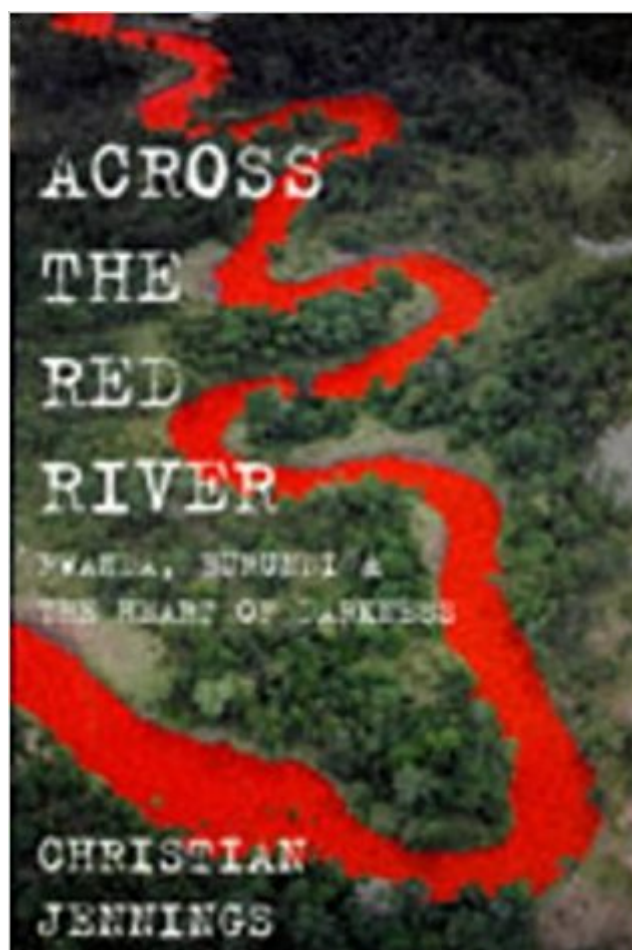


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Across The Red River: Rwanda, Burundi And The Heart Of Darkness



Synopsis

'When seven Burundian paratroopers booted down the door of my hotel room and arrested me, I was wearing nothing but a towelling dressing-gown. With angry movements of their Kalashnikovs, they gestured to me to get dressed. What, I wondered in that long, slow-motion second before the fear kicked in, do you wear to your own execution? Would the Gap jeans do one more day?' In the summer of 1994, Christian Jennings arrived in Rwanda with an almost impossible mission: he had five days to track down the army officers and government ministers responsible for the slaughter of 850,000 people and persuade them to participate in a TV documentary about their crimes. He had fifteen thousand dollars taped to his thigh, a satellite phone, thirty feet of rope, eighteen litres of mineral water and a good command of French. Nothing in his past - which included service in the French Foreign Legion and a spell in publishing - prepared him for the three and a half years that followed. *Across the Red River* is an epic account of the terror and beauty of Central Africa, both moving and harrowing in its detail, and frequently appallingly funny.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Across the Red River details Jennings' days in Rwanda, Burundi and (the then) Zaire as a journalist for Reuters and the BBC. While this is a must read for any journalist because of the apt way in which Jennings paints the 'scene', it is an excellent read for anyone interested in the region because with wit and charm, he manages not only to explain what was going on in these countries, but to also to give a very real flavor of what it's like to be in these places, during intense times, and trying to cover situations that are daunting (at best) and dangerous (at worst). One of the interesting

things the book sheds light on is how a journalist in the field weighs information, and makes decisions about how to write, and what to write when writing at all can put him/her in jeopardy with the forces in the country they are working in. It is a great page-turner, and in spite of the sometimes weighty subject matter, I found myself chuckling at Jennings' observations.

It was tempting to preface this review with "The horror, the horror...." but that would be too obvious. Christian Jennings's "Across the Red River" presents the reader with a harrowing catalogue of horror, atrocity and inhumanity. Jennings is the quintessential observer and the relentless bodycount and descriptions of cruelty are presented in a matter-of-fact, unemotional manner that never loses its impact. He achieves this through an honest reportage, describing events with an almost photographic sensibility. Although the events he describes are gruesome, there is an objectivity and lack of gratuity that lends credibility and above all, gravity to his story. His reportage is accompanied by an analysis of the political, social and sometimes personal circumstances surrounding wars, genocides and murders. This analysis is often bewildered as we learn through Jennings the labyrinthine complexities of Central African Real Politik. All this is tempered with a careful humour. While Jennings can often find an amusing anecdote to relieve the grimness of the carnage, the humour is always directed back at himself. He never makes light of the horror inflicted on the innocent (and perhaps not so innocent). He pulls no punches when it comes to the involvement of Europeans (particularly France and Belgium), Americans and in particular, the UN. Though loath to criticize individuals (save a few), he points out with righteous anger the systemic failings in UN policy and execution which have, through inefficiency and a sometimes callous disregard for the charges in their care, resulted in over a million deaths and the displacement of many more. He does not, however, tar everyone with the same brush. Some organizations (for example Medicine Sans Frontiers) he recognizes as having played a significant, if not heroic part, in attempting to limit the suffering. He also recognizes that this is not an African problem, but a problem faced by the whole world as he watches the crises in Kosovo and Chechnya. This book provides a valuable insight into the chaos of the late 20th century, long after it has slipped from the front pages and out of the CNN consciousness.

As a grad student of international relations I have read much about the nation state and human rights. However, Jennings puts the charnel house into very basic terms. Something that most academic texts papers over. I am glad to see that such an account is out there.

This book was an incredible read. It follows the author, journalist Chris Jennings, through his times in Rwanda, Burundi and the Congo during what must have been the darkest days these countries would ever have seen. As well as giving the reader the facts on what went on throughout the nineties, Jennings also goes into the history of the conflicts, clearly demonstrating that European colonialism has a lot to answer for. The book will at times make you cry and at times make you laugh. Jennings obviously found that the best way, if not the only way, to live through what he saw was to keep his sense of humour alive. There are harrowing accounts of unthinkable atrocities, but don't let that put you off. Reading this book will put your problems in perspective and hopefully disturb and shake up your 1st world pettiness.

This book is the terrible story of the destruction of the people of two African countries, engagingly told as the background to a journalist's life covering the region. This book made me angry and sad. Other reviews talk of the book's humour. I didn't see it. Read this book.

There are better books about there on these subjects. However, Jennings has written an eye-opening book although it is seriously undermined by poor editing and some inaccurate facts.

I must admit I haven't read the book but I've read Jennings's other work "A Mouthful of Rocks" and, if he lies and exaggerates like he does in that work, then I'd question the veracity of what he writes about here. One of the other reviewers talks about Jennings honesty? I served with him in the Legion and his account is far from honest. Don't get me wrong. I'm not for one minute attempting to belittle what went on in Rwanda but Jennings may not be the best man to report on it.

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