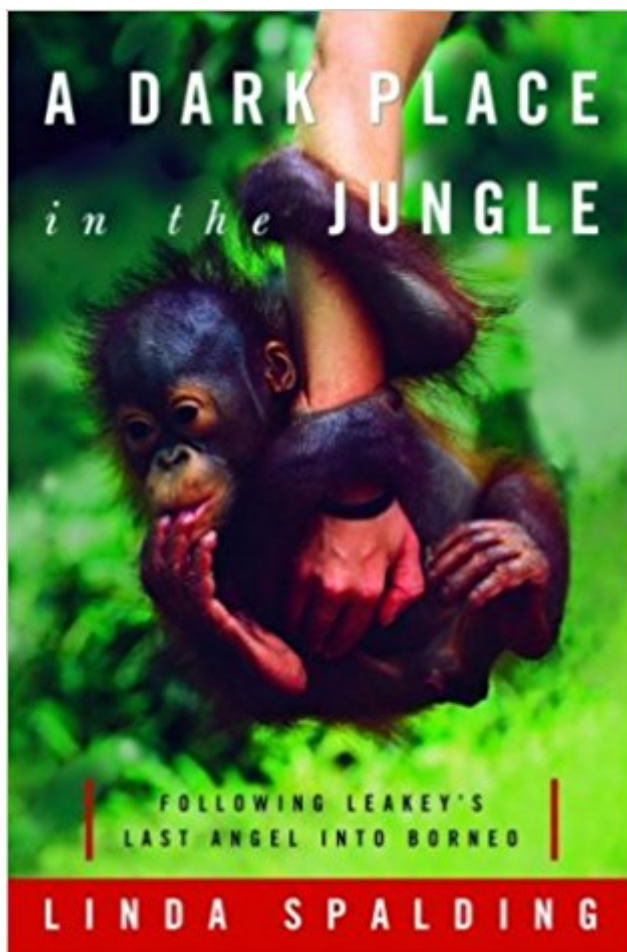


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A Dark Place In The Jungle: Following Leakey's Last Angel Into Borneo



Synopsis

Birute Galdikas, along with Dian Fossey and Jane Goodall, form the famed trio of 'angels' • Louis Leakey trained to study great apes in the wild. While Fossey studied the gorilla and Goodall the chimpanzee, Galdikas went to Borneo to study the orangutan and, decades later, emerged as a complicated figure, embroiled in scandal. Spalding's quest to know this woman takes her from the offices of Galdikas's foundation in Los Angeles to the Sekonyer River in Borneo, where she discovers a beguiling cast of characters. A host of foreign scientists, government workers, tourists, loggers, descendants of the Dayak headhunters, Javanese gold miners, and half-tame orangutans all vie for control of this despoiled Eden. *Dark Place in the Jungle* is an absorbing rumination on the failure of a woman trying desperately to mother a species to survival, the dangers and temptations of eco-tourism, and the arrogance of our inclination to alter the very things we set out to preserve. 30 black-and-white photographs are featured in this revealing and fascinating journey.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A sophisticated mixture of memoir, science writing and travel essay; a disturbing expose of complex, sometimes counterproductive, attempts to protect an endangered species; and a knowing self-portrait of a perceptive, sympathetic woman trying to make sense of the ambitions and disappointments around her."

I loved this book! It gave great detail about the amazing life of Birute Galdikas and her family in

Borneo. I felt like I was there! If you want to know what it was like to be a field researcher in the 1970's then read this book. It's not technical but is rich in description. You'll love it.

About a year ago, I tried to sort out all the orangutan advocacy organizations, what they were doing, where the money was going, and what they were accomplishing. I sent a short questionnaire to almost two dozen organizations around the world -- and only two answered my questions. OFI sent this email response: "WHO ARE YOU?" I should have read this book instead. Linda Spalding's exploration of Borneo -- and the people who work and volunteer there -- explains so much. Her research on Birute Galdikas and Orangutan Foundation International explains more. I realize that some people are looking at this book for more info on orangutans. Spalding may not be the best author for that. But she excels in taking the reader through her search for the real Birute Galdikas. I could not put the book down, and read it over two days. Spalding's "follow" of Birute reminded me of my own confusion about why the orangutan advocacy and protection organizations are so splintered. Slowly, over the course of a couple of years and many efforts to talk to Birute, Spalding discovers the jealousies, the ineptitude, the power struggles, and the egos that are hobbling the struggle to save wild orangutans from extinction. Spalding ends the newest edition of the book with a list of hopeful developments, especially with Dr. Willie Smits and Lone Droscher-Nielson. Unfortunately, while these two individuals are doing great work [...] the orangutan advocacy community has splintered even more in the six years since that postscript. I think it's time for Spalding to do another book on the subject. I'd be glad to give her the emails I received from several of the orangutan/conservation organizations in (non)response to my questions about what they were accomplishing.

This book deserves credit for pointing out the mistakes made by Galdikas in Tanjung Puting National Park. These include swarming a natural habitat with tamed apes that can never become wild again but pass on human diseases to the wild population and outcompete them for food in the area. It also reveals how OFI "volunteer-programs" and "study tours" were little more than overpriced package tours for naive animal lovers, simply aimed at making cash. In that respect, it is a real eye-opener which is also very accessible to the general reader. In fact the publication of this book has already caused OFI/Galdikas to address some of the issues publicized in it! Thus the author has probably achieved more than she had hoped for. On the downside I found it somewhat poorly-researched. It is obvious that Spalding knows very little about the culture, fauna, and conservation issues of Indonesia. She seems also rather naive - all information obtained from

Indonesians on her short trips to Borneo is taken at face-value. The book is also quite unbalanced - Galdikas is put in an all negative light, ignoring the positive aspects of her long work in the area. Finally, I also found the book too personal - Spalding speaks way too much about herself, which has bored me though may interest others... For those with a serious interest in the issues raised in this book I recommend reading "Our Vanishing Relative: The Status of Wild Orangutans at the Close of the Twentieth Century" by H. D. Rijksen & E. Meijaard which is a professional summary of everything that has to do with the conservation of these great apes.

This book weaves together the author's story with the story of Birute Galdikas. The two tales have many similarities and their links are masterfully revealed. But it's the scathing portrait of Galdikas as a woman who lost her way and became a profiteer and a tyrant that is the most astonishing and chilling part of the book. It is a gripping and TRUE tale.

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