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Radio Congo: Signals of Hope from Africa's Deadliest War

Ben Rawlence

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While poring over dust-caked pamphlets in the library, Ben Rawlence stumbles upon the photo of a lost city of colonial Congo--a glistening, modern metropolis built by huge tin mines and European capitalists. Today, that city, Manono, sits beyond the infamous “Triangle of Death,” in an area rarely reached by outsiders since war turned the country’s rivers to blood.

In this compelling debut, Rawlence sets out to gather the news from this ghost town in one of the most dangerous places in the world. Ignoring the advice of locals, reporters, and mercenaries, he travels by foot, motorbike, and canoe, taking his time and meeting the people who are rebuilding their homes with hope, faith, and nervous instinct. We meet Benjamin, the kindly father of the most terrifying Mai Mai warlord; Leya, who happily gives up a good job in Zambia to return to her razed town; Colonel Ibrahim, a guerrilla turned army officer; the Lebanese cousins Mohammed and Mohammed, who oversee the remains of Manono’s great mine; the priest Jean-Baptiste, who explains the conjoined prices of beer and normality; and the talk-show host Mama Christine, who dispenses counsel and courage in equal measure.

From the “blood cheese” of Goma to the decaying city of Manono, Rawlence shares the real story of Congo during and after the war, and finds not just a lost city but the seeds of a peaceful future.

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