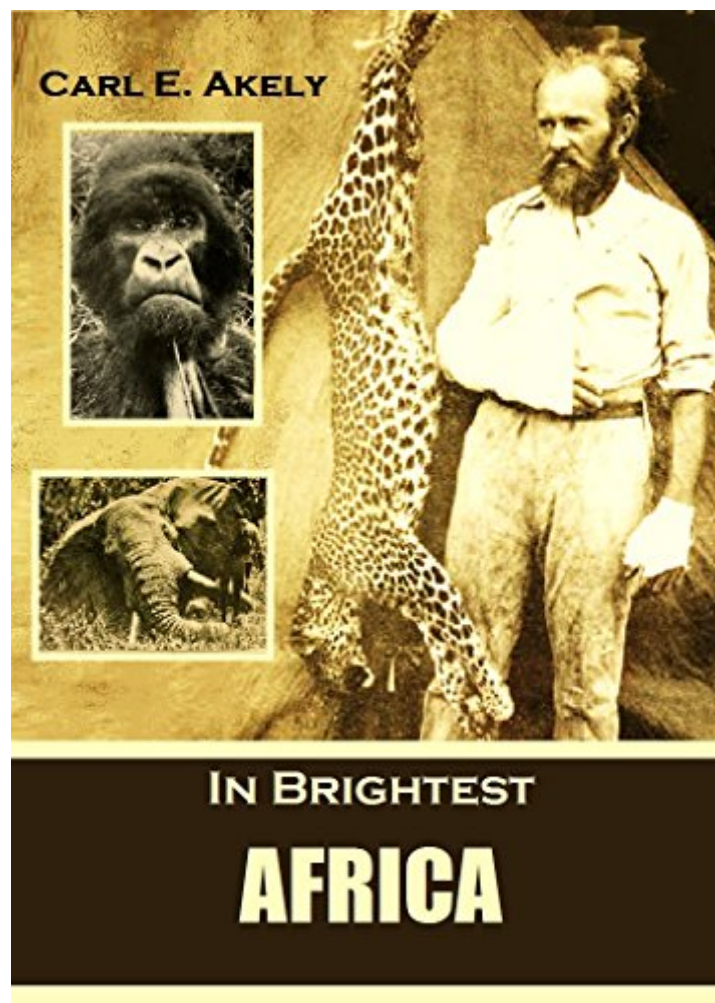


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In Brightest Africa



Synopsis

During the golden age of safaris in the early twentieth century, one man set out to preserve Africa's great beasts. This epic account tells the adventures of the brooding genius who revolutionized taxidermy and created the famed African Hall we visit today at New York's Museum of Natural History. The Gilded Age was drawing to a close, and with it came the realization that men may have hunted certain species into oblivion. Renowned taxidermist Carl Akeley joined the hunters rushing to Africa, where he risked death time and again as he stalked animals for his dioramas and hobnobbed with outsized personalities of the era such as Theodore Roosevelt. He survived severe hardships and attacks, even killing a leopard with his bare hands after it attacked him at close range. In 1921, eager to learn about gorillas to determine if killing them for museum dioramas was justified, Akeley led an expedition to Mt. Mikeno in the Virunga Mountains at the edge of the then Belgian Congo. At that time, gorillas were quite exotic, with very few even in zoos, and collecting such animals for educational museum exhibitions was not uncommon. In the process of "collecting" several mountain gorillas, Akeley's attitude was fundamentally changed and for the remainder of his life he worked for the establishment of a gorilla preserve in the Virungas. "In brightest Africa" he tells of his experiences there and especially of his last trip which was undertaken for the purpose of studying the gorilla, securing specimens for the museum, and arranging scenic backgrounds for the gorilla group. The book tells also of his training as a taxidermist and sculptor and its closing chapter describes his conception of a great African hall in the museum "to perpetuate the animal life, the native customs and the scenic beauties of Africa."

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Customer Reviews

Not an easy read due to the stilted language of the time. But the man was very brave and very talented - a true innovator in the art of taxidermy. I had read other accounts of his adventures and most notably his near-death encounters with elephants and leopards. Hearing the details from him was especially interesting. Glad I read it.

Great read, wish there were more.

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