



Spirit of the Rainforest

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The Yanomamo of the Amazon -- endangered children of nature or indigenous warmongers on the verge of destroying themselves? Now for the first time, a powerful Yanomamo shaman speaks for his people. Jungleman provides shocking, never-before-answered accounts of life-or-death battles among his people -- and perhaps even more disturbing among the spirits who fight for their souls. Brutally riveting, the story of Jungleman is an extraordinary and powerful document.

Spirit of the Rainforest Details

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From Reader Review Spirit of the Rainforest for online ebook

Tessa Stockton says

This book is difficult to rate. On the one hand, the senseless, cruel brutality (especially to women and children) is hard to stomach – and I'm somebody who has read many tomes on ethics and human rights abuses. Some of the recounts of Spirit of the Rainforest I can't un-read nor images un-see in my mind and I wish that I could. On the other hand, this book is a "no bones" description of the days in the lives of the fierce Yanomamo Indians living in the deep jungle of southern Venezuelan's Amazon basin; how they exist, think, and behave, told by a shaman. The shaman referred to as "Jungleman" (since they culturally do not speak their names) candidly tells of their spirit world, the deceptions of the spirits, and how they grew up fearing the one enemy spirit, the unfriendly spirit, whom Jungleman and other shamans eventually came to know as Yai Pada. The shamans' perspectives here begin to recognize Yai Pada as not an enemy, after all, but the one Great Spirit, greatest of all, the Creator, God, who is the real source of love and peace. One by one, they end up casting all their other spirits, who had been guiding them down evil and violent paths, to seek only Yai Pada. Daily life begins to change for them as a result. The book certainly is not propaganda for missionaries or anthropologists, for a handful of them in those particular fields were not portrayed at all in a good manner, in fact, some were downright unlikable and nasty. Overall, I think I'm glad to have read this book. It really lent profound insight into a fascinating culture believed to be the most primitive. God is there, reaching into the hearts of man with strings of truth before and against outside influences, according to the words of a powerful and respected shaman. Spirit of the Rainforest is a vicious yet distinctive story.

Jacob Beck says

An absolutely incredible book. I so appreciated the blunt writing of this author and the willingness to share this story. Of course, as readers, we're at the mercy of the authenticity of authors, but after being exposed to multiple credible sources from which these same stories came, I fully believe this tale to be true. A tough read for anyone of any age. It would be more appropriate for mature readers due to some of the graphic nature of daily life for the tribesmen. Would recommend to anyone wanting to see the supernatural power of God still at work in the world through the Holy Spirit.

Timothy Nichols says

This book presents a rare opportunity to hear a Yanomamo's story in his own words. This is cross-cultural reporting at its finest, and it's VERY hard to read. I'm not a big fan of trigger warnings, but you need to know that alongside the beautiful moments that will move you to tears, this account includes rape, murder (including murder of children), torture, child molestation, and a variety of other abuses and atrocities. It's not easy reading. It tells the warts-and-all truth about jungle life, the Yanomamo spirit world, anthropologists, missionaries, traders, and more -- it's a very unsparing look at our culture from a true outsider's perspective, and that's hard, too.

This is a deeply controversial book. You can find some highly critical reviews of it (some of which are reprinted in the back of the 2nd edition for your reading pleasure.) I don't have a lot of respect for the haters, honestly. It's one thing to disagree with someone's opinion; there's always room for disagreement in human

dealings. But it's only too obvious that most of the haters here can't see the Yanomamo as *people* with their own aspirations, opinions, and hopes. I can't really get on board with that.

Anna Roederer says

Pretty graphic but not simply for the sake of sex and violence. My favorite part was the very end at the appendix when you actually heard the author's voice instead of the narrator Jungleman. I loved how Shoefoot said that he can think of no other way for his people to be free from the evil spirits except to believe in the great spirit. I 100% believe the truth of this story and how the half-truths of the evil spirits are used to control those that they possess. It was unintentionally a really good follow-up book about the reality of spiritual warfare after reading Peretti's "This Present Darkness.

Favorite quote:

"We want people who will really care about us, like the man who came into my village and put his arm around me when I was covered with dirt, sweat, saliva, and mucous. This man shared in our suffering. He cared about our children. He showed us something we knew nothing about--love" (243).

Cori says

If I could give this book more than five stars I would! It is among my Top Ten favorite books ever! Mark Ritchie did what he set out to do, to portray the Yanomamo Indians from their perspective, to tell their story.

Intellectuals and scholars, as well as religious philosophers can debate to their hearts content. This book shines a light on the spiritual world that we in the West are too blind to acknowledge. There is a spiritual warfare between demons fighting for the souls of man, desiring to see corruption, hatred, and war and the tremendously indescribable Grace, Light, Goodness, and Love of the Lord God Almighty and His Son, Jesus Christ, who provided the way for us to spend eternity with Him in Heaven.

I was moved reading of the spiritual battles faced by the missionary, Keleewa, with the certain discouragement he faced daily in attempting to minister to these people... his friends. I wept openly when reading of the Power of God saving those in the most destitute situations. I wept over the rape of young girls sanctioned by their own family members. I was sick over the brutality, but I am thankful the author included it. This is real stuff. This is the spiritual battle. Sin is ugly and devastating. In the West, we don't like to mention the harsh, raw, ugly brutality of sin, but this is the very thing that makes us realize we NEED a Savior! Shoefoot, a Yanomamo shaman, clearly understood the need to get rid of ALL his spirits to follow Yai Pada, The Great Spirit. He was able to see how some Western Christians followed Yai Pada, but did not get rid of ALL their spirits. He saw that some Christians kept some of their spirits. He had the "all-or-nothing" attitude to follow Yai Pada only. I admire Shoefoot and cannot wait to meet him in Heaven!

Be forewarned!!!!!! This book contains brutal violence and overt sexual talk. If these make you too

squeamish or if you are convicted as a Christian that there is a better way to tell of these truths, then please do not read this book. Nothing is held back, as it is told through the eyes and perspective of the Yanomamo shamans that tell their story. However, if you are able to accept looking at the gorey details of sin and then being moved in soul and spirit when you see the Triumph of God Almighty, then read this book!

Matt says

This book had been recommended to me several times in the last few years, and I wish I had heeded the recommendations earlier. *Spirit of the Rainforest* is a remarkable and provocative first-person account of tribal life in Venezuela from a Yanomamo shaman named Jungleman. Dictated over the course of multiple interviews and translated by a fluent Yanomamo speaker, Jungleman's descriptions are raw and unflinching, stripped of any romantic notions of natives frolicking naked in an unspoiled Eden.

His drug-induced forays into the spirit world are challenging for many Westerners to accept, and his descriptions of violence are disturbing, as villages battle over women and settle old scores. Encounters with foreigners introduce disease, exploitation and—at times—spiritual transformation, as tribal traditions clash with Christian teaching.

It should be noted that this book is not for the faint of heart and has not been edited to accommodate the standards of a mainstream Christian publisher. I would guess the book is controversial in some circles and should be read, not as a comprehensive ethnography, but the perspective of a single member of a tribe—albeit a person who is highly intelligent and clearly knowledgeable of his people's traditions.

Iron says

In belief that this book is translated at least 90% accurate and that it's at least 90% as honest as it claims to truth.

I really like this book. I like it for its raw content and reality.

The best thing about reading this is learning about these people in their primitive (civilized) uninfluenced state. At least until near the ending of the book anyway.

Through learning about these people, I learnt a bit about us, or humans, in general: Culture, sexuality, priorities.. etc. Even as they are savages, they saw the dark side of our world and deemed it more savage than theirs.

How our religion has changed. The spiritual and historicity of the book is also quite important to take note of. Who/what taught them their ways since the beginning and how they've been held captive by the teachings. You learn a lot about fear and the necessity to overcome it, in order to find the truth.

Preston says

At first after hearing about the brutality of the Yanomami reports of this book I was a little hesitant to read it. Glad I did.

Spirits of the Rainforest transcends into our Western culture also by people who our bound by them, although not always detected for what it is. An interesting note of the word 'Yai Padi' or 'Yai Wana' for the Great Spirit, a likeness to the Hebrew word for God being 'YAH'.

"I wish I had known the truth about Yai Wana Naba Laywa when I was a young man- it would of saved me so much pain and misery. But how could I ? My spirits lied so much to me and tricked me. They were the so beautiful, so wonderful, so hard not to want. They were best at telling me split truth. Now I'm at the end of this life, and I'm ready to begin my real life with Yai Pada" -Head Shaman 'Jungleman' from Spirit of the Rain forest pg. 238

Dawn says

This is a tale any American knows all too well.

Thankfully it seems the author has created a way for the old ways of these people to remain intact after they were deceived and taken over by white men. Many will remark how this story is full of murder, rape and other horrible things. I find most horrible is the enormous lie many tribes and indigenous people have been told so that insecure Christians can further validate their delusion and make more of a profit out of others fears and uncertainty of life.

These people had wars and treated women horribly. They thought this new spirit was helping them become more of a good person somehow. But they were not told that this spirit had been used by these white men to control and manipulate entire populations of people against their will, that this spirits name was linked to more wars and deaths than they could ever know.

These men came into their world, raped and mistreated them, told them they were no good unless they followed their god. Unfortunately they succeeded, they took over the land and now the rainforest is dwindling by the minute.

It is so sad to me that modern society looks at these people living with nature the way they should be and tells them that is uncivilized, that lies and destruction are the only way to be truly human. This book tells one story that can be told with so many others of our disconnection with our roots, the story that tells of all of us and our downfall.

Kacie says

This book was a really good book. At first I thought it was going to be a missionary story, but it is not. Mark Richie (who I actually met last year before I even knew this book existed) is retelling the story of the life of a Yanomamo shaman, and it is biographical based on recorded interviews. The shaman tells the story of his people as missionaries, priests, and anthropologists arrive in their remote jungle villages and begin to

influence the Yanomamo with their various worldviews, opinions, and cultures.

The book is fascinating for several reasons. First of all, it is a middle ground between two competing sides. We hear missionary stories and we hear anthropological scholarly perspectives about tribal life. In fact, one of the main characters in the story is the anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon who wrote the most well-read anthropology book of all time about the Yanomamo. This book shows you what the Yanomamo think about all sides - it identifies the hypocrisy of some missionaries, the cultural bias of the anthropologists, and the caught-between cultures Yanomamo, who neither want to give up their identity or be forced to remain in what they consider to be lives filled with suffering.

It IS the perspective of a shaman turned Christian. He only joins the followers of "Yai Pada" in his old age, and hearing about his spiritual perspective as a shaman is shocking for me - the supernatural world he interacts with is very nearly unbelievable to a western materialist mindset. At the same time, hearing how the Shaman perceives the message of Christianity from a spirit-filled perspective is really really interesting.

It was a good book. It made me mad and it made me think and it made me pray.

Tracey says

A fascinating account of Yanomamo life and how Western visitors (missionaries and anthropologists) affect it. The story is narrated by Jungleman, a Yanomamo shaman, as told to Ritchie, a Western anthropologist. Ritchie went to great lengths to verify Jungleman's account, and his notes at the back of the book add a convincing layer of authenticity to the true stories. I learned so much about the life of South American jungle tribes - family relationships, fighting/war practice, spiritual beliefs, food-handling, disease treatment, joining and splitting villages, interaction with outsiders, and more.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in crossing cultures or learning about animism.

****Trigger warning:** graphic violence and sexual abuse of women and children. These scenes are necessary for a full picture of Yanomamo relationships, but are painful to read.

Jessie says

This is a powerful story told by a Shaman from the Amazon. Powerful in terms of his experiences with the spiritual world and the battle that he has witnessed there between the evil spirits he's known well and whom have ruled his people for so long and the Spirit of God that he comes to know and love. After reading his story it is hard to ignore the spiritual world and its impact on the physical. His experiences with the spirit world are insightful for any human no matter what culture he or she comes from. The same battle, the same lies versus the same truth exist everywhere. Even your reaction to this book could very well be seen as a spiritual one. His story puts to shame so many accounts of this people written by anthropologists who've come to observe his people and write about them. He makes you wonder if preserving a culture to the extent of enabling its destructive patterns is such a good idea. Very enlightening.

Jeffrey Niles says

A CROSS-CULTURAL CRITICAL REVIEW OF SPIRIT OF THE RAINFOREST

Summation and Content

The broken heart of a Yanomamö shaman expresses the story of his people in this vivid account of an Amazonian tribe and their passage through the spirit world to meet the great creator Spirit. Spirit of the Rainforest reveals a people imprisoned in darkness, captive to lives of murderous vengeance, savage raping, and unceasing fear for their enemies hidden both in the shadows of the rainforest and lurking in the darkness of the spirit world. The story gives a glimpse into Yanomamö wars, the shamans' interactions with their spirits, and the journey of a few Yanomami who have found forgiveness and life.

Narratives of the Yanomamö people have been told many times by missionaries, anthropologists and other interested parties, but Mark Ritchie offers a perspective in Spirit of the Rainforest that differs from most of his predecessors. This account arrives through the storytelling of Jungleman, one of the fiercest shamans of the Yanomamö people. Whereas many others have described the Yanomamö as living in Eden, a fortunate people unaffected by the evils of the modern world; Jungleman, the narrator, describes his people in vividly darker tones.

His story takes his audience through vicious night raids into villages where warriors seek prestige by taking vengeance on those who have killed or stolen people from other villages. He accounts the stealing, raping, and murdering of women from other tribes, revealing the desperate situation which young girls and mothers find themselves in as subjects to a male dominated society that has little regard for the wellbeing and lives of their females aside from their ability to procreate and increase the size of the village. Jungleman also expresses the fear that captures each Yanomamö community after they have taken revenge on other villages. This fear drives men, women, and children deep into their "shabonos" (village shelters) where they hide fearing to seek out food, dispose of waste, or even to sleep. It is this fear that drives the Yanomami to their shamans and spirits for protection and strength. But the spirits tell "split truths" and only lead the people to longer wars, increased suffering, and greater fear.

Jungleman also gives a Yanomamö perspective toward the "nabas" who arrived in the rainforest in the 1950s and of their continued interaction over the next few decades. Some of these foreigners brought medicine and gifts of superior technology, some just asked questions and studied the Yanomamö, and others took advantage of the people for their own pleasures and greed. However, a few came to tell the Yanomamö villages about Yai Pada.

Spirit of the Rainforest reveals the battle between the spirits of the shamans and Yai Pada, the great creator Spirit. Jungleman describes the inner struggle he and other shamans faced as his spirits urged him to live a life of vengeance, rape, and taking hallucinogenics (to induce trances); on the other hand, Yai Pada offered a different life that rejected their old ways and offered what the nabas call "forgiveness," a concept for which the Yanomamö had no word. Many of the Yanomami, particularly those in Honey Village and their former shaman leader, Shoefoot, chose to follow Yai Pada. Spirit of the Rainforest is their story of transformation and Jungleman's struggle with his own spirits who fought to maintain their stronghold in him.

The strengths and weaknesses of Spirit of the Rainforest are one in the same. Many other outside perspectives have been written to describe this endangered rainforest tribe, most being ethnographic

observations written by trained anthropologists providing more objective and holistic views of the Yanomamö people. While Jungleman's account conveyed through Ritchie is more subjective and comes from one individual, his account comes from an insider, one who has lived his entire life knowing the turmoils of the rainforest and its spirits. His story gives a glimpse, albeit a small cross section, of a leader whose heart breaks for his people and whose heart has been broken before Yai Pada. Jungleman demonstrates himself to be one who has come to know the forgiveness, love, and eternal life that only his Creator can give.

Comparison and Contrast

Our battle is against flesh and blood, or so western civilization has nearly convinced us. Jungleman's perspective clearly takes into account the reality of spirit beings who are at war with our Creator and with us. He understands the attraction that makes these spirits so desirable and the deception that makes them so reprehensible. He states, "I wish I had known the truth about Yai Wana Naba Laywa when I was a young man—it would have saved me so much pain and misery. But how could I? My spirits lied so much to me and tricked me. They were so beautiful, so wonderful, so hard not to want. They were the best at telling me split-truth."

Jungleman tells his story from an animistic perspective. As a shaman he saw spirits behind every rock and log. Sometimes this was certainly the deception of angelic beings who were communicating with Jungleman. Perhaps at times, this was merely his worldview as an animist. Nevertheless, the narrator keenly communicates the existence of demonic spirits and his communication with what the apostle Paul called "angels of light." Western culture has grounded itself in naturalistic thought and thus rebuffs the reality of angels, a world of spirits, and God. Too often, the Christian community succumbs to this worldview and loses sight of the war that it is within, a war against "spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

On a personal note, *Spirit of the Rainforest* challenged this writer to evaluate his own beliefs and behavior. Jungleman's testimony reminds one of the means God has provided to stand firm and to resist the devil. The narrator testifies, "Now I lie in my hammock and talk to him at night just like I used to do with my old spirits. And now even I have stopped many of the old ways." His story challenges one to cling to the same privilege in the midst of the battle.

A week after reading *Spirit of the Rainforest*, this writer spent the night at a coworker's house to avoid an extra commute the following morning. While there, my pagan friend of western culture asked to share with me a new television series depicting gladiatorial life in the Roman Empire. What ensued was a depiction of orgiastic lusts, violent rapes, and brutal scenes of glorified bloodshed. What was seen of the episode was, in summary, true to ancient Roman gladiatorial culture, but what seized my attention was the parallel between Yanomamö culture and what my friends were celebrating in their own – as entertainment. One of Ritchie's statements regarding Shoefoot during his visit to America resounded, "He has even identified the signs and symbols of many of the spirits right here in our 'civilized' culture. He has no problem understanding the Columbine High School massacre (Colorado, 1999), or any other killing spree. The spirits of anger and hatred that own and drive a person are spirits he has known personally."

Both, the Yanomamö culture that Jungleman and Shoefoot lived within and the western culture that surrounds the church existing within it, have glorified sin. Sex, violence, abuse of women and children, and narcotics pervade both cultures. The Yanomamö live it and fear it. Westerners watch it and chalk it up to the art of storytelling, yet the more they do so the more it becomes reality in their civilization and they grow to fear it as well. The Yanomamö washed themselves of their murders, waiting long periods of time for purification, but then they returned to their reveling and violence. Westerners wash their hands of it saying,

for example, as my friend did, “Wow, pretty disgusting the way they lived!” but then they quickly return for the next round to watch it again. Sin enthalls us. We are enraptured by it. Unless a greater Spirit rescues us from its dark clutches, we are continually imprisoned by it.

Both the Yanomamö and the western worlds continue life day by day. The citizens of both cultures continue on as they provide for their families and take their place within their communities. Men and women marry, children are born, leaders rise and leaders fall as the events of life continue to transpire in both worlds. Their cultures differ greatly in the way they dress, how they eat, how they give and get what they want. Yet both the Yanomamö and westerners are ensnared in their sin and serve (whether they are aware of them or not) the spirits of a heavenly realm that are involved in a battle that began ages ago when the Creator spirit was rebelled against. The Yanomamö can name their spirits and are vividly aware of their presence and control whereas westerners deny these demonic forces and proclaim their freedom of individuality. Their human dilemma remains the same, but even more so is the answer and solution for both peoples.

Communicating a Christian Understanding

The Yanomamö need Jesus just as much as one's neighbors next door in the American Bible belt. It remains the call of the church to communicate the message of the gospel. But as outsiders the difficulty is finding a way to contextualize the message so that those of another culture may clearly understand its meaning.

Of fundamental importance are the similarities between the dissimilar cultures. All men desire to be loved, are looking for hope in some form, and need to see the transformation that the true God makes in individual lives of those who follow him. To communicate a basic Christian understanding of the spirit world, humanity, and sin to the Yanomamö, the western believer must begin with a transparent life in the presence of the people. Frequent interaction with, or better yet, living with the Yanomamö, will give rise to occasions in which they will witness these qualities in the life of the believer. These are the differences that people of any culture will grow to desire and search out.

As Yanomamö language and culture are learned by the westerner and as the Yanomamö have opportunity to see the believer's Christian life in action, one can then begin to present the truth about the spirit world. The Yanomamö have a firm grasp on the existence of the spirit world, but the spirits they serve are truly demonic and are at war with the God of Christianity. This writer agrees with the approach which was taken in *Spirit of the Rainforest*. The Yanomamö need to be presented with the truth that the great Creator spirit is more powerful than all the other spirits and desires to be reconciled with the Yanomamö. He is at war with their spirits, but loves the people. This last truth is the solution to the greatest error in Yanomamö theology and remains the pivot point upon which the gospel message may be presented.

I believe that the Yanomamö are well acquainted with their sin. They may choose to justify themselves and seek life and salvation by other means, but their sin haunts them every sleepless night as they wait for vengeance to come back upon them. It must be communicated that Yai Pada is angry at their sin as well and has guaranteed that he will judge it. He is a God who must bring judgment because of their murders, because of their rapes, and because of any sin committed, for every sin is against him and not just against other Yanomamö. They fear the vengeance of other villages for sins committed, but it must be communicated that it is the vengeance of God that should be taken even more seriously. Yet he desires to be reconciled. He does not want to stay angry at them for their sin.

As this Christian understanding of sin is communicated, of even greater importance is the place of Jesus Christ in the message. The Christian teaching of humanity is that all men were created by Yai Pada, not just the nabas. He created each Yanomamö as well. He also created the spirits, but the bad spirits chose to rebel

against him. It was those spirits who then led the nabas and the Yanomamö alike to rebel against Yai Pada. All men sinned against Yai Pada and he promised that death had to be paid by humanity. So Yai Pada became a human and lived as a man, showing them how to live differently. Men still rebelled against him and killed him, but what they did not know was that when he died, he was dying the death that all nabas and Yanomamö alike were supposed to die. He took vengeance on himself so that men could be his friends. Shoefoot's description of faith seems to be well contextualized and clearly communicates the response required of every man, Yai Pada "is the friend of any Yanomamö who hangs his desires on him." It is when a Yanomamö man or woman does this that Yai Pada's anger goes away and he will show that person what it really means to be human.

The message of the gospel can not change, but how it is contextualized will drastically effect whether the Yanomamö understand that message. It is the responsibility and privilege of the church to contextualize this message and present it clearly to the Yanomamö. Yet no matter how hard we try, this writer believes that the message will be most clearly presented through the Yanomamö themselves. Thus it is imperative that Yanomamö believers are trained to preach the word of God and to share the gospel message. They will be able to describe it in words that a westerner could not and will be living demonstrations of their Creator's work in the life of one of their own people.

Ultimately, it is the Creator's heart that breaks for the Yanomamö and who desires for them to throw away their spirits so that they may meet him. He offers to throw away his anger and give them life. The truth about the spirit world, humanity, and sin must be communicated clearly so that the Yanomamö people may know their Creator and experience this life with him.

Trevor says

This book was recommended to by a good friend as a must read book. After reading the subtitle I thought I would gain interesting insights into an animistic culture and some their religious beliefs and mythologies. There was indeed some of that in the book. What I was not suspecting was the vivid and at times horrifying portrayal of life for the Yanomamö people. I simply could not believe the fear and deception which plagued the people and the ghastly treatment of women and even relatives for the Yanomamö people. There are no rosy-colored glasses through which to read the miseries of these people. I would caution potential readers from getting into this book without a clear recognition of what the book entails. That said, I appreciate that the author doesn't pull any punches but tries to accurately recount the people's story. Mark Ritchie writes in a novel way which greatly helps one try to see the world through Yanomami eyes. This book will make your heart weep as you come to grips with the reality of the misery of Yanomamö life and rejoice as you seem some within this culture liberated from the social, emotional, and spiritual bondage finding hope and freedom in good news of Jesus who became Yanomamö, returned from the grave, and cut a trail for the Yanomamö to where he lives.

Jess says

this book was an amazing account of the true story behind the spiritual journey of the yanomamo people. i was floored by these people's ability to know what's going on in the spiritual realm, and their stories opened my eyes to the truth about what is going on. but more than that, i was in awe of God's desire and ability to

reach these people's hearts. the yanomamo people have a history of being very violent, revenge-driven people... but meeting the one true God and learning about Jesus Christ changed all that. warning for those who have a weak stomach: there are some very graphicly described details of violent occurrences. but that's the reality of what happened in these people's lives. another large part of this story is the arrival of the white man within the yanomamo people's jungles, and the good and bad that goes along with their arrival. i am so glad that i read this book. it showed me more of God's character, and the power He has to change lives.
