

twisted personality on the life of the ship. Bullitt is a sick man. The crew senses this; his superiors have long since flagged him as unfit for combat. As a result, his assignments are limited to such seemingly harmless berths as that which he enjoys on the *Ajax*.

"The Steel Cocoon" deals with Tyler Williams's gradual discovery of Bullitt's real nature, the strange chain of events that leads to a serious shipboard accident, Bullitt's crack-up, and Williams's eventual accession to the chief's job, although not his rating. In the background is the affectionately drawn crew of the *Ajax*, seen in relation to one another and to the central problem of the novel. It is a temptation to overdramatize these situations, but the author has wisely refrained from so doing. His characters are the result of his feeling for people rather than a manipulation of them, and although this gives the story a highly casual structure, it also makes the action extremely credible.

Readers who seek the meaning of war in deadly combat or who confuse drama with the big courtroom scenes, will do well to look elsewhere for their entertainment. But those who appreciate the truths of fiction in their most natural and unassuming poses will want to read this novel.

—DAVID DEMPSEY.

Criminal Record

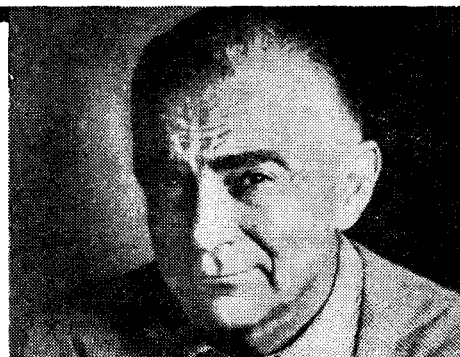
BIG TIME MYSTERIES. By Members of Mystery Writers of America. Edited by Brett Halliday. Dodd, Mead. \$3. Fifteen previously serialized shorts (1938-58) selected for teen-age readers; locations include United States, Canada, England, plus two space jobs. Readable collection (but why the hifalutin title?).

DEADLY PURPOSE. By Robert P. Hansen. Mill-Morrow. \$2.95. Neil Mallory, Korean veteran and conductor of West Coast fishing parties, on hook when his Enemy No. 1 is killed; hero narrator aims to outsmart cops (one of whom is real old meanie); brotherly unlove abounds; gal beaten up; recordings played; justice triumphs. Grab-bag.

DEATH OF THE PARTY. By Ruth Fenisong. Crime Club. \$2.95. Discovery of corpse in shiny new office of outcoming New York physician puts Matt Berthold, scientific hopeful, on spot; lady motorist's assistance a factor; hero's amatory involvements critical (and so are villain's). Complicated.

—SERGEANT CUFF.

Edgar Snow



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JOURNEY to the BEGINNING

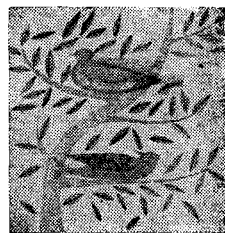
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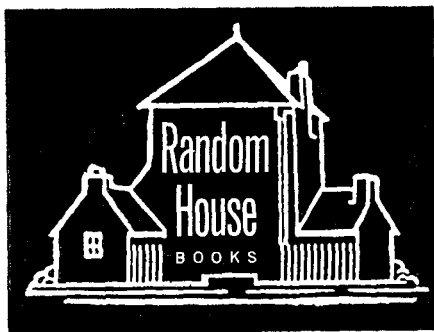
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ANCIENT PEOPLES

Expedition Damned by the Gods

"*The Lost World of the Kalahari*," by **Laurens van der Post** (Morrow. 279 pp. \$4), is about the vanishing Bushmen in Bechuanaland. Hassoldt Davis, who as a professional explorer knows this country "backwards and upwards and diagonally," reports on the book for us. His most recent title is "*World Without a Roof*."

By Hassoldt Davis

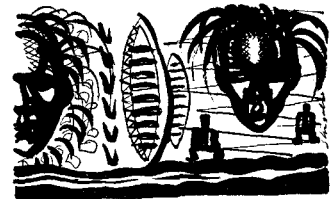
A WHILE ago the South African Laurens van der Post wrote a fascinating book, factual, called "Venture to the Interior," which had excellent reviews, including one of mine, and sold well. The important thing about it was its completely accurate knowledge of Africa and its delightful writing. This new book has less incident in it but is equally excitingly well written, and concerns a most curious subject, the near disappearance of what may be the world's oldest people, the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in Africa's Bechuanaland, a tiny people, apricot-colored, apparently half Negro and half Mongolian.

According to the author, they absorb, as the camel its humps, their big buttocks for nourishment in the lean seasons, and both men and women have other anatomical differences which may be mentioned in a book but not in a proper review.

They were, furthermore, the greatest cave painters of Africa, a Stone Age people of whom few still exist. The author organized a whopping expedition to find them, film them, and record their legends on tape, in the company of other Europeans, who turned out badly.

One was a vegetarian, which is unfortunate in Africa, and had to be shipped home; another an hysteric. He had as his guide a witch doctor, who boded no good—quite correctly—for when the expedition came to the Slippery Hills and finally discovered a small group of authentic Bushmen, all their cameras and recorders ceased to function. Now this can happen, believe it or not, and old explorers curse and marvel at it. The gods were against them, as the author seems sincerely to believe.

There were terrible swamps, where no water should be. Stampeding buffalo were no pleasure to live with.



The heat was terrible, the eland elusive. Mutiny of the natives was always imminent as they approached the sacred spots.

"For a long time we heard the normal talk of the camp behind us, and however the polished crocodile or larded hippo took to the creamy water round us, the ripples resounded like flute-song among the reeds."

This, though adjectival, I consider fairly good descriptive writing, as are Mr. van der Post's chapter heads, which may be vague but are certainly indicative: "The Shadow in Between," "The Spirits of the Slippery Hills," "The Song of the Rain."

The gods were against this expedition, as Laurens van der Post seems sincerely to believe. He trailed the shy and honest Bushmen, remembering that they had been followed by tribes of Griquas and Basutos in the past on their migrations south to Bechuanaland, and massacred in masses, so it was a delicate entente he had with them.

He followed "the wind singing through the hollow bones of the desert," and by dugout canoe up the Okarang River, while the Bushmen followed the honey-bird, which chirped at them and led them to the honey hives, which the little primitives would open for their favorite food and the birds would profit by on the leftovers.

Excellent botanists and chemists these Bushmen were. They brewed poison, fished in the sand for small animals, danced frenetically to bring on the rains, and, like cupids, shot three-inch arrows into the backsides of those they wanted to love them. It works infallibly.

Nothing in this book is as startling as the novels of old Rider Haggard, because it is the work of an ethnologist, a colonel, and a poet. To me it is a joy because of its simple, accurate, rhythmical, and imaginative tale-telling. Van der Post writes, as he must talk, in the soft, deep, clear, South African voice, unlike any other in English, and he writes with authority.