

Where Soldiers Fear to Tread



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“There is going to be a shooting here and it is a toss-up who is going to get the boy’ s first round. The soldier, about ten years old, is jamming the barrel of his gun hard against my driver’ s face, and unless the kid decides to go for me, the relief worker, my driver is going to get his head blown off.”

Where Soldiers Fear to Tread

John Burnett survived this ordeal and others during his service as a relief worker in Somalia. But many did not. In this gripping firsthand account, Burnett shares his experiences during the flood relief operations of 1997 to 1998. Ravaged by monsoons, starvation, and feuding warlords, Somalia continues to be one of the most dangerous places on earth. Both a personal story and a broader tale of war, the politics of aid, and the horrifying reality of child-soldiers, his chronicle represents the astonishing challenges faced by humanitarian workers across the globe.

There are currently thousands of civilian workers serving in over one hundred nations. Today, they are as likely to be killed in the line of duty as are trained soldiers. In the past five years alone, more UN aid workers have been killed than peacekeepers. When

Burnett joined the World Food Program, he was told their mission would be safe, their help welcomed—and they would be pulled out if bullets started to fly.

When he arrived in Somalia, Burnett found a nation rent by a decade of anarchy, a people wary of foreign intervention, and a discomfiting uncertainty that the UN would remember he’d been sent there at all.

From Burnett’s young Somali driver to the armed civilians, warlords, and colleagues he would never see again, this unforgettable memoir delves into the complexity of humanitarian missions and the wonder of everyday people who risk their lives to help others in places too dangerous to send soldiers.

“Where Soldiers Fear to Tread is a rousing adventure story and a troubling morality tale....If you’ve ever sent 20 bucks off to a relief organization, you owe it to yourself to read this book.” —Michael Maren, author of

The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity

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