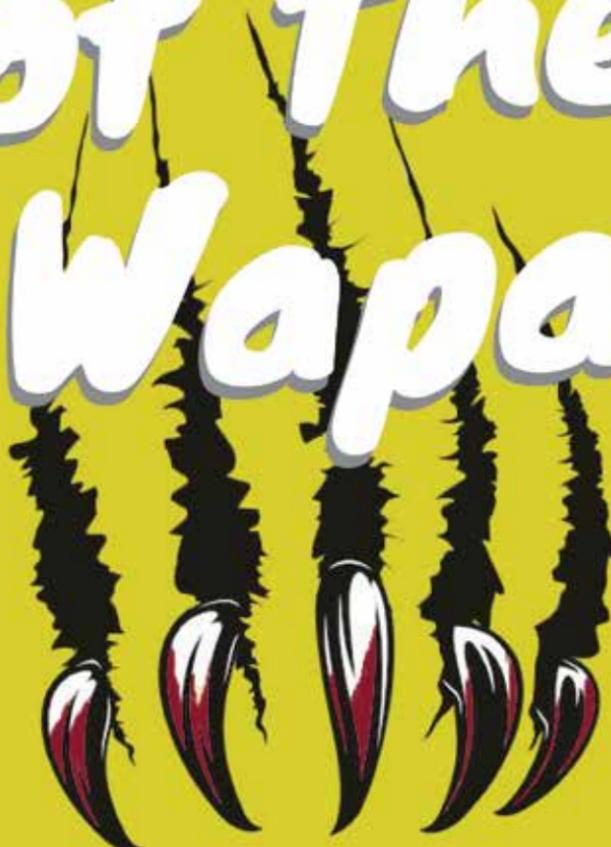


Jungle Missionary Series - Book 1

Legend of the Wapa



Cruciform
Fiction

A NOVEL BY ERNIE BOWMAN

Jungle Missionary Series - Book 1

Legend of the Wapa



A NOVEL BY ERNIE BOWMAN

For Natalie:

*You are usually my first reader, and therefore subjected
to the worst of my drafts.*

*Amazingly, you continue to read them anyway.
Your selflessness and godliness inspire me every day.*

“This book will thrill the hearts of those who like a good fictional story, but it also will inspire them toward more support and participation in the real life adventure of world missions.”

Dr. Harry L. Reeder, III, Sr. Pastor, Briarwood Presbyterian Church

“I am a missionary today because a storyteller captured my imagination and made me think, *Hey, maybe I could be a missionary too!* Ernie is a missions-motivating storyteller for a new generation. His book is full of rich details of the realities of modern missionary life, and it’s chock-full of ‘me too!’ moments. He portrays the everyday realities of missionary life in least-reached places. This humorous, engaging story will lead readers to consider their role in reaching the world with the gospel message.”

Elizabeth McAdams, Student Ministries/Camp Missionary

“The next generation of missionaries are right now in their formative years. The books they read and the stories that they hear from missionaries will bend their hearts to the mission fields of the world. *Legend of the Wapa* is one of the books that should be on the book shelf of those who are the potential missionaries of tomorrow.”

Paul Seger, General Director, Biblical Ministries Worldwide

“A good teacher knows that a story will stick with his students longer than a straight lecture. Much longer—maybe even a lifetime. Ernie Bowman is a good teacher, and *Legend of the Wapa* is a good story. It’s an adventure

story, a mystery story, and you might even say the story is a romance; after all, what is more powerful than love—love, not of self, but love of a Being who has revealed Himself as worthy of worship, or love of neighbor that moves us to venture across cultural lines, or the love of Christ that compels us to live our one brief life for something bigger than ourselves.

Legend of the Wapa is a thoughtful telling of how zeal builds in Ian Allen's life, and how he, an ordinary American, is willing to go and intertwine his life with the lives of people in a small village in the jungle. Ian and his wife become rich in ways that matter, and find themselves in the middle of a once-in-a-lifetime event that only the elders in the tribe have heard about. You'll find yourself turning pages to solve the mystery and finish the adventure, but you might also be surprised that Ian's life appeals to something deep inside of you, something that you've maybe never fully identified, but is as real as the water in the ocean."

Paul Gardner, Director, Camp Barakel

"I started reading and couldn't put the book down...a masterful job!

As one who seldom reads fiction, I was both entertained and challenged by Ernie's Bowman's *Legend of the Wapa*. Written in an engaging style, the story drew me in, and I read with anticipation. Although fiction, Brother Bowman's story is seasoned with real-life missionary experience, preparation, and ministry.

Legend of the Wapa will be formative for adults and children alike. I recommend this as an excellent read-aloud to children and grandchildren. I'm sure

you'll find yourself, along with me, moved to reflection, laughter, and tears. I started reading and couldn't put the book down...a masterful job. I look forward to the next in the series—may the Lord use this for his glory!”

Dr. Marty Marriott, President, Maranatha Baptist University

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Legend of the Wapa

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Chapter 1

The curtains are drawn tight across the window and just a bit of light filters around the edges to catch the side of my face. My eyes crack open and I am momentarily confused. It takes me a second to remember where I am, but I don't panic. This happens often enough that I'm used to it.

I take in the not-so-familiar sight of the new gray-blue curtains on the windows and marvel at how good of a job they do at keeping the sunlight at bay. Sunrise comes early here and I have never been a morning person. Because of that I didn't object when my wife wanted to splurge on some new curtains. The old ones looked okay, but they did a lousy job of keeping my bedroom dark in the morning. I'm up early for work every day during the week, so when the weekend gets here I want to sleep in. My neighbors think I'm nuts and they can't seem to figure out why I don't want to get up at the crack of dawn every day like they do. Literally. They are up at dawn, every day, without fail. Weekends included. Why? That's just what they do. They cook breakfast and then most of them head outside to work in their gardens.

"That is what we have always done," they say, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "Work in the light, sleep in the dark."

I've thought about trying to explain the terms "weekend" and "night owl" to them, but whatever—to

each his own, right? Anyway, enough musing about my sleep habits. There are things that need to be done right away today if the rest of the day is going to go as planned. And I desperately want the rest of the day to go as planned.

I swing my legs out of bed and head across the bedroom and out to the kitchen. I can hear my wife singing softly in the shower as I begin the familiar routine of starting the day. I glance out the front window to make sure no one moved my motorcycle during the night, then head like a zombie for the coffee pot. I heard one time that there are actually people in the world who drink decaf coffee. For what purpose, I have no idea. Clearly those people don't understand coffee and should not be trusted.

Once the coffee pot is gurgling its way toward a steaming pot of life-giving, caffeinated goodness, I turn my attention to this morning's special preparations. This is no ordinary day of the week. It's Sunday.

Sundays mean two things, each of them special to me in their own way. First of all, and most important, it's Church Day. It's the one day of the week where nearly every Christian in town gets together. We've been living different lives all week, but each Sunday we put those individual lives on hold for a few hours. Coming together as one, we give our attention and our worship to the Lord.

That comes first.

But after church, it's also Game Day.

It's the one day of the week where I kick back, pig out, and indulge in that quintessential American pastime: watching football. Football has been my

favorite sport ever since I was a kid. I can still remember the first time I saw Barry Sanders dance his way across the field for the Detroit Lions. No one could touch him. He twisted grown men into knots, leaving them grabbing at air. I wanted to do that. Every kid in Detroit did, I'm sure of it. Or, at least I think they did. I actually have no idea because I'm not from Detroit. I'm from Lapeer, a small town just a few miles down the freeway from Flint. No one has ever heard of Lapeer, but everyone in the country seems to have heard about Flint. At least the water anyway. I have no idea what "Lapeer" actually means, but we used to say it's French for "the back of beyond." I could tell you stories of growing up with miles of woods and fields to play in, wishing like crazy we had cable TV, or even air conditioning, but that will have to wait for another time. Like I said, I've got stuff to do.

I start the warm water at the tap and when it's hot I dump the right amount into a bowl and add the yeast. Sugar and salt go in next and the whole thing gets stirred and set aside for a few minutes. This is the other thing that makes Sundays so great: pizza. I have no idea where she learned how to make pizza, because her step-mom is a terrible cook, but my wife makes the best pizza in this entire country. Hands down, no contest. And there is nothing in the world that can make a guy feel more American than spending a Sunday afternoon eating pizza and watching football, which is exactly what I intend to do today. It's what I did last Sunday, the Sunday before that, and, Lord willing, next Sunday too. It probably seems like a little thing to anyone else, but to me it's an important ritual.

It helps me keep my sanity and feel connected to back home, especially when I think about how different and dangerous things can be here. Not that I'm expecting a whole lot of excitement today, but you just never know.

With the yeast beginning to foam in the mixing bowl, I take a couple glass bottles of Coke from the cupboard and put them in the back of the fridge. As always I'm careful to open the door quickly, get the Coke inside, and shut the door as quick as I can. Time elapsed: less than two seconds. Minimizing the amount of cold air that escapes is critical. Our fridge is old and doesn't work that well, so I have to do this if I want the Cokes to be the right temperature for game time—just short of freezing, but only barely.

The initial preparations are done and I can no longer hear the water running in the bathroom. That means my wife is out of the shower and it's my turn. I head in that direction, realizing as I go that I have managed to gulp down three cups of coffee already this morning. If I had known then what was lying in wait for me over the next few days, I would have made an extra pot and taken the time to savor it more. Sometimes hindsight really is 20/20.

Having no clue what's coming, I briefly consider how much coffee is too much, before remembering there's no such thing.

By the time I get out of the shower, get dressed, and finish checking the morning's email, my wife is dressed and ready to go. She takes less time to get ready in the morning than most of the men I know from back home, and I silently thank God for her again. A rare combination of beautiful and low-maintenance, she

truly is one-of-a-kind. She is in the kitchen adding the finishing touches to the pizza dough as I come through the door and give her a kiss on the cheek.

“How’d you sleep last night?” She asks with genuine interest, taking a sip of coffee.

“Long and well,” I reply, knowing full well what’s coming next.

“I’ll say. I tried to wake you up when I left the bed this morning, but you barely stirred. I guess those curtains are worth the extra we paid for them after all?”

Her smile gives her away and I know she’s just messing with me. I’m normally pretty tight-fisted when it comes to spending money, and she knows the premium we paid for those curtains hurt my heart a little bit.

“Worth every penny,” I concede. “Come on, we’ll be late for church if we don’t leave now. Is the dough done?”

“Of course it’s done. It’s Sunday, isn’t it? And we don’t need to rush—it’s not like they’ll start without you.”

We head out the door together, my wife pausing to place the dough bowl in the corner of the porch. From there it will rise slowly while we’re gone, as the morning heats up. We live just south of the church, close enough to walk there, which is exactly what we’ve done every week since we moved here. We get to church on time, find our seats in the front, and begin the familiar and comfortable routine of the Sunday-morning church service.

It’s probably almost exactly like the service at your church last Sunday: opening prayer, a chorus,

announcements, another song, an offering, more singing, Scripture reading, and a sermon from a Bible passage. The sermon goes longer than usual but I'm not worried about missing the kickoff, because the game I'll be watching has been taped. That's a blessing the 15-year-old me would have been insanely jealous of.

I can remember as a kid that my parents would stay after church talking, and talking, and talking. Always the endless talking. They acted as if they had no clue there was a game we were missing. And I would keep checking the time over and over again, knowing that the longer they talked, the more football I would miss. Now, with the advent of modern technology, I don't even worry about it anymore.

So we take our time chatting with friends after church. We hear about how so-and-so's niece just took her first steps. We smile to mask the disappointment at not having kids of our own. We are genuinely happy for them, but it still hurts. We finally close up the doors and head for home, retracing the familiar steps up the path.

Ninety minutes later the pizza is hot and the Cokes are cold. I press play on the remote control and kick back on the couch. My wife sits down next to me and I wonder again: *How many guys have a woman who willingly watches football with them? No wonder I love her so much.*

I cheer and chow my way through the game. I thank God for technology as I fast forward through the commercials. I'll admit the beer commercials are sometimes funny, but the prescription drug commercials? Not so much. I slow it down to listen to

the commentary at halftime. As the post-game show wraps up I reflect for just a second on how very routine my afternoon was. The pizza was delicious. The Lions lost. And I am still the luckiest guy on earth. I know it's probably not right how much I like football, but I have come to accept my own idiosyncrasies in that way. My neighbors, however, have not. They can't understand why I love the game so much. This conversation from church is typical...

A neighbor of mine, Bigfoot (not his real name, but that's what we all call him), came up to me one day as I was walking by his house.

"Headed home to watch the game?" he asked.

"Of course," I told him. "It's Sunday, isn't it?"

"It is, yes. But it is such a violent game; it seems so savage and cruel. The people who play must have very primitive minds, to find it fun. Besides, aren't games for children?"

"Many of them are, Bigfoot, you're right. Maybe that's why I like this one so much. It keeps me young at heart."

(I know, I know, that's a pretty thin argument, but I wasn't sure what else to tell him. We'd had this same conversation at least five times.)

"Well, I hope your friends win. You seem to love them very much."

I was still trying to figure out if I should be insulted by his cryptic reply when he clapped me on the shoulder and walked away. No doubt he spent the afternoon at home resting, just as soon as his garden was weeded perfectly. In that regard we're not that much different after all.

With Bigfoot still on my mind, I stand up from the couch and stretch, clicking off the TV in the process. As I turn around I can see some other neighbors out front. They have their faces pressed against the window, hands cupped to fight the glare, peering into my living room. I wave and walk toward the front of the house. They back up two steps as I come out the door.

“Hello, Mister Neighbor!” Henry calls out as I close the door. “Did your team do the killing today?”

His smile stretches from ear-to-ear as he says it, because he knows no one was being killed on my TV. He still has no idea what is actually happening on the football field, but he knows enough to give me a hard time about it. Most of the people around here good-naturedly call football The Killing Game. The first time they saw it they said it looked like everyone was trying to catch and kill the man holding the funny shaped fruit. Others said it looked like a group of children trying to catch and kill a small bird.

“No, Henry, not today,” I reply with a smile of my own, as I clasp his lower arm in greeting. This kind of handshake would be foreign to my friends back home, but here it is the social norm. Grasping another man by the wrist and offering your own wrist is a way of demonstrating trust. It shows you have nothing up your sleeve. Even though no one here has sleeves.

“Too bad,” Henry replies, his smile never dimming. “You would think a lion could kill whatever it wanted. Yours is a strange world, my friend.”

“Yes it is, Henry, yes it is.”

I release his wrist and he transfers his fishing spear back to the right hand as he and his group continue

down the path. They are headed south past the airstrip to the river, in search of supper for their families. I'll join them as soon as I can.

Perhaps at this point I should introduce myself properly.

In case you haven't guessed by now, I am not your average football fan. I love football; I love America; I love pizza, Coke, and my wife Rachael (though not necessarily in that order). In some ways this has been a typical American Sunday, complete with church, pizza, and football. But it hasn't taken place in America.

I live in Venezuela.

At least I think I do. I've been told by some visiting groups that my house actually sits on the border of Venezuela and Brazil, but don't tell that to my neighbors. Their village may straddle that border, but when you try and talk to them about countries and borders they just get confused.

"No," they will reply. "This is our land. Venezuela is not one of our ancestors. This has always been our land. We do not know this man Venezuela."

What's funny is how weird that sounds when you say it out loud, but also how right it sounds when you think about it. Anyway, my house is apparently situated directly on the border, but you would never know it by looking around. From where we sit on the front porch the jungle of Venezuela in the front yard looks exactly the same as the jungle of Brazil in the backyard.

But I digress. Back to introductions.

My name is Ian Allen and I am a jungle missionary, although the people who write the pamphlets and other such things back home in the States don't like

it when I say it that way. I'm supposed to say "tribal missionary." Apparently saying "jungle" will make kids these days not want to be missionaries. Personally, I don't really get that. For one, I love how it sounds to say "jungle missionary." And, if you ask me, what better way to make young people want to do something than to make it sound like Indiana Jones works in the cubicle next to you. Though we don't have cubicles in the jungle, of course. Which, come to think of it, is one of the many reasons why I love working here.

And besides, the bottom-line truth is that I live and work in the jungle. My wife Rachael and I have been here for almost two years now. We arrived here with a team of six people—two couples and two single guys. We were the initial group of adventurous jungle missionaries (see how cool that sounds?) trying to bring the good news of Jesus and the message of the gospel here for the first time in history.

"Here" is officially named Indigenous Outpost 139 by the Venezuelan government, although their maps actually have it located about 12 miles further north than it actually is. To the Kilo people who live here, it's simply called Bahwee.

Home.

It is the only place most of them have ever known. There are no cities or even towns anywhere close by, and only a few other tribes within walking distance—as long as you measure walking distance in terms of days and not minutes. Even going by river, the fastest form of transportation they have here can take several days of paddling downstream before you come to the nearest cluster of "civilized" humanity.

So if something goes wrong, we are very much on our own and have to deal with it ourselves.

Chapter 2

At this point you're probably wondering why an American boy from Michigan would choose to live and work in the jungle. It's a legit question, but you have to know—the Kilo people are not savages. They are not cannibals or devil worshipers or anything like that. I'm supposed to call them "tribal people" (again, the office types back home have chosen the vocabulary), but I mostly just call them friends.

I know, I know. That sounds cheesy enough to make broccoli edible, but it's true. Over the course of the last two years many of the Kilo have become my friends and I can't think of any better way to describe them in my letters to home. "Tribal people" sounds too formal. "Natives" always make people think of "naked." And "Indigenous People Group" is too big of a mouthful. "Friend" or "neighbor" typically works well.

Right, you say, but what am I doing here? The short answer is that we're translating the Bible. The goal of our mission outpost is to complete a Kilo language translation of the Bible. Once that's done we can teach them about Jesus directly from God's Word and help them build a self-perpetuating church community of their own. If I wanted to sound impressive (an occasionally useful skill back home on the fundraising trail), I would tell you that our mission team is "engaged in a strategic, long-range, evangelistic church-building and outreach plan with the goal of

spreading the gospel of grace to the indigenous tribal people groups of west-central Venezuela and Brazil.” Talk about a mouthful! That’s why I typically just say we’re here to translate the Bible.

Nice plan, right? Yeah, we thought so, otherwise we wouldn’t be here. Consider this though—the Kilo have no written language, no word for “book,” and no alphabet. In a world with no paper and no writing utensils of any kind, they have no need for the literacy skills any second grader in America would take for granted.

Which means they have no Bible. No Bible, no church, no pastors, no knowledge of Jesus at all. They have never heard of Christ, let alone Christianity. My team and I aim to change that. This is year two of a twelve-year process, start to finish. We landed here knowing next to nothing. Between the six of us we knew about five Kilo words, but we were all fluent in Spanish, the trade language of Venezuela. We were told at least one of the Kilo people we met would be a Spanish speaker.

We were told wrong. No one here spoke Spanish. So, combined with the laughable amount of Kilo we knew, the task became almost impossible to consider. But we were too determined (or dumb maybe) to turn back. It took us two years of training at the Bible Institute, two years of language and cultural studies, and fifteen weeks of travel and government red tape to get here. We weren’t going to be turned back by something as trivial as not being able to communicate.

One of the other missionaries, my friend Jeff, loves movies. Doesn’t matter what’s happening, he’s

got a movie quote for it. The day we learned that none of the Kilo spoke Spanish, we were all sitting around eating lunch, wondering what we had gotten ourselves into. Jeff took a big bite off his plate (sweet and sour rice, I think), swallowed and said, “We are too young to know that certain things are impossible. So we will do them anyway.”

Apparently that’s from some obscure Christian movie nobody but him has ever seen. But it didn’t matter. What mattered was that afternoon we all pledged to not give up. Looking back on that moment now it seems pretty melodramatic, like something scripted for a Missions recruitment video. But we weren’t trying to be dramatic and we weren’t recruiting anyone but ourselves. We knew it would be hard, maybe impossible, and we decided to do it anyway. We’ll see this thing through to the end—all for one and one for all.

Henry and his group don’t stop to wait for me as they head down to the river, and I know I have to hurry. I duck my head inside the door and call out to Rachael.

“See you later, Babe!” I call in my best sing-song voice. “I’m going to work!”

“Okay, Honey! Be safe and be home before dinner!” comes her standard reply.

This is our little running joke, our little nod to the amusing absurdity of our “work” here. She knows I’m going fishing, but in my world fishing is work because the main part of my job right now is to learn the language and the culture. Making an accurate Bible translation means we have to be fluent in the Kilo language. The best way to be fluent? Spend time with the people. Today that means I’m going fishing.

So far I have become passably adept at speaking Kilo. No one would call me fluent, but I can hold my own in conversation and I can understand much of what is said around me. I have done a better job of acclimating to Kilo customs and culture, although I'm still pretty shaky on their history and folk lore.

Every time I lean in the door to tell my wife I'm going fishing (the most educational cultural activity there is here), I can't help but flash back to when I was a kid and would shout through the screen door to my mom that I was going down the street to a friend's house to play football.

I duck back outside and make my way around to the back of the house. Opening the door to the shed I pick out my best fishing spear from the selection along the wall. What? Don't tell me you only have one fishing spear!

I start to jog as I catch up to Henry and his crew. His name isn't Henry; of course, it's actually Mahala, which roughly translates to "Man of Hammer." When this was explained to me I was immediately reminded of the tall tales about John Henry we were taught in grammar-school history class. I'm not sure Mahala understood everything of what I told him about those American legends, but he was thrilled to be the first guy in the village with a "ghost name" and it has stuck with him ever since. "Ghost" is what many of the Kilo call me. Like a white spirit, they say. That's what the little kids thought we were when we walked up onto the riverbank that first day: white ghosts.

"Mister Neighbor, welcome," he says with a grin, as I catch up to the group and fall in step with them.

We are walking single file down the side of the airstrip in the traditional Kilo way. When you have to hack paths out of the jungle by hand, none of them ever become wide enough to walk side-by-side. I wonder what the Kilo would think of our sidewalks back home. Henry's smile is bigger than ever as he glances to take in the sweat that's beading on my forehead from running just thirty yards. Back home, sweating means you're working hard or you're out of shape. But for white men in the jungle, it usually just means you're outside after 11 am.

"Thanks, Henry. You don't mind if I come along, do you?"

I know the answer already, in Kilo culture it's rude to just insinuate yourself into a group without asking.

"Of course not, my friend. We always need an example of how to keep cool in the water!"

He laughs and so does the rest of the group. I grin right along with them, knowing that I deserve every bit of the abuse I'm about to take. Two weeks ago I was fishing with the guys when I slipped off the rock where I was perched. My dramatic splash into the water wasn't exactly a graceful swan dive. To make it worse, the fish I thought I was oh-so-close to spearing was actually well out of range, and they all saw it. The sweat from my brow had dripped into my eyes and obscured my vision. This messed with the already fragile depth perception that comes from looking down through the surface of the water. So I had tried to spear a fish that was comically far away.

While we walk, Henry and his friends amuse themselves for several minutes at my expense. Their

reenactment of my fall is actually pretty good. I smile and take my medicine. More than simply enduring their banter, I revel in it. I revel in it because I understand their jabs and mocking to be exactly what they are: acceptance.

In Kilo culture the worst insult in the world is to ignore another person. To see a person wanting to join a group and not invite them in. Or to observe them in a dramatic moment and offer no comment. This would be tantamount to social exile. Strength is found in numbers and survival is based in the tribe. Isolation, then, is bad. That's one reason I can grin and bear their mockery. In the jungle of Venezuela, as in the locker rooms of America, guys show their affection by poking fun at each other. It means I am on the way to achieving my goal of becoming one of them.

We make our way down the side of the airstrip to what people back home would probably call "the beach." It isn't a beach in the traditional American sense of a place to go swimming, although swimming does happen there pretty much every day. It's much more than that; it's a secondary social hub. The primary social action takes place in the Commons, but the waterfront is a close second.

The path leading down from the airstrip is the widest here. Two people can pass each other going opposite directions, without having to step aside. Even with a full load of whatever they happen to be carrying, there's a bit of room to spare. For the women that usually means laundry, water, or children. For the men a typical load would be fish, firewood, or a canoe. From sunup to sundown the waterfront is typically a

busy place, and today is no exception. Our little group, six in total, heads down the path on the left-hand side (something that took me almost an entire year to get used to), as a mother carrying her infant in a child loop with a water jug perched on top of her head makes her way past us.

In America we usually keep to the right, of course, but not here. The way it was explained to me is that you walk on the left-hand side of the trail as a defensive maneuver against potential attack. Even in the jungle most people are right-handed, and such a person walking on the right side of the trail would have a clumsy time bringing their weapon around quickly. So if you want to be ready for an adversary, you'd better walk on the left side of the trail. The logic makes sense, even though I have never seen even the slightest bit of violent aggression along any trail here.

This is because the Kilo are a prideful people, bound by honor codes as old as the jungle itself. To strike a person in the jungle is dishonorable because it gives the attacker the ability to hide and keep his actions a secret. Better to call out your opponent in the Commons so a public display can be made with witnesses on hand.

We emerge from the tree line and I take in the waterfront. From left to right the area is roughly fifty yards long, with a "beach" that covers probably ten yards from the tree line to the water. It's not really a beach in the way you're probably thinking. There's not much sand, just lots of rocks and a few grassy areas here and there. It's mostly an area where the jungle is not, rather than an area where something else is. But "beach" is the best word I have for it, so that's what we call it.

The Kilo call it Piebu.

The Place.

The best I can discern, it is called The Place mostly because this is where the action happens during the day. I see women washing clothes by dunking them in the water and slapping them on rocks. There are many misconceptions about life in the jungle, but this is not one of them. These women are the very picture of jungle people that Americans have in their minds.

Small children play in the water near their mothers, careful not to stray too far away from the bank. There's not much of a current, but it wouldn't take much to overpower a three-year-old. Older kids are scattered down the shoreline in groups of one or two. I watch as they tread carefully, bent at the waist. Occasionally one will reach down and yank up a rock, while the other one, quick as lightning, shoots a hand down into the water to pluck up a small creature. I can never remember the word for what they're catching, but it looks like a mini-crawfish to me.

I glance across the water and down the river about a hundred yards, and see our destination. Just before a sharp curve in the river, the water eddies almost to a standstill in a rocky cove where fish get trapped. They get pushed in with the current and for some reason many can't get back out. So they stay there until we come to get them out. Back home in the States I'm sure some environmentalists would have a conniption if they knew that the Kilo have fished in this exact same spot for the exact same type of fish for generations. No catch and release, no permits, and no daily quotas. Yet, as we wade into the water and begin to

float downstream, I know there will be fish there.

As I kick my legs gently and swim through the water, I rehearse how to correctly pronounce the word for what I call the cove: bahweetan. It means “fish home,” because it’s where the fish live. An effective name, if not very creative.

Our little group swims into the cove and I wonder exactly what event in nature could have happened that caused these large rocks to be plunked down in this particular spot. No doubt an evolutionist would see the work of some ancient glacier in the remote past, while a pulpit-thumping preacher would credit God’s hand. I land somewhere in the middle. I have serious doubts about the theory of evolution, but I also don’t think God is in the business of moving rocks around one by one. And they’re way too big for the Kilo to have done it.

When I asked Henry how the cove got to be the way it is, he just shrugged and said, “Nimishish.”

That’s a fairly common Kilo word roughly equivalent to the English phrase “I couldn’t care less.” It expresses the idea that there are some things in life that are so trivial or abstract, they don’t really matter. Geology holds little interest for people who don’t have enough to eat.

“Why would a man ponder rocks,” Henry asked, “when there are fish to be speared?”

Touché.

We spread out and take up familiar positions as Henry sprinkles bugs around the water. He dips into a pouch at his waist, dropping about a dozen insects onto the surface. It takes a minute or two, but soon

enough the fish start to appear. One by one, heads poke out from cracks and crags and then dart up to the surface. We let the first two get away, with no one even attempting a strike. After that, all bets are off.

Henry is by far the best at spearing fish, and he quickly manages to score six kills. Soon enough everyone is finished and we assemble on the bank. We sling mesh bags around our shoulders, with the newly cleaned fish inside. The river will wash away any remaining blood or scales as we swim home. The current is not strong, but even so I labor to make it upstream.

The last to arrive back, I wade onto shore and fall in as the women and children head up the trail. The men have not waited for me, and I don't blame them. I see their backs disappearing up the trail and I know they mean no offense. It's common sense actually. Why stand around on the shore when your dinner is on your back? If I ever outswim any of them I'll do the same, but I don't think they're worried about that ever happening.

Rachael has a fire going outside and she looks up as I cross the yard toward her. We cook the fish camp-style over the coals, wrapping them in foil with onions and butter. Twenty minutes later we are eating quietly as dusk settles onto the village and the shadows grow long.

That night I fall asleep in an introspective mood. I may be living in the jungle, and the football game I watched today was on a DVD mailed from home, but I wonder: *How many men have what I have? I live in a beautiful place with a beautiful woman. I have more food*

than I can eat, free time to pursue hobbies I enjoy, and a job that is rewarding and beneficial. How many men are stuck on a corporate hamster wheel, fishing for what I have already managed to catch? Who knows, and frankly, right now I couldn't care less. Nimishish, as Henry would say.

Nimishish.

Author

Ernie Bowman is the Associate Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Also a part-time Bible teacher and writer, he blogs regularly at www.thefoolishr.com about living for Jesus, church life, books, and education. This is his first novel.

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HAUNTED MAN

by Charles Dickens | 140 pages

A Forgotten Classic

*Abridged and Annotated by
Dave Swavely*

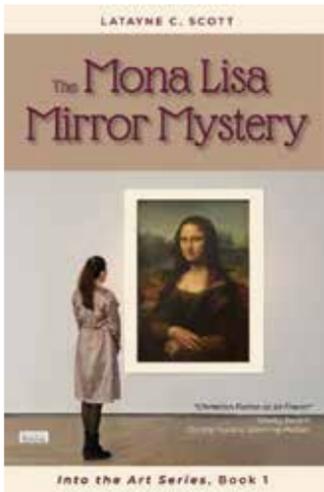
bit.ly/hauntedman

A college professor named Redlaw is a good man plagued by bad memories of a traumatic childhood, compounded by a terrible betrayal and loss during his young adulthood. When an ethereal demonic doppelganger of himself appears and offers to wipe away those memories, Redlaw eagerly accepts, and also receives the ability to spread this “gift” to others.

Featuring the breathless suspense, colorful characters, and witty humor that has made Dickens such a beloved author, the story also tackles some of the deepest philosophical and theological questions ever raised in his writings. His answer to “the problem of evil” is of both literary and religious interest.

“Swavely’s goal of making *Haunted Man* more accessible to modern readers is an overwhelming success.”

*–Dr. Gary L. Colledge (PhD, University of St. Andrews,
author of *God and Charles Dickens*)*



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Into the Art Series, Book 1
by Latayne C. Scott | 108 pages

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Addy's three friends don't know what to think when Addy tells them she "whooshed" right back into time and met a quirky Leonardo daVinci. Is it a dream? And what do the girls do when they have just as much drama in the present?

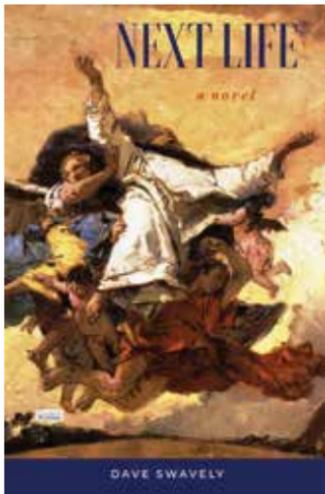
"Christian fiction at its finest!" –**Shelly Beach**, Christy Award-winning author

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[NEXT LIFE: A Novel](#)

by *Dave Swavely* | 125 pages

*One Christian's adventure of a
lifetime*

...in the NEXT LIFE!

bit.ly/NEXTLIFE

What happened to Tim Carler is so hard to believe that he had to call his story a novel to keep from being mercilessly mocked (or locked up for his own safety). But ironically, his account rings true in a way that other “heaven tourism” books do not. Unlike those supposedly non-fiction titles, there’s nothing in this one that contradicts Scripture.

After the shock of finding his soul in the Intermediate State, the surprises multiply as Tim finds out who’s there, who’s not, and how different heaven is from our common conceptions. In a dimension not bound by time, he is sent on missions into the past where he meets some extraordinary everyday people, as well as famous ones like the Jewish Patriarchs, Adolf Hitler, and two Victorian Charleses—Spurgeon and Dickens.

Reminiscent of *A Christmas Carol*, but with more gospel content. It’s a *Pilgrim’s Progress* where the journey takes place in the life to come rather than in this one.