

# Skulduggery

Mark Shand, Don McCullin

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When Don McCullin and Mark Shand decided to get away from it all, they ended up on the other side of the world - in Indonesia. Together with Harry Fane, Shand's business partner, they settled on the Asmat region of Irian Jaya, the western half of New Guinea. Marked 'Relief Data Incomplete' on the map, and the home of the reputedly ferocious nomadic tribe, the orang hutan, it promised 'headhunters, crocodiles and booty'. They collected a cunning Batak guide, Deo, fat as a Buddha, and a motley local crew. Then, armed only with a first-aid kit, and T-shirts, beads and tobacco for trading, they plunged into the dark heart of a cannibal country. Shand gives a vivid and refreshingly candid account of their fitful progress in a vibrating canoe (nicknamed the Dildo), stopping at villages along the Brassa and Kolff rivers and the Casuarina coast. It is a story of drama and farce, of compassion and earthy high spirits, of fractious muddles and derring-do. In a race against time and a shrinking budget, McCullin takes a series of photographic studies, while Shand and Fane compete to bag the best bargains in spearheads, feather G-strings, orchids and carvings, and Shand adds to his own collection of snaps 'Private Parts of Primitive People'. Tempers fray as they endure steamy heat, legions of mosquitoes, icy showers, stinking mud, and long, cramped hours in the canoe. McCullin maintains his sanity with the luxuries of clean underwear and prepacked meals, while his more pragmatic companions abandon washing altogether and live off stomach-churning local stews. They find themselves in a succession of scrapes: they argue with a crocodile, are terrorized by a giant spider, and Shand narrowly escapes a noisome fate in a latrine. A snubbed officer of bananas brings them within a hair's breadth of being perforated with spears, and some nifty shuffling of biscuit tins (containing skulls) saves them from incarceration in a jungle jailhouse. They meet lager-swilling missionaries, negotiate with a whole village of headhunters, the heads of their nearest and dearest tucked neatly under their arms, and tangle with the evil Augustine. At last, they track down the orang hutan, possibly the first white men t do so. Staring into a hundred pairs of gleaming eyes in the silence of a gloomy hut, they are transported back in time to another world. The trio live to tell the tale. This book, with Shand's enthralling text and McCullin's magnificent photographs, is a riveting chronicle of their exploits.



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