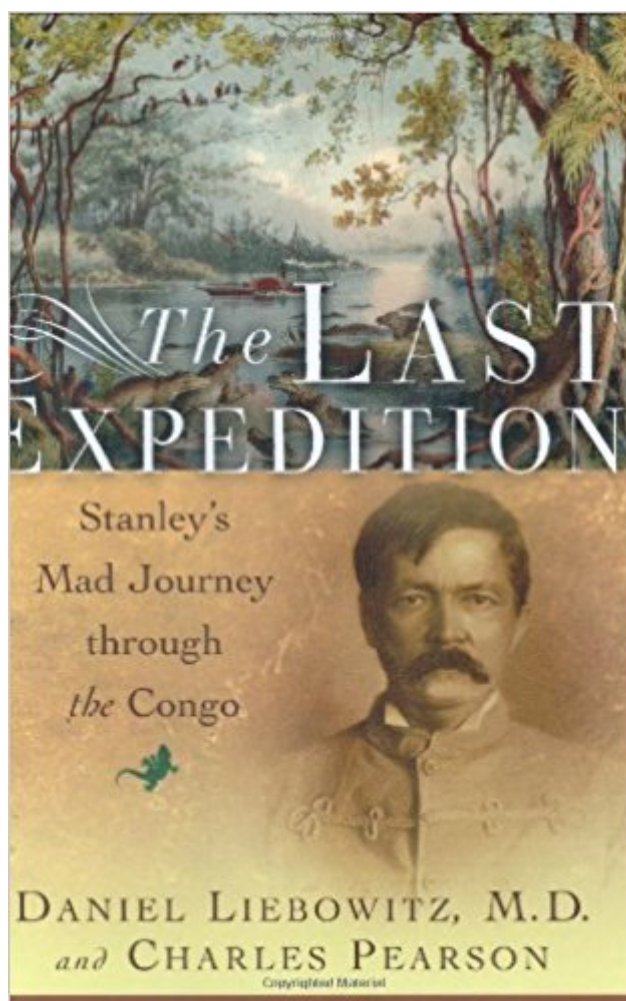


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The Last Expedition: Stanley's Mad Journey Through The Congo



Synopsis

Traces Henry Morton Stanley's three-year African expedition that was launched with the official intention of rescuing Emin Pasha, governor of the southern Sudan, in an account that reveals Stanley's secret agenda of territorial expansion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this engrossing chronicle of a noble rescue mission turned sour, the monstrosities come as often from its central character as they do from the forests of Equatoria that he and his officers explored. Henry Morton Stanley (1841–1904) was "an unwanted bastard" who became arguably the Victorian era's greatest explorer. Liebowitz, a retired physician, and TV documentary writer Pearson reason convincingly that the shame of Stanley's Dickensian childhood gave rise to his hunger for glory and his nonexistent empathy: almost prerequisites for the 1886–1889 mission (to rescue the governor of Equatoria, now the southern part of Sudan) that was the pretext for Stanley's expedition. The authors move to great effect between the record of events in Stanley's journal and those of his officers. The book becomes slightly tedious in its overly detailed slog through the three-year trek, in which a key colleague went mad, a good half of the expedition died and the survivors arrived too late. After almost 300 lugubrious pages, the final chapters relating the aftermath of the expedition make for quicker, if no less dark, reading. This account may have too much logistical minutiae for mass appeal, but history buffs and students of colonial and African studies will find it purposefully harrowing. Agent, Inkwell Management. (July 25) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

In 1887, Henry Stanley set out to rescue Mehemet Emin Pasha, governor of the southern Sudan, from the Islamic jihad. Known as the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, it took three years; thousands of dollars; and the lives of several hundred, if not several thousand people, to rescue Emin Pasha from Equatoria. The expedition shot, burned, and looted its way across Africa. Stanley returned to London and a hero's welcome, but later praise for Stanley was undercut by criticism and controversy about the expedition and about his book, *In Darkest Africa*. The authors indicate that some likened Stanley's militaristic approach to that of a latter-day conquistador, treating the native people he encountered as so many impediments to be exploited or brushed aside with whatever force was necessary. In the end, London's social and political elite believed Stanley to be a "scruffy little Welsh bastard." Liebowitz and Pearson offer an in-depth and fascinating account of this eminent explorer who, we learn, had his dark side. George Cohen

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Subtitled "Stanley's Mad Journey through the Congo", this book appealed to the historian in me. It also appealed to my armchair-traveler sense of adventure and exploration. There was much to learn here too because, prior to reading this book, all I knew about Henry Morton Stanley is that he is often remembered for searching for the explorer, David Livingstone in Africa and, upon finding him uttering the words "Mr. Livingstone I presume". This was in 1870. Years later, in 1886, Stanley went back to Africa with a huge expedition, the stated purpose of the mission to rescue Emin Pasha, the governor of the southern Sudan. This book is about that mission, the unstated nature of which was territorial expansion and a hoard of ivory. It makes fascinating reading. Filled with details taken directly from some of the diaries of the men on the expedition, this is a story of one bumbling misadventure after another. Stanley started out with more than 700 men; barely 200 returned. There was illness, warfare, wrong judgments and mistakes. And through it all, Stanley was absolutely convinced that he was right in all things and had no trouble putting the blame on others. Perhaps it was this very pigheadedness that helped them survive at all. After all, Stanley had something to prove because he was an illegitimate child who was brought up in an orphanage. Later, he went to America and briefly fought for the confederacy in the Civil War but he deserted, became a journalist and eventually went back to England. There are a lot of characters in this book and I must say I sometimes got confused about all the players. There were officers who tried their best to follow orders in horrible situations. There were hundreds of African natives who acted as porters and who often deserted. Then there were the sponsor with big money and nations looking for glory. There

was never enough food. Disease was everywhere. They had to deal with a notorious slave trader. They also had to deal with the conflicting ambitions of several nations, most notably the Belgians. They had to leave most of their provisions and belongings along the trail. There were wars with hostile natives. They were attacked by poisoned arrows to which they responded by using their guns and burning villages. There was the heat and the bugs and the wrong decisions and illnesses which added an extra two years to their trip. And then, when they finally found Emin Pasha, he didn't really want to be rescued. But he finally joined them along with about 600 Egyptians fleeing the Sudan with their families, slaves and household goods. Mostly, I felt sorry for the poor porters. This book was a slow read but I kept coming back to it, mostly because it was an escape from my day-to-day life and added some perspective to my knowledge of history. It doesn't read like a novel though. It's full of facts and figures and conflicting points of view. I enjoyed it. However, I stop short of recommending it to everyone. It is for history buffs only.

This is the most engrossing book I've read this year. Like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, it combines vivid adventure narrative with disturbing psychological drama. Stanley was a complex figure--intelligent, stubborn, charismatic, sometimes generous and sometimes brutal. The authors disentangle all the complex threads of the story as Stanley's expedition breaks up, reassembles, and ultimately completes its epic trek across Africa. The tension and suspense are unrelenting. *The Last Expedition* is a brilliant, novelistic historical saga that should be made into a movie.

Good read. It is hard not to say that Stanley was a showman and cared only for Stanley. And yes, money was a big motivator too. If it did not help Stanley or promote Stanley, Stanley was not interested. He learned early in life that self was paramount no matter what course he took.

I have nothing more to add to the splendid reviews given this outstandingly informative work; however, I would recommend a fictionalized account of the same expedition written by Peter Forbath entitled "The Last Hero". It is no longer in print but can be purchased online from used book sellers. I cannot emphasize strongly enough the impact Forbath's book had on my curiosity about 19th century exploration, particularly that of Stanley's 3 African enterprises. Whether you consider him a hero or villain, one cannot readily dismiss the tremendous contribution Henry Morton Stanley made to our understanding of and to the mapping of the "Dark Continent". We will never see the likes of him again. Both "The Last Expedition" and "The Last Hero" raise the standard of adventure, excitement, and intrigue to an altogether different level.

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Breathtaking book, with resourceful documentation, unfolding superbly, to tell an outrageous tale, of one of the most interesting and least known of the African journeys, and this one, by the greatest of all the European explorers. Stanley was implacable, deplorable and invincible. His force of will triumphed over dwindling to exhausted supplies, the courage of some and the disinterest of others, fevers that had no name and the intrinsic obstacles of one of the world's impossible places. With expert editorial intuition and effective journalistic strategies the authors weave their tale, of starvation and disease, ambition and betrayal, ridiculous courage and astonishing single-mindedness. This is the story, not of an adventure but an assignment, carried out not with courage but with an inhuman inner strength.

great

These explorer stories are amazing in the ordeals they endured. Given how soft humankind is nowadays, I doubt any of us transported back to these times would have survived. How they did it is beyond me.

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