



# **The Unconquered: In Search of the Amazon's Last Uncontacted Tribes**

*Scott Wallace*

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*THE UNCONQUERED* TELLS THE EXTRAORDINARY TRUE STORY OF A JOURNEY INTO THE DEEPEST RECESSES OF THE AMAZON TO TRACK ONE OF THE PLANET'S LAST UNCONTACTED INDIGENOUS TRIBES.

Even today there remain tribes in the far reaches of the Amazon rainforest that have avoided contact with modern civilization. Deliberately hiding from the outside world, they are the unconquered, the last survivors of an ancient culture that predates the arrival of Columbus in the New World.

In this gripping first-person account of adventure and survival, author Scott Wallace chronicles an expedition into the Amazon's uncharted depths, discovering the rainforest's secrets while moving ever closer to a possible encounter with one such tribe—the mysterious *flecheiros*, or “People of the Arrow,” seldom-glimpsed warriors known to repulse all intruders with showers of deadly arrows.

On assignment for *National Geographic*, Wallace joins Brazilian explorer Sydney Possuelo at the head of a thirty-four-man team that ventures deep into the unknown in search of the tribe. Possuelo's mission is to protect the Arrow People. But the information he needs to do so can only be gleaned by entering a world of permanent twilight beneath the forest canopy.

Danger lurks at every step as the expedition seeks out the Arrow People even while trying to avoid them. Along the way, Wallace uncovers clues as to who the Arrow People might be, how they have managed to endure as one of the last unconquered tribes, and why so much about them must remain shrouded in mystery if they are to survive. Laced with lessons from anthropology and the Amazon's own convulsed history, and boasting a Conradian cast of unforgettable characters—all driven by a passion to preserve the wild, but also wracked by fear, suspicion, and the desperate need to make it home alive—*The Unconquered* reveals this critical battleground in the fight to save the planet as it has rarely been seen, wrapped in a page-turning tale of adventure.

## The Unconquered: In Search of the Amazon's Last Uncontacted Tribes Details

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# From Reader Review The Unconquered: In Search of the Amazon's Last Uncontacted Tribes for online ebook

## Michael says

A fascinating topic: tribes in the Amazon living without contact with the modern world. But far too concerned with petty personality issues, and too full of poetic description. What should have been an adventure story about the Amazon, the tribes, and the challenges they face, turns into a narrow description of an expedition that ultimately has little impact on the greater issues. Edit out a hundred pages and this is a better book.

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## Terri says

This book is going straight to my favourites shelf. It will sit there in the company of other gems such as *Arabian Sands* by Wilfred Thesiger and *The Road Gets Better From Here* by Adrian Scott. Books that capture the people, the culture, the food, the environment, 'the message' in a way that few books do.

The *Unconquered* was hard to put down and by the end I didn't want it to finish. In fact, I could have started it all over again. It is books like those that will forever have a treasured place in my memory. For teaching me so many new things, for opening my eyes to a place I have never been, to a culture I have never experienced. For taking me on a journey that I would like to have the courage to take myself. But mostly it is books like those that are the reason I read books in the first place.

Scott Wallace is a freelance journalist who is asked by *National Geographic* to join Brazilian Explorer Sydney Possuelo on an exploration of the Amazon in search of the Uncontacted Tribes. The *flecheiros*, the Arrow People, who live in the deepest bosom of the jungle in isolation, having never experienced white civilization. They are under pressure by the illegal loggers and prospectors (among other illegal activities) and are often hunted themselves by white men. Entire tribes are brutally and callously wiped out so the *flecheiros* cannot attack or interfere with illegal activities in protected Brazilian lands. Sometimes they are hunted and slain purely to cleanse the jungles of them as it is the presence of the uncontacted tribes that keeps large tracts of the Amazon protected.

This book had it all for me, excellent up close and personal description of the Amazon's unique ecosystem, action, adventure, tests of human endurance. The only problem I had, which wasn't a problem with the book itself, was that I didn't much like Sydney Possuelo. I think he would be a hard man to work for and to spend much time around and I am sure if I had been on this exploration, things would not have gone well. Much like everyone else on his team, I do not appreciate this type of personality. There is no doubt he has done some good in his former role in FUNAI, but he was lucky he didn't cause full scale mutiny in the middle of the green nowhere.

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## Anna Griffith says

Check out my blog for more extensive reviews and more!

PROS: I am still in awe of this book. This may be one of the best books I've ever read. I was a little concerned going in because as much as my Western curiosity wants to read about the "wild" Indians (and in this book they are referred to as Indians, not "Native Brazilians" or anything, so I will use that here), I know that contacting them, no matter how pure-intentioned the gesture may be, will almost certainly prove detrimental to their physical, emotional and social well-being. This book alleviated all those concerns. It combines the action, adventure, hardship of a early 1900's exploration of the Amazon with modern-day realizations and sensibilities regarding the Indians.

CONS: None.

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## Clint says

This is one of those non-fiction books that is so badass and teaches you so many badass things you never knew you wanted to know that you talk about it continuously the entire time you're reading it to anyone around you that will listen. "Dude, check this out, these dudes are fucking hunting and eating monkeys, and one of the dudes keeps thinking it's kind of like cannibalism and has nightmares where monkeys attack him with knives for revenge." "Dude, these dudes made a giant-ass canoe out of a single huge tree the size of an 18 wheeler." "Dude, if this arrow so much as nicks you, you're probably going to be dead in a few minutes because the poison is THAT FUCKING DEATH METAL!"

Also a big eye-opener to the problem the Amazon tribes face, a really weird one, that if they are ever contacted, even if that contact is to help them out, they'll probably get really fucking sick and die because of our gnarly germs.

Crazy crazy highly-recommended book.

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## Ioana says

Unbearably boring memoir of a trek through the Amazon, written by a self-absorbed, privileged brat suffering from delusions of grandeur. I was expecting *The Unconquered* to offer at least *some* insight into uncontacted native tribes, the history of the region/forest, ecology, or really, ANYTHING at all. Ok, so there was a little info on the different groups and Brazil's efforts to maintain a protected area, but the learning opportunities were few and far between.

Not only that, but this wasn't even a good rendering of a real-life "adventure"--monotone pacing, constant whining-while-pretending-to-be-oh-so-very-brave-and-awesome, and waaaay too much wallowing in trivial details.

Lastly, the author is detestable. Besides his constant digs at native culture and natives recruited for the journey (he was "surprised" one of them didn't use the new shoulder pads on the author's backpack but instead fashioned his own out of reeds and such) --one other example of the author's obnoxiousness will suffice: throughout the book, it's a theme that he won't see his kids for months, and yet he cannot pass up this opportunity for them. Ok, fine. But then he goes on about how his ex-wife forced him into a divorce and into complaints about her, and that's when I know Scott Wallace is not a man I'd like as a friend.

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## Clif Wiens says

A journey into the unknown, dangers in a forbidden jungle, and a larger-than-life hero – the stuff of fiction, only Scott Wallace's unforgettable, "The Unconquered" is a true adventure, with the narrative drive of a great novel but also an acute moral sensibility encompassing the complexities of our world on personal, social, and global level. Wallace's story is that of a journey to protect an uncontacted tribe in the northwest reaches of Brazil, led by Sidney Possuelo, a larger than life Mr. Kurtz – if Kurtz had a saintly twin.

There is only a few books that stay with one long after you've read them, and even change how you look at the world on a daily basis. Peter Matthiessen's "The Snow Leopard," Bruce Chatwin's "In Patagonia," and Colin Thubron's "The Lost Heart of Asia," are on that shelf for me. Wallace's "The Unconquered" is now there as well.

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## Fiona Ingram says

The Unconquered by Scott Wallace is his account of an expedition into the deepest recesses of the Amazon, on assignment for National Geographic, to confirm the existence of 'The Arrow People' (or 'les flecheiros') so that their territory may be preserved and protected. Wallace joins Sydney Possuelo; a larger-than-life figure in the history of Brazil's endangered indigenous people, and a man who has devoted his life to saving and protecting the last of the uncontacted tribes.

'Uncontacted' is a bit of a misnomer because the remaining elusive tribes have fled from contact, diving deeper in the vast Amazon to escape what they know (from bitter experience) will happen: death from disease, despoliation of their territory, and the loss of their culture from 'contamination' by modern artifacts and an increasing dependency on them – this fate has befallen many tribes who now straddle the uncomfortable divide between totally indigenous and self-sufficient, and those who no longer can fend for themselves because they have forgotten the old ways of hunting, fishing, and making their own weapons. Brazil's past and indeed much of the South Americas is steeped in blood, both historically and in today's times. The devastation of the forests, the outright plundering of wildlife and natural resources of yesteryear has been tamed but not to the extent that uncontacted tribes can rest in peace and go about their daily lives. Ever watchful, often times violent (and with good cause), they find their existence is precarious. Amazingly, drug dealers have turned to the Amazon to find passages through; entrepreneurs (in the worst sense of the word) prey on Indians and their territory for precious woods, rare fish and animals, and gold, despite the best efforts of FUNAI (National Indian Foundation), the agency set up to protect the Indians' rights.

I found this book hard to read for several reasons. I thought I was prepared for the tragedy unfolding between the pages, having subscribed to newsletters such as Survival International, where a dedicated organisation highlights the plight of indigenous people worldwide. I wasn't prepared for the litany of bloodshed and tragedy that taints Brazil's history. The details of the horrors perpetrated by the architects of Brazil's rubber boom verges on genocide. Colonialism in its worst form still prevails, but this time there is no outside invader: the threat comes from the vilest of Brazil's population, those who don't care a damn about the trail of destruction in their wake. Indigenous Indians are considered a nuisance, and expendable at that. They battle death threats, being shot at, being evicted, being hunted by people who want what is theirs by right; the

invaders' reasoning being how can a tiny percent of the country's inhabitants (less than 1%) need so much land (11%)? We have learned very little from history when colonial invaders destroyed indigenous cultures outright and reduced their people to the horrors of dependency and/or death in the name of civilisation. People like Sydney Possuelo and the teams of dedicated 'rangers' deserve better support than they have received. It is an on-going, thankless task, and one that seems doomed unless the government gets its act together.

I also found the book hard going because the actual journey is hard going. From the idyllic start of a river-borne expedition, to the utterly hellish conditions whereby the team members had to toil up inclines and down slopes, drenched and slipping in mud, plagued by ferocious insects, under threat from dangerous wildlife, having to make camp each night by hacking their way through thick foliage, facing dwindling supplies; not to mention food theft, food hoarding, and the kind of weird mentality that takes over a group 'trapped' in an endless round of daily trudging. One is reminded of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in many ways as a grim madness prevails. Ironically, the team was only minutes away from civilization, had a plane been able to land, but months away from it by foot or boat.

At first I thought author Wallace was something of a moaner; he complained endlessly about everything. Then, as I wearily took up the book each night, I began to appreciate exactly what they went through, and the hideous discomforts associated with such a journey. Things such as satellite phones and the like are useless in the dense jungle, so increasingly they had to rely on themselves. Apart from the Indians amongst them who could cope, many did not. No wonder they emerged three months later wild-eyed, exhausted, and much thinner. I ultimately appreciated the mind-set and thoughts the author expressed; from saying a special prayer each night, to totally doubting they would ever emerge from the impenetrable jungle. There is so much more in the book than one review can ever tell. The most significant message for me was that we have reached a tipping point where there is very little left that has not been explored, exploited, and ultimately destroyed by civilization's need, greed, and depredation. Where will it end, one wonders? How much more can be stripped from our natural environment before we are left with the bleak, barren, infertile remnants of a once-beautiful planet? The inhospitable dystopian future so fondly depicted by movie makers and writers does not seem either far-fetched or very far away.

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## **Stan Caldwell says**

This is an outstanding book!! The author through his writing was able to take me on an expedition that included hardship, adventure, pathos, and danger only found in the Amazon. I felt the heat of the Amazon, the sting of the insects, and the privation that the author endured during his trek. The "Unconquered" also outlines the life's work and internal fire of Sydney Posseulo driven to protect the indigenous people from many advancing forces threatening their existence. Sydney Posseulo is the tireless and unrelenting Brazilian government leader heading the trek. His leadership techniques are detailed and sometimes questioned by the author. The trek included natives who were recruited locally for their indigenous ways and language skills. Another interesting aspect of the book is the wealth of background information and facts that are well researched and cited in the notes.

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## Jen Hirt says

I bought this as an ebook after 1. seeing the author on "The Daily Show" and 2. hearing him on NPR and 3. watching a nature documentary where some explorers flew over uncontacted tribes in the Amazon. Media saturation did its job on me. That said, this book is pretty much what one should expect from mainstream narrative nonfiction; it is a chronological, adventure-by-adventure account that is informative and educational and really interesting, but the descriptions are at times clichéd, redundant, or flat. Wallace, the author, is an experienced *National Geographic* journalist, which means that he is probably able to write an outstanding piece for the magazine, but when he expanded the article into this 500-page book, he made the mistakes that I've seen other journalists make -- he doesn't quite know how to handle the lengthy cast of characters (there are close to 40 people on the expedition, combined with substantial historic research that names every player in the preservation of the Amazon...that's a lot of names. The ebook version comes with a list of the people), nor does he know how best to handle tension and pacing in a narrative this long. For example, I always wanted more insight into the expedition leader, the Speedo-clad and seemingly bipolar Sydney Possuelo who seems to be mostly alone in his lifelong mission to document and protect the uncontacted tribes. There is a near-mutiny and near-disaster halfway through the expedition, largely due to Possuelo's abrasive nature, but Wallace documents this with the same level of energy with which he documents the many times he (Wallace) thought he heard something dangerous in the jungle and it turned out to be nothing. It's an error of emphasis -- everything that happens on the expedition has the same tone, the same urgency, and in the end I was skimming through it to get to the epilogue, which, in its condensed and wrap-it-up tone, is actually one of the more compelling parts of the book since we find out what happened to some of the key players.

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## Nicole says

The story Wallace tells is fascinating, and his journey through the rivers and rainforests of the Amazon is amazing and at times surreal. But this book needed a better editor-- Wallace is frequently and painfully repetitive, reiterating the same points about Indian land conservation and his own personal family worries again and again. This very long book should have been much shorter and more concise. Wallace also chooses to focus on some odd things and skim over others. I would have liked to know what the motivation was behind some of Possuelo's more puzzling actions, his mood swings, and why the crew was so angry with him by the end. Instead there are endless ponderings about what the Europeans originally conquering the land must have thought 500 years ago. Also, Wallace has had some amazing experiences as a journalist, but he's constantly worrying and fussing and comes across as kind of a nerd. At least, more of a nerd than you'd expect to sign on for a 3-month trek through the jungle. He shares a few too many anecdotes in which he 'could have possibly been in danger if something had actually happened'. Overall, there is an important message and an interesting story here, if you can mine it out from among all the extra information. In the end I did sympathize entirely with Wallace's desire for the slow and arduous journey to reach its conclusion, because I felt the same way.

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## Susan (aka Just My Op) says

nonfiction, 3.5 out of 5 stars

Child-killing anacondas, ants that have pincers so strong they are used as a substitute for stitches in wounds,



jaguars wanting a tasty snack, vampire bats – are these going to be smaller dangers than the Arrow People?

I'm sorry to say that I would never have had the courage to attempt the expedition that National Geographic author Scott Wallace undertook when he joined Sydney Possuelo's attempt to find and protect, but not meet, "the last uncontacted tribes" of the Amazon. The hardships and dangers are almost unimaginable to me. And to the degree that I can imagine them, that is where I want them to stay – in my mind only.

The Amazon basin is fascinating to me, perhaps because it is so different from my part of the world. Mr. Wallace did a great job of showing me the isolation of the country, the vulnerability of its inhabitants, both native and non-native, animal and human. Mr. Possuelo, an outspoken supporter of the indigenous tribes and critic of those who harm them, either intentionally or not, comes across as a bit of a Captain Queeg but even so, was not able to control the actions of some of his employees. Speaking of Possuelo's plans, the author writes "It was a grandiose vision, seeming to require an extraordinary combination of altruistic impulse and an ego of Amazonian proportions."

The author speaks of a caiman's "malicious smile," and while that seems anthropomorphic, I wouldn't blame the caiman if it were malicious. The cruelty to animals, often unnecessary even though the men needed to eat, was horrifying. "He worked his machete like a sushi chef, excising the upper and lower jaws. The mouthless fish continued to flip-flop around the bottom of the boat, as though powered by some demonic force that refused to die." And the monkeys – awful!

The writing was too drawn out for me, and some of what was intended as lyrical seemed just overwritten. "...exposed tree roots protruding hideously from its sandy declivity like the ganglia of some huge terrestrial jellyfish" and "his eyes were wet like the morning dew that dropped from the leaves." The author, I thought, included a little too much about himself. The information about his relationships back home didn't add to the story for me. There was too much repetition. There were some funny bits, including the men's habit of calling the author "Scotch" and later "Scotch White Dick."

I appreciate that the author recognized how different his life would be when he returned home compared to most of the men who were on the journey with him and the Indians left in the jungle. And I appreciate that there is no easy solution to protecting the lifestyles as well as the lives of the indigenous people in the Amazon basin. I learned from the book and I appreciated the story, just not always the way it was told.

The quotes were taken from an uncorrected proof and may have changed in the published edition. Thank you to the publisher for giving me a copy for review.

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## Tracy Towley says

I received *The Unconquered* courtesy of the Goodreads First Reads program, and I will admit that I was immediately biased against it. The purpose of the expedition on which Scott Wallace tagged along is to locate 'lost savages'. Supposedly not to contact them, but as early as the Prologue, Mr. Wallace admits his real desires:

*"Any direct contact with the Arrow People could be disastrous. The tribe had no immunity to the germs we carried. We were not doctors and carried few medications . . . Yet, who among us - yes even the purist Possuelo - didn't secretly hope for a "first contact" . . . An experience for all time, a tale to recount to wide-eyed children and grandchildren . . . We'd bedazzle the world with images of the Stone Age savages, appear on the Today show, become celebrity journalists.*

*Maybe I'd get a book contract."*

Well, looks like you got your fancy book contract! Though, quite frankly, I don't understand why. While I was very uncomfortable with these modern day men trying to mess with these tribespeople's way of life (and yes, I prefer terms like "tribespeople" or "indigenous people" versus the books use of "savages" and "Indians"), I also assumed that if the man had written a 450+ page book about it, something must have happened, right? Not so much.

Basically, a group of 30 or so men set off into the Amazon, hike and camp for several months, and then turn around and come back. About half of the book is just straight up infighting and gossip regarding the group of men who were stuck with each other for months. The other half of the book was split between somewhat interesting tidbits and histories of the various people who lived in the Amazon, and descriptions of the landscape.

Which brings up another point - Mr. Wallace is extremely heavy handed with his descriptions. If I were the type to skim, I certainly would have been skimming a lot of this book, as many of his descriptions went on for several paragraphs - and very unnecessarily. They read as though he wrote down a simple concept, oh, like, "The fog rolled in and surrounded our camp," and instead of adding a few descriptive words to help the reader visualize it, he grabbed a Thesaurus and just went to town. Something as simple as some fog could easily stretch for an entire page. If I didn't know better, I would have thought Mr. Wallace was being paid by the word.

Overall, I was personally glad to see that the outcome wasn't what they'd hoped for, but as a reader the story was a bit dull and inevitably pointless. The interesting parts could have been whittled down to 150 pages or so, and the book would have been greatly improved if the author had managed to be more concise.

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### **Sarah says**

This book is a real page-turner; an adventure that is riveting, brutal, and life-changing. It is the story of an egomaniacal Brazilian named Sidney Possuelo, who is on a crusade to protect the last independent peoples of the the earth: the wild Indian tribes who inhabit the deepest most impenetrable parts of the Amazon rain forest. Reading this book raises many philosophical questions regarding the heirachy of humanity in our world today and whether our high tech fast-paced modern lifestyle is truly an improvement over the hunter-gatherer way of life. This is an extremely thoughtful book that will change your view of the natural world forever. When the movie is released, it will be the first film produced which addresses the many complex environmental, social, and moral issues that Scott Wallace explores in *The Unconquered*.

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### **Apala says**

This book is about an expedition into the Amazon jungle to chart the territory of an yet-uncontacted Amazonian tribe. I really liked it for the subject matter because I love reading travel stories. Amazon, of course, has a special place in my imagination. I liked it even more for the author's style of writing. His style is very down-to-earth and un-judgmental. He does not idolize environmentalists/indigenous tribes, nor does he condemn anyone. He sticks to the facts, which makes it a really good read. But the writing is not dry because it is interspersed with his thoughts and with the intimate stories of interactions between the

expedition members. I loved the passages on the definition of contact and its pros and cons. And finally, the book is very informative. It not only describes the expedition, it also talks about the events that led to it. And these events stretch back hundreds of years. It is exciting to get context that dates back to the 1500s on events that are happening today. Yet it does not read like a history book, so beautifully is this all blended in.

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### **Jake Wavra says**

Only 5 percent of the book actually talked about the indigenous Indian tribe they were seeking to observe. Another 5 percent went towards stuff we already now about the destruction of natural wilderness. The final 90 percent was a personal blog about running around out in the Amazon forest. Overall, somewhat disappointing.

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