



The Scramble for the Amazon and the "Lost Paradise" of Euclides da Cunha

Susanna B. Hecht

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The fortunes of the late nineteenth century's imperial and industrial powers depended on a single raw material—rubber—with only one source: the Amazon basin. And so began the scramble for the Amazon—a decades-long conflict that found Britain, France, Belgium, and the United States fighting with and against the new nations of Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil for the forest's riches. In the midst of this struggle, Euclides da Cunha, engineer, journalist, geographer, political theorist, and one of Brazil's most celebrated writers, led a survey expedition to the farthest reaches of the river, among the world's most valuable, dangerous, and little-known landscapes.

The Scramble for the Amazon tells the story of da Cunha's terrifying journey, the unfinished novel born from it, and the global strife that formed the backdrop for both. Haunted by his broken marriage, da Cunha trekked through a beautiful region thrown into chaos by guerrilla warfare, starving migrants, and native slavery. All the while, he worked on his masterpiece, a nationalist synthesis of geography, philosophy, biology, and journalism he named the *Lost Paradise*. Da Cunha intended his epic to unveil the Amazon's explorers, spies, natives, and brutal geopolitics, but, as Susanna B. Hecht recounts, he never completed it—his wife's lover shot him dead upon his return.

At once the biography of an extraordinary writer, a masterly chronicle of the social, political, and environmental history of the Amazon, and a superb translation of the remaining pieces of da Cunha's project, *The Scramble for the Amazon* is a work of thrilling intellectual ambition.



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