So O'Hanlon, Fenton and Leon travel there. When they arrive, they have a few awkward encounters but are able to ask an elderly Ukit about the animals. Indeed, he has seen many of the animals they are interested in, and claims to have killed eight of the Borneo rhinoceroses in his youth. There the book ends.



Quotes

"This situation in Sarawak as seen by Haddon in 1888 is still much the same today. He found a series of racial strata moving downwards in society and backwards in time as he moved inwards on the island." Chap. 1, p. 1

"You go just to see rhinoceros? But they eat people in there! They're cannibals! Blowpipes! Phut. Phut. You die. No Noise. Very better than a gun." Chap. 3, p. 10

"I want permission to go up the Baleh to its headwaters and then to climb Mount Tiban. James Fenton and I wish to re-discover the Borneo rhinoceros." Chap. 4, p. 21

"Redmond, I am about to see something marvelous." Chap. 6, p. 43

"Of course, it doesn't matter now he's drowned, but you should have placed yourself behind him on the rope." Chap. 7, p. 57

"Look—don't tell James, because he wouldn't like it, he's do modest. But, in England, he's very famous. HE is the poet of all the tribe, the chief poet in all England. His whole life is making songs. That's what he does all day. You understand? He sings songs. And he dances. He knows all the dances." Chap. 8, p. 61

"It was the nastiest transaction of my life." Chap. 9, p. 79

"The Tuai Rumah, he says very many hills, very many streams. We sleeps now." Chap. 11, p. 113

"In those hills, lads, think of nothing if the going gets tough. Or, if you're young enough, think of sex. Never, ever, think of the mountain that never gets any nearer. Think of nothing, and you'll survive to be a credit to the regiment." Chap. 12, p. 116

"This is the big one. This is the day we conquer Everest." Chap. 14, p. 133

"We stood at the heart of Borneo, therefore, on the watershed." Chap. 14, p. 139

"The girls watched me do it. They thought it was a tremendous idea." Chap. 16, p. 152

"The politicians get rich—one or two men get rich granting licenses to the Chinese to tear out our forests and take it all downriver; and now they're going to build a dam and lay a cable to Japan and sell electricity and get even richer. You can say what you like, Siba—very soon there will be none of our land and none of our jungle left. Nothing." Chap. 16, p. 153

"Sir, we are educated. But our fathers are nomads." Chap. 17, p. 178

"I damn well won't stand for it. I will not have the death of this woman on my conscience just to take you on some picnic. It's monstrous. I won't have it." Chap. 17, p. 180



"He wishes to tell you, sir, that when he was young, when he was a man just like us, by the mountain known as Tiban, he killed eight of these with his own best spear.' Our search had ended." Chap. 17, p. 183



Topics for Discussion

Explain three bits of advice O'Hanlon and Fenton were given about surviving the jungles of Borneo.

Who are the Iban tribe? Who are the guides from the Iban tribe and to what extent are they affected by modern cultures?

Why are O'Hanlon and Fenton in Borneo?

Is there any significance to O'Hanlon's constant references to previously written guides about Borneo?

Does O'Hanlon develop as a character at all in the book? If so, how? And if not, why not?

Does Fenton develop as a character at all in the book? If so, how? And if not, why not?

Discuss two ways in which life in Borneo is threatened by modern developments. These might include major wars, immigration, language changes, economic development, geographical changes, etc.