



Luis Devin

# LA FORESTA TI HA

Storia di un'iniziazione

C A S T E L V E C C H I

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## The Forest Has You Story of an Initiation

C A S T E L V E C C H I Litedizioni

Central Africa. Jenghi, the powerful, mysterious spirit of the Forest, is about to kill the young boys of a pygmy camp during an ancient initiation rite. But for the first time ever, among the boys lying on the ground in a jungle clearing, their bodies painted and smeared with blood, there is a White man, an anthropology student who arrived here a few months earlier. This is the opening scene of a personal story told by Luis Devin, containing accounts of the secret rituals he underwent with the Baka Pygmies in order to be accepted as a member of their group and to allow him to share with them the secrets of the forest. But this rite of passage with its tests to overcome and its teachings, is also the underlying theme of a wider story which unfolds in a natural environment (the vast rain forest of Africa) and a cultural setting (the pygmy camps), both of which until quite recently had remained relatively intact. Now, unfortunately, this world is rapidly disappearing. Forming a backdrop to the main narrative we find vivid descriptions of food gathering expeditions, hunting with crossbow and arrow, propitiatory songs, creation of musical instruments from leaves and water; but other themes dealt with include deforestation, conflict with Bantu peoples, sorcery, alcoholism, prostitution, and the illegal trade in wildlife. Luis Devin's account of his unique first person experiences is written in a direct, absorbing style that succeeds in blending strong narrative, anthropology and the poetry of the unknown language of the Pygmies.

**A true story from the heart of Africa,  
an enthralling journey into an unknown world,  
among leaf huts, spirits of the forest  
and the initiation rites of the Baka Pygmies**



«It holds you close, it protects you. Slithering over your feet, flying into you, scratching your skin. Swimming around you when you step into water. Wherever you are, you hear its voice. Its smell. Its breath. Even if you wanted to, you cannot hide, because it has eyes everywhere. Little by little it transforms you. It swallows you up and begins to absorb you - it digests you.

The forest.

In the end you are part of its body, like the antelopes and the streams. The plants and the palm grubs. You have become an extension of it. You belong to the forest...»



«Here in the belly of the forest, where the elders have brought us to make us into men, we no longer have names, we have no purpose. We are disappearing, but at the same time we can take on any form. We are like water. We are clay just scooped out of a hole with hands and machete. We are molten metal waiting to be poured into a mould...»



In his first published work Luis Devin takes us on a long and enthralling journey into the world of the Pygmies, from their secret initiation rites to their hunts with crossbow and arrow, in order to discover one of the last hunter-gatherers on earth (the Baka of Cameroon) and the amazing environment they inhabit: the tropical rainforest of Africa.

AURELIO PECCEI AWARD

SELEZIONE PREMIO PRIMO ROMANZO  
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SÉLECTION PREMIERS ROMANS ITALIENS  
FESTIVAL DU PREMIER ROMAN DE CHAMBÉRY

2° PREMIO LETTERATURA E AMBIENTE  
FESTIVAL VALLE OLONA

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**LUIS DEVIN** (1975) has carried out anthropological field research in central Africa, where he lived with the Baka Pygmies and other Congo Basin hunter-gatherers. In 2000, while he was still an undergraduate student of anthropology he took part in the secret rites of male initiation of the Baka, in the Cameroon rainforest, and thus became accepted as a member of one of their clans. In the years that followed he continued his field

research while also completing a PhD in Ethnomusicology at the University of Turin and a diploma in Composition at the Conservatory of Music of Turin. His first book *La foresta ti ha. Storia di un'iniziazione* (The Forest Has You. Story of an Initiation), published in Italy by Castelvechi, is an account of his experience of initiation rites with the Baka Pygmies. An other result of his field experience is his new book *Ai confini del gusto. Viaggio straordinario fra i cibi più insoliti del pianeta* (At the Edge of Taste. An Extraordinary Journey Among the Most Unusual Foods of the Planet), published in Italy by Sonzogno. His work has been also published in literary reviews such as "Nuovi Argomenti" (Mondadori) and "Granta Italia online" (Rizzoli).



[www.luisdevin.com](http://www.luisdevin.com)



[www.pygmies.org](http://www.pygmies.org)



[www.facebook.com/LuisDevin](https://www.facebook.com/LuisDevin)

## PRESS REVIEW

*«Luis Devin's debut work reveals a great talent for storytelling and resonates with truth: it is a pantheistic prayer, a hymn to the rainforest and to its inhabitants, the Baka Pygmies.»*

CARLO GRANDE – **La Stampa, TuttoLibri**  
(national newspaper book supplement)

*«An incredible adventure, documenting the culture of a fast disappearing world.»*

GIANFRANCO CORINO – **Oasis**  
(nature and anthropology magazine)

*«In a single book we have an intensely private memoir, descriptions of a unique, distant culture, an exposé of developing Africa, adventure and a mystery. The very effective construction of the book, consisting of significant events in tribal life and the writer's personal epiphanies, makes for riveting reading.»*

SIMONE COLOMBO – **Argo** (literary journal)

*«The story of an adventure that no white man has ever lived.»*

MARIA SPEZIA – **Millionaire** (magazine)

*«Devin has lived among the Baka Pygmies of Cameroon and was able to be admitted into one of their clans, taking part in the secret rite of initiation with other young people of the community in the rainforest. A reportage from a vanishing world.»*

MICHELE GRAVINO – **National Geographic Italia**

*«Luis Devin gives a first person account of his experience of the initiation ritual he underwent with the Baka Pygmies. We realize that, in order to find their way home, some people must embark on a seemingly endless journey, in this case leading to Africa and its rainforests. It is not an experience for everyone, but, like Devin, they can give us some idea of what makes a man become a man: to die before dying.»*

**DARIO OLIVERO – La Repubblica** (national newspaper)

*«An absorbing and evocative experience. An anthropological exploration that has become sharing, friendship, love.»*

**LAURA STRADAROLI – Domus Aurea Magazine**

*«Devin's book combines factual reporting and an anthropologist's notes, reportage and exposé journalism, autobiography and scientific observation. But above all, it is the story of one man's journey of the heart, the discovery of his special place: arriving in the rainforest he has the feeling that he has come home. So much so that he eventually becomes a member of the tribe of Baka Pygmies, accepting their invitation to be "initiated" in a secret and bloody ceremony that marks the passage into adult life.»*

**MARIA GIULIA MINETTI – La Stampa** (national newspaper)

*«I was reminded of the nights and days I spent with the Pygmies: incredible and unrepeatable as my experience was, it was nothing in comparison with the story told by Luis Devin of his own personal experience. Those of us who admire and respect the surviving indigenous peoples of our planet could not wish for more from a book.»*

**FOLCO QUILICI** (documentary maker and writer)

*«Luis Devin was accepted as a member of the community of the Baka Pygmies in the Cameroon after undergoing a complete and authentic initiation rite. This is his personal account of what it means to become part of an age-old culture (diametrically opposed to our own), living in symbiosis with a natural world that is welcoming and fecund, yet also very cruel.»*

GIULIANO ALUFFI – **Il Venerdì** di Repubblica  
(national newspaper's weekly magazine)

*«The African rainforests are in danger. To combat this threat we need to get to know the forest in depth, and the real experts on these complex ecosystems are the Pygmies. Luis Devin, one of the very few westerners accepted into a tribe of Baka Pygmies, explains what we can learn from their relationship with the natural environment.»*

GUSTAVO GANDINI – **WWF Italia magazine** (Panda)

*«"La foresta ti ha" evokes a great number of complex feelings. It takes us on a journey into a world that is still unspoiled (not for very long perhaps) among people that we would actually love to meet in person, in real life. It transports us into another dimension, one we would love to find ourselves living in, to be able to experience the same intense feelings that the book communicates.»*

LORENZA MARI – **ArticoloTre** (online newspaper)

*«A writer of great talent, Devin's narrative is as direct and simple as it is beautifully written. He has the capacity to move his readers or to make them laugh, to maintain a breathless pace with fascinating anecdotes, conveying the magic of these places and of the Baka Pygmies. A perfect book, written with the clarity of a photograph, written from the heart. And it speaks to the heart of the reader. Like the voice of the rainforest.»*

Editorial board **QLibri** (literary portal)

*«Luis Devin recounts his amazing experience, penetrating into the indigenous community of the Baka Pygmy People so deeply to be admitted to its initiation rite.»*

VANNA PESCATORI – **La Stampa** (national newspaper)

*«The secrets of the rainforest. Initiation rituals. Concepts of nature and of community that we find difficult to imagine, absorbed as we are in our busy city lives. Yet there is still someone who is prepared to travel there, to see this world with his own eyes, to experience it firsthand... And if this someone is not just an anthropologist, but a writer? Well, then we really feel that we have seen the intense green of those leaves, heard the sounds of that language. As if we had actually been in the rainforest.»*

Editorial board **laFeltrinelli.it** (online book store)

*«An extraordinary adventure in a world that is rapidly changing. A story full of adventure, mystery, emotions, but also social protest.»*

SIMONA TRERÈ – **TuttoGreen** (green economy website)

*«Hunting expeditions, journeys through the rain forest, propitiatory chants and ceremonies of witchcraft: Luis Devin recounts his incredible experiences with the Pygmies, weaving together narrative, anthropology and lyrical description.»*

PIER MARIA MAZZOLA – **Africa** (magazine)



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by Luis Devín

# The Forest Has You

Story of an Initiation



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