



The Mosquito Coast

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In a breathtaking adventure story, the paranoid and brilliant inventor Allie Fox takes his family to live in the Honduran jungle, determined to build a civilization better than the one they've left. Fleeing from an America he sees as mired in materialism and conformity, he hopes to rediscover a purer life. But his utopian experiment takes a dark turn when his obsessions lead the family toward unimaginable danger.

The Mosquito Coast Details

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From Reader Review The Mosquito Coast for online ebook

Agnieszka says

Hell is - the other people .

But really ?

When everything's going wrong one may like Zorba tell *that's nothing to worry about* or like Scarlett *I'll think of it tomorrow* or jack everything in and set off to look for promise land. And so Allie does.

Allie Fox, handyman and gifted inventor, disappointed with America, disgusted with consumer, corporate or whatsoever lifestyle, out of the blue packs his family and set off to Honduran jungle.

But let's not be mislead by this idyllic picture. Neither America is so spoilt and devilish nor the brave new world that wonderful and flawless. The story revolves around the danger illusion of creating new life, endurance and human ability to adapt for new circumstances. Nature, its beauty and toughness at the same time clashes with the man who broke with life in the civilization jungle and went into the real one to make a new civilization.

The sense of threat and growing madness, stifling atmosphere, jungle with its luxuriance, dizzying heat. All that evokes a bit a choking atmosphere of *Heart of Darkness*. One can't admire Theroux's dexterity at depicting main protagonist. His personality shouts out from the very first page, his ideas are stunning, imagination has no bounds, arrogance has no limits.

While reading I was pissed off at what Allie Fox has done and what he hasn't. I was pissed off at his wife, unnamed – what's a bit significant, I guess, so passive and inert. I was pissed off at all the sufferings Allie brought on his family. But finally I felt only relief. And when everything's finished I couldn't even say: what a beautiful catastrophe it was.

Christine Boyer says

Okay, I'm quitting. So keep that in mind with regard to my 1 star rating. I got half way through and this was the last section I read: "Then the darkness, which was like fathoms of ink, softened, became finely gray, and, without revealing anything more of the sea, turned to powder. All around us the powdery dawn thickened, until, growing coarser and ashy, in a sunrise without sun, it threw us glimpses of the soapy sea and the shoreline and the jungle heaped like black rags of kelp." OMG! I can't take it anymore! This was just describing the teenage son waking to find his father steering the boat in the morning.

Even if there hadn't been this constant over description of small scenes, it was just not the story for me. It didn't work at all. I could never figure out the father character - if he was a jokester or was I supposed to think he was a villain? Maybe I just didn't like the premise. I've always disliked that whole America's-a-capitalist-shithole-place-to-live story line for a book or movie. The whole thing was very masculine, as well.

Tinkering, inventing, engines, weird father-son conversations that, as a woman, I couldn't relate to at all. The wife character was useless - at least up to this halfway point that I read.

Oddly enough, I think I want to watch the movie now (with Harrison Ford). The only thing that kept me reading was that I heard there was a surprising & tragic end. So maybe I can get through the rest of the story quickly with the 1 1/2 hour movie.

Andrew Smith says

It's a hard book to categorise, this one: coming-of-age yarn, adventure story, literary fiction? Well, in truth, all of the above. I'd read one of the author's renowned travel books (which I thoroughly enjoyed) but this was my first experience of his fiction. And a pretty good experience it turned out to be.

Allie Fox is an engineer, an inventor and a bombastic know-it-all. Fed up with America – it's fast food, television, religion and pretty much everything else – he surprises his family one day by packing up the car and decamping, with them in tow, to the jungles of Honduras. A bit drastic? Well not for Allie! He'd already demonstrated that (to his own satisfaction at least) he knew more than anyone else about just about everything, so this was his opportunity to identify a new audience and some virgin territory in which to build his ideal world.

In truth, the first section of the book – pre the moonlight flit – was high octane stuff. Allie, despite his downsides, did actually demonstrate that he was quite a clever bloke and he did seem to have some good ideas and decent engineering skills. His encounters with just about everyone he came across, though, ended with him ranting about just how rubbish everything he'd not himself invented was. It was, at times, hilarious.

Once the family – Allie, his wife and four children - had reached deepest jungle territory the tempo dropped and, for me, the book went into a temporary lull. The energy had gone out of the story and it was noticeable that it only picked up whenever Allie was centre page.

Thankfully, his was only temporary. The final section of the book became a wild adventure as the family's future was thrown into the balance and they were forced to confront the confirmation that Allie was not always right.

The tale is narrated by Charlie, the eldest son. Through his initially naïve, teenage eyes we witness these events unfolding and bear witness to his inner thoughts. It's all very cleverly done. We see Charlie grow up before our eyes as he gradually discovers the truth about his domineering father and is faced with important decisions which could decide the ultimate fate of the family.

Some great characters are introduced along the way – I particularly loved Mr Haddy – and it's by and large a very entertaining romp. Though, that's probably not doing it justice. It's more accurately a fine work of fiction by a writer who obviously has more than one string to his bow. If you've yet to experience the power and dexterity of Theroux's prose than I'd urge you to grab one of his book and give it a try. Whether you choose his fact or his fiction, I'd wager you'll be amused and charmed by his ability to put words on a page.

Joe Valdez says

My introduction to the fiction of Paul Theroux is *The Mosquito Coast* and readers in search of the Great American Novel would be hard pressed to find a more thrilling definition of the term. Not that there haven't been novels of high literary merit set in mundane locations, but the Great American Novel takes its characters on a great journey--physically, spiritually, often both--and says something definitive about the U.S.A. in the era in which it is set. Published in 1982, this novel achieves that, introducing an ingenious but self-destructive man whose obsessions drag his family off the map, where he's determined to keep gambling on his grandiose ideas until he has nothing left to lose.

The story is narrated by Charlie Fox, a fourteen-year-old who lives with his family outside of Hatfield, Massachusetts. Kept out of school with his younger siblings Jerry and twins April & Clover, Charlie spends his time with Father, Allie Fox, an inventor ("Nine patents," he liked to say, "Six pending.") who dropped out of Harvard to get what he considered a real education. Allie works for an asparagus farmer named Tiny Polski fixing things and inventing others, like a scale model box that generates ice from enriched ammonia and high-pressure hydrogen without any electricity or gas. Father dubs his invention Fat Boy.

Polski refers to Fat Boy as a "contraption" and seeing no application for it on his farm, is largely unimpressed. Father gives his working model to the migrant workers who live on the farm and who the inventor refers to with both admiration and derision as "the savages." What Allie Fox most likes to do other than take things apart is rant: free trade, education, pollution, crime, energy, nutrition, entertainment (the Foxes do not own a TV), etc. A trip to a hardware store in Northampton is enough to push him past the boiling point. He is far from optimistic about the direction the country is headed.

I'm the last man! *That had been Father's frequent yell.*

It was painful, back in my bed, in the dark unlocked house, not dreaming but thinking. I felt small and shrunken. Father, who believed there was going to be a war in America, had prepared me for his death. All winter, he had been saying, "It's coming--something terrible is going to happen here." He was restless and talkative. He said the signs were everywhere. In the high prices, the bad tempers, the gut worry. In the stupidity and greed of people, and in the hoggish fatness of them. Bloody crimes were being committed in cities, and criminals went unpunished. It was not going to be an ordinary war, he said, but rather a war in which no side was entirely innocent.

"Fat fools will be fighting skinny criminals," he said. "You'll hate one and be scared of the other. It'll be national brain damage. Who's left to trust?"

Without telling Charlie what's going on, Father and his compassionate but obedient wife Mother take the children to Springfield to purchase tents, canteens, cotton cloth, needles and thread, mosquito netting, fifty pounds of hybrid seeds. The field workers pay Father a visit, conferring over a map and giving him a machete as a gift. Leaving everything except for the camping equipment and most of Father's tools, they drive to Baltimore and board a cargo vessel. Charlie meets a family of missionaries, whose hip daughter Emily Spellgood takes a liking to him, and earns the confidence of Captain Smalls.

Charlie is embarrassed by his father's humiliation of those he considers himself superior to. The boy's encounters with Emily remind him just how abnormal the Foxes are and he's glad they're headed where no one will see him: Mosquitia, the virgin jungle of Honduras. Just as Polski tried to warn Charlie about his dad ("Your father's the most obnoxious man I've ever met," Polski said. "He is the worst kind of pain in the neck-")

-a know-it-all who's sometimes vight.") the captain advises Charlie that while the Indians live an easy life, for the Foxes, it will be like living in a zoo where the animals are free and he's the one in a cage.

Upon landing in La Ceiba, Charlie is enchanted by the stillness of the port, but seeing it in the harsh daylight, finds it hot and stinking and chaotic. Father, a fluent Spanish speaker, acquits himself wonderfully with strangers he wants to impress, such as a drunken German who for a sum of four hundred dollars, sells Allie his one-acre farm someplace up the Aguan River known as Jeronimo. Passage is booked on a launch piloted by Mr. Haddy, a mariner who like everyone else, buckles under the willpower of Charlie's father, letting him steer the boat all the way up the river to their new home.

Jeronimo reminded me of one time when we were in Massachusetts, and fishing. Father pointed to a small black stump and said, "That's the state line there." I looked at this rotten stump--the state line! Jeronimo was like that. We had to be told what it was. We would not have taken it for a town. It had a huge tree, a trunk-pillar propping up a blimp of leafy branches with tiny jays in it. It was a guanacaste, and under it was a half-acre of shade. The remnants of Weerwilly's shack and his failure were still there, looking sad and accidental. But these leftover ruins only made Jeronimo seem wilder this wet afternoon.

Along with Mr. Haddy, Father wins over a dozen Zambu Indians who live in the area, most of whom speak English, including a family squatting in Weerwilly's shack who Father asks to stay, putting them to work along with his family. His first invention is a paddle wheel on the river that moves water through pipes into a bathhouse, where the settlement can wash clothes, bathe and boil water. The natives remain dubious about the contraption, noting that water is readily available during the rainy season and can be fetched from the river with a bucket any time. Father moves ahead. Land is cleared, waterproof bamboo huts built and miracle seeds planted.

Work begins on a silo. Though Charlie recognizes what it is, Father keeps everyone else in suspense until a full scale version of Fat Boy delivers ice to the jungle. Everything Allie Fox has promised--food, water, shelter--is achieved and other than an unannounced visit from a missionary who Father chases away, no one bothers them. Mother is open to learning the Zambu ways for skinning and smoking meat or hanging peppers and the children build a hidden campsite with access to indigenous water and food, but Father becomes obsessed with spurring innovation and self-sufficiency among Indians of the region.

After failing to find an Indian settlement untouched by the white man along the river, Allie sets off with his gift of ice over the mountains, despite warnings from the Zambu that *"They always troubles there. Contrabanders. Shouljers. Feefs. People from Nicaragua way."* Taking Charlie and Jerry, they find an Indian settlement which appears to have three English speaking slaves. Father tells the captured men about Jeronimo and compels them to slip away. When the men show up, armed with rifles, Allie realizes that it was the Indians who were being held prisoner by the soldiers, who decide to stay in Jeronimo indefinitely. Allie finds this intrusion unacceptable.

The Mosquito Coast pushes its chips onto the table to tell an adventure story with ideas just as big as the trek the characters undertake. At the time of its publication, Allie Fox may have seemed like an aberration, that uncle whose rants about society are endured once a year at Thanksgiving. Thanks to social media, his type seem like they're everywhere today, white men disparaging everything from government to free trade to immigration to breakfast cereal to television. Rather than parroting talk radio, Fox is able to think for himself, and demonstrate that his solutions are right nine times out of ten. But when he's wrong, he's really, really wrong.

Theroux appeals to that pioneer in us who suspects something is rotten in America and fantasizes about

getting out of here, to take on virgin nature with our ingenuity and live free. Fox's inventions--with names like Thunder Box or Atom-smasher--are the creation of a wily engineer yet are described with the language of a natural storyteller. I would have never thought there were forty different ways to beautifully and vividly describe a dirt poor country like Honduras, but Theroux does it, tickling our imaginations with his prose like National Geographic does with their color photographs as he describes the life of a jungle settler.

It was not an easy life these first weeks in Jeronimo. It was no coconut kingdom of free food and grass huts and sunny days, under the bam, under the boo. Wilderness was ugly and unusable, and where were the dangerous animals? There was something stubborn about jungle trees, the way they crowded each other and gave us no shade. I saw cruelty in the hanging vines and selfishness in their root systems. This was work, and more work, and a routine that took up every daylight hour. On the Unicorn and in La Ceiba, and even in Hatfield, we had done pretty much what we pleased. Father had left us alone and gone about his own business. Usually I had helped him, but sometimes not. Here, things were different.

One aspect of the novel that comes up short for me is that Allie Fox overpowers every other character in the story. He's a cue ball that strikes all the other balls on the table, moving them but only in relation to him. I anticipated Charlie asserting himself more and mounting a battle of wills against his father as his decision making becomes more questionable, but this expectation was entirely of my own design and unfair to criticize the author for. *The Mosquito Coast* may be best appreciated as a journal written by Charlie and documenting how, like America's action in Vietnam, Americans enter the jungle with too many resources, too many ideas and little by little, go insane.

Theroux's novel served as the source material for an overlooked movie released in 1986 starring Harrison Ford as Allie Fox, Helen Mirren as Mother and River Phoenix as Charlie Fox. Audiences were not sold on Ford playing something of a bad guy in a family tragedy and *The Mosquito Coast* was a commercial failure. Working with Peter Weir, the Australian filmmaker who'd directed Ford in *Witness* and has never made a bad movie, Ford is Allie Fox and gives a riveting performance completely against his virtuous type. The movie is definitely worth a look.

Lyn Fuchs says

Setting off on a big international trip, I asked an eighty-year-old man with the reputation of being a wise counselor for his input on my destination options. I was obsessing over this decision. He responded, "The place doesn't matter, because wherever you go, there you'll be." He was hinting at the annoying truth that my character, not places or circumstances, was hindering my spiritual journey. He was absolutely right.

Paul Theroux wrote a classic book on heading for parts remote with spiritual as well as physical baggage. In *The Mosquito Coast*, Allie Fox leaves home for a barely-mapped corner of Honduras. He has the survival skill of a foot fungus. Yet, he's a cruel bully married to a weak conflict-avoider. Thus, wherever they go, there they be.

Harrison Ford and River Phoenix did a film version, but the novel is better. Harrison does a masterful job portraying a guy who is too smart and independent for the world's bullshit. He makes the character relatable, despite the demonic scourge Allie Fox is to his family.

Watching the sought-after Garden of Eden descend into the jungle from hell is rather shocking. It seems like humanity has met the enemy, and it is us. I highly recommend this work for all travel lovers - not to promote

chickening out and staying home but getting out and growing up. Travel demands character but also instills it in those who are willing to learn. You actually can hit the road and leave it all behind - except yourself.

Manny says

I do research in spoken language technology, building software that people can talk to. Right now, our main project is an app that lets beginning language students practice their speaking skills; if you're interested, you can find out more here. We have been working on it for about three and half years, and so far we don't really know if it's a good idea or not. We get mixed messages from the people who have tried it out. Some of them are enthusiastic and say it's really improved their French or Japanese. Others complain about this and that: not fast enough, speech recognition isn't sufficiently reliable, doesn't let you practice enough different things. We continue with it, because we believe in the basic concept, but it's quite possible we're just going down a dead end.

I read this book about 25 years ago, when I was starting out in this field, and it's a frightening parable for anyone who works with new technology. Ally Fox is a gifted engineer who completely lacks any kind of common sense. He conceives an insane plan to move his family to Honduras and set up house in the jungle. He will build an enormous refrigerator and make large quantities of ice. The near-savage inhabitants of the area have never seen ice. For no particular reason, Fox is convinced that they will be amazed and thrilled by it.

They locate a good spot to pitch camp, they build their house and their monster refrigerator, but no one comes asking for ice. Fox decides he has to go to the clients. He wraps up some big blocks of ice, insulating them as well as he can, and sets off to find his user base.

If you're in the tech innovation business yourself, you will probably find this book fascinating. But be warned that it could also give you nightmares.

Robert says

I have to say that I didn't find anything at all funny about the book. It was a bleak, bleak tale, a heart of darkness, a descent into madness, a story of horrific hypocrisy and abuse. It features an amazingly weak female character, a man who abuses his own children to the point where his two sons openly fantasize about killing him (and for good reason!) even as they are overwhelmed by his personal charisma and energy.

Truthfully, I didn't like the book. I'll never read it again. I do, however, think it is worth reading once (as philosophy) and my four star rating reflects that.

The rest of this review will contain SPOILERS so stop reading here or whenever you decide to read/not read it for yourself.

Alli Fox is your fairly normal trans-neurotic genius. A Harvard dropout and a fairly smart guy (constantly described as a "genius" by his eldest son, who tells the story in first person), he's a hands-on Edisonian inventor -- he tinkers with pipes and machines and makes them work. He has dropped out of society itself.

He begins the story working as a handiman/mr-fixit for a farmer who raises asparagus.

The farmer raises LOTS of asparagus and harvests it with probably illegal migrant farm workers from the Honduras. He stores the harvest in a refrigerated warehouse to sell later in the season when the price is higher. His warehouse is full, and he asks Alli to turn one of his barns into a refrigerated storage unit so he can make even more money.

Alli has just "invented" an anhydrous ammonia refrigerator (see "Absorption Refrigerator" on Wikipedia) -- a machine that "turns fire into ice" as it runs on heat alone without a motor. He tries to sell the farmer on having him build one onto his barn, add a chicken run on the other side, and use the methane produced by fermenting the chicken manure to both heat the chicken coop and cool his asparagus storage (even as he harangues the farmer for his "wickedness" in not selling his asparagus cheaply instead of storing it for a higher price later).

The farmer, alas, just wants a plain old refrigerator run by plain old electricity. Alli -- well advanced on the road to madness already, but "sane" enough to make a string of barbed comments on the various evils of modern consumerist America as he encounters them at every turn, finally decides enough is enough. America is about to implode in war and destruction as the insanity of modern consumerism and its various political and military adventures catch up with it. So he goes shopping for things he needs to start life anew in the wilderness, packs up his family in his pickup truck ("mother", Charlie (the narrator), and his brother and two sisters) and drives away from the shack that was their house.

They drive to a banana boat in Baltimore, he gives away his truck, and they are off to the Honduras. On the boat Alli manages to offend nearly everybody -- he is such an arrogant butt-head, full of self-righteous zeal -- and takes a perverse joy in forcing Charlie to perform dangerous, life-risking pointless tasks. He also gets to demonstrate his "genius", outdoing the missionary also on the boat in scripture, fixing a critical pump that has broken and (perhaps) saving the ship thereby in a storm; he's "better than everybody", always right, never has a moment of self-doubt or modesty. And of course his wife just meekly follows along, full of love for him, while he drags the family to Honduras with literally little more than the clothes on their backs and a tiny bundle of tools and supplies.

And money (probably from patent royalties, as it is otherwise difficult to see where and how he would have any money). They arrive and he promptly buys a mountain of pipes and metal scrap, passage on a riverboat, and a "town" that belongs to a drunk in the coastal city they land in. His charisma and ability seem to lift them through difficulties that would paralyze a lesser man, or more likely get their head beaten in (the punishment for being a butt-head in much of the world, after all). In a matter of days, they take off in the middle of the rainy season for their new Eden.

There they find an Eden that is being reswallowed by a relentless jungle -- they aren't the first, or the second, group to come to this place to try to make a home. The book then enters its most positive phase. Alli is enthralled. He has a vision of a paradise, one with a high level of comfort (as it turns out, he DOES like his comfort) supported by his personal brand of technology. Drafting the local natives by sheer force of will (he immediately becomes "fadder" to them all) he directs them as they build pumps, flushable toilets, houses on stilts, gardens filled with the most modern of US hybrid vegetables, using the tools he has brought with him.

Note well the thread of hypocrisy here -- he is parodying the Swiss Family Robinson; he arrives on his distant shore far from naked. He has his tools (and they are serious tools, including a welder), his knowledge, his will, and tons of pipes and metal, augmented by things they uncover as they slash the forest back from what was once a number of houses in a small community. Still, there is no denying it -- they work hard, but

he and his family and the co-opted natives are happy, and even prosperous by his standards.

He then builds his dream. Using local mahogany and piping, he builds the "Fat Boy", an enormous anhydrous ammonia and hydrogen icebox. These two substances, note well, are **TREMENDOUSLY** dangerous -- poisonous and explosive both -- and he risks everybody's life without asking by loading it up with the chemicals (brought in on barge at again one presumes considerable expense) while they sleep nearby, unprotected. Once the unit is sealed it is safe enough, and he lights a small fire in its firebox and shortly thereafter produces his miracle -- ice, in the middle of the Honduras jungle, a thing that the natives have never seen.

His obsession with his own cleverness and brilliance grows ever wider with this demonstrated ability to master even the jungle and create "green" technology. But he is unwilling to simply live, or live simply -- he embarks on a series of insane journeys to neighboring native tribes and villages, taking them a hunk of ice for no apparent reason save self-aggrandizement. In the second or third of these, he encounters trouble -- a village with three white men apparently being kept as slaves. The ice he was taking them melted en route, and they are asked to leave.

This, as it turns out, is the end of paradise. The men are not slaves, they are the slavers. They are armed and force the natives to wait on them. Alli (thinking that they are the captives) has invited them repeatedly to come down to his place and run away from captivity. And so they come, guns in hand, and announce that they are going to move right in.

It is now the dry season, and Alli (who is unarmed) tries to convince them to leave, that they have termites, that there is no water, that they have little food. He literally tears down their houses so that there is nothing attractive, spreading manure to make everything stink. To no avail -- the keen eyes of the men make it clear that these are much better slaves, capable of making ice in the jungle. In a desperate move, Alli invites them to stay in the mahogany-walled cooler box of the Fat Boy, which is by chance idle and off when they arrive.

That night he locks them in, and starts a fire in the firebox. As it burns and the pipes within turn so cold they can strip off your skin if you touch them, the men realize that they are about to freeze to death in the tropics and try to get out. They cannot, and start to fire their guns at and through the walls to get out. This doesn't work either, and they turn their shots to the machinery.

The Fat Man, it should be noted, is the name of the Nagasaki plutonium bomb. The Fat Boy in the jungle explodes in a toxic cloud of gas, killing not only the three men but all the animals, polluting the settlement and the river itself, creating a hell where a before there was only Alli's privately made purgatory.

Alli now goes fully mad. They walk away this time with a single machete and the clothes on their backs and take a canoe downriver to start again on the coast. Alli has no idea how the weather works and builds on the shoreline of a vanishing lagoon in the dry season, even though the natives tell him he's crazy to do so. He reproaches himself for his lack of "purity" in using toxic materials and technology in his first effort, even as he becomes obsessed with repairing an outboard motor that is uncovered by the falling waters. The rains come, their crops fail in the flood, and their house (made with a waterproof bottom) becomes a boat.

At this point his two sons are openly fantasizing about killing him. They are nearly naked, lice ridden, starving, and all Alli can think of is to drag them farther into the jungle to start a third time, telling them that America is in ruins and even the coastal cities have fallen. He risks the lives of his sons repeatedly, and openly threatens to abandon or kill them if they question his vision. Again, his wife merely stands by, acquiescing in his madness.

Up river they encounter a miracle. The mission occupied by the missionaries they met on the boat, with electricity, TV, video games, food, music, clothing, and comfort. To Alli it is the devil made flesh, and he burns the mission's plane and generator and runs back to his boat to flee.

His sons finally take action. They tie him in a chain, and get their mother in the canoe with the girls as the mission starts shooting at the "communist insurgents" they presume are attacking. Alli takes a well-deserved bullet that merely paralyzes him for a horrific ending a short while later.

Not a FUN story at all. Worth one read.

rgb

Clif Hostetler says

This is a popular book from the early 1980's that I never got around to reading until now. It's the first book by Paul Theroux that I've read. It's my understanding that he first became famous for his travelogue "The Great Railway Bazaar (1975)." He's written a number of novels since and most (maybe all) are fictionalized travelogues by having their characters end up in some exotic and isolated corner of the world. That's certainly the case with this book.

This story evolves around a man who is so fed up with what he perceives as deteriorating quality of life in the United States that he takes his family (wife and four children) to the most isolated place he knows of, the Mosquito Coast on the east coast of Honduras. Once there he goes up river trying to find a place untouched by civilization. He has the gift of having no doubt that he always right. No matter what happens, he insists--and apparently believes it himself--that he's not surprised because he was expecting it all along.

He sets up a machine to make ice from heat energy of fire and expects the natives to be grateful. The results are mixed and from there it gets worse. He hates the missionaries who he believes are contaminating the natives with civilization. But he thinks his ice machine is a good idea of course.

The story is told in first person by the man's son. As the story progresses it becomes obvious that his father is out of touch with reality (i.e crazy). Things get tense toward the end of the book.

The book provides an entertaining way to learn about the geography of the up-river areas of the Mosquito Coast of Honduras.

The following is a review from PageADay Book Lover's Calendar for October 19, 2017:

A paranoid inventor and dark genius, Allie Fox decides to leave civilization behind and move his family to the jungle of Honduras to live in a shack. The family is horrified by their new surroundings, but Allie embraces the opportunity—exercising control over everyone around him. When his control starts to slip, darkness descends, and his family is put in grave danger. A riveting and beautifully written adventure tale for fans of Heart of Darkness, Robinson Crusoe, and Lord of the Flies.

THE MOSQUITO COAST, by Paul Theroux (1982; Houghton Mifflin, 2015)

Chris Gager says

This will be my third or fourth Paul Theroux read, plus short stories in The New Yorker. I wouldn't be reading it if I didn't like his writing(duh ...). I first heard of this book when the movie came out. Didn't see it, but it helps to imagine Harrison Ford embodying Allie Fox, world's biggest a-hole. I tried to think of anyone I'd ever met who was so thoroughly and obviously narcissistic, but couldn't. Allie's like that guy/stranger in a bar that overhears your conversation and busts in with some weird ranting about Martians in Kansas. So ... there IS the credibility factor to consider, but otherwise it's pretty good so far.

- There's a nasty scene here right out of "Silence of the Lambs" - Hannibal Lecter stuff. UGH! Paul Theroux never shies away from the sick and twisted.

'Bout halfway through after last night as Allie and his ragged band of followers(his family) are embarked on their/his big adventure in the Honduran jungle. Allie is a force of nature and much easier to take when he's focused on something positive. He is improving the lives of the amusingly/distressingly hapless locals and creating a world he can live in "happily." Of course, we know that won't last, because he's crazy, but for now it seems to be OK. And ... Paul Theroux is a fine writer who makes the whole thing fun to be involved in. I think this is my third of his novels, and they all have tropical settings: 'Saint Jack"(Singapore - been there), "Hotel Honolulu"(been there) and, in this book, Central America(haven't been there). The settings are described in a way that reminds me of Denis Johnson's "The Stars at Noon"(set in Nicaragua).

- "squittered," "carkles," "yattered"

- "now windows" s.b. "no windows" - always with the misprints!

Up until last night the book has been about Allie's triumphs in imposing his will, creativity and energy in and on the bush of the Honduran Mosquito Coast. Last night brought about the beginning of the endgame, which will be considerably grimmer, I do believe. Much of this story is about young Charlie's gradual awakening to the awfulness of his father, about which he was given warning by Mr. Polski. I can sympathize with Charlie. My father was no achiever, but like Allie/Father, he was a fountain of bullshit, and relentlessly self-absorbed. A diagnosis of NPD(Narcissistic Personality Disorder) seems appropriate for Allie, but I assume that this book is about more than just that. The Robinson Crusoe syndrome also comes into play, and likely for some implied criticism as well. And, I think it's safe to say that Paul Theroux is no fan of proselytizing Bible squeezers either.

- the kids are going "Lord of the Flies" - do you think those oft-mentioned man-traps are going to come into play? Of course you do ...

- Father is a bully, a man with no compassion or real love for his family - they are just his follower/slaves. On his ill-fated mountain trek, he taunts the suffering Jerry(a little kid) and displays the severe limits of his emotional resiliency in the face of adversity. Can't handle the downside=typical narcissist. His behavior in the mountain village shows even more cluelessness. Doesn't recognize danger ... ALMOST becomes a flat out liar in Charlie's face, but relents later.

Finished last night in the midst of trauma and survival, as most readers probably assumed it would. No spoilers from me! So ... what's this book about? Is it all a political allegory? Could be ... One thing it's about for sure is Paul Theroux's ongoing excellence at taking us to the Honduran bush. Beautiful and threatening at the same time. How "believable" is the story? Well ... maybe not that much, but it was a tense and

worthwhile ride regardless. My own reaction at the end was curious. Even though my own father story was pretty dreadful, and even though I was SO angry and fed up with Allie a number of times and wanted him to STFU!, I felt some sympathy for him at the end - a tortured soul. Other reviewers noted the humor in the book, but for me the awfulness of Allie over-rode any lightness the author put in. Too close to home for me I guess. More notes ...

- Another book connection" "A Perfect Spy," John Le Carre's fictionalized memoir of his own narcissist-father. "Heart of Darkness" is also an obvious connection.
- This is kind of a post-apocalypse story w/o the apocalypse. One wonders about the believability of the notion that Allie convinces his family that the United States has been destroyed. Is he lying to them deliberately to control them or does he actually believe it? Seems like I missed the part where that delusion begins to take hold.
- The character of the mother comes into question. Is she believable? In most of the story she's almost totally in the background. Why marry such a nutburger in the first place, and why allow him to consistently endanger his children? Is that part of the allegory? The enabling of charismatic tyranny?
- The chaotic scene at the church compound in Wampu ... why didn't Emily tell her father who was on the boat in the river once the excitement started? 'Course, she was kind of a knucklehead ...
- Anyway, this book's a solid 4* for nerve-wracking entertainment and great writing. Some G'reads reviewers resisted the ripe jungle(and more) descriptions and I can see their point. Mostly, however, I liked it.

ArturoBelano says

" ülkenin uyu?turucu müptelas?, evlerinin kap?lar?n? kilitleyen, ülserli, müsrif çapulculardan, cani milyonerlerden ve ahlakç? gammazlardan olu?an bir tehlike bölgesi haline geldi?ini anlatt?. Ya ?u okullar?n durumu? Hele de politikac?lar. Patlak bir lasti?i de?i?tirebilecek veya on ??nav çekebilecek tek bir Harvard mezunu bulamazd?n. New York City'de kedi köpek mamas?yla karn?n? doyuran, bozuk para için adam öldürecek insanlar vard?. Bu normal miydi ?imdi? Peki de?ilse, neden kimse sesini ç?karm?yordu?"

Bu kitap " Osurukçu" Allie Fox, Harvard ve medeniyet kaç?n? mucidimizin e?i ve dört çocu?u ile birlikte Amerika ve temsil etti?i her ?eyden kaç???n hikayesi. Plastik ürün, diet cola, fast food g?da, geri zekal? yet?tirme merkezi okullar ve i?levsiz teknolojisile Amerika y?k?m?n e?i?indedir. Ciklet ve vaizlerin yozla?t?rd???, kaosa te?ne apokaliptik dünyada ayakta kalan son insan Allie Fox'dur ve ailesini kurtarmak için, ailesine dan??madan Honduras'?n din, e?itim, medeniyet girmemi? ormanlar?na do?ru yolculu?a ç?k?l?r. Lakin Allie, cang?la küçük Amerika's?n? da yan?nda ta??m??t;r; "dünyay? oldu?u gibi kabul etmek yabanılıktır, bat?l inançl? olmakt?r. Kurcalı ve bir faydas?n? bul" felsefesi ile cang?l? ailesi, Zambular, oraya s???nm??lar için kendi medeniyetini kurma ad?na adeta çal??ma kamp?na çevirir. Edebiyatta en bilinen örne?ini Robinson Cruose'da gördü?ümüz medeni insan?n "dü?tü?ü" do?ay? modernle?tirme çabas? kitab?n da önemli izleklerinden. Yaln?z ?öyle bir durum var; bu eserde do?aya dü?me de?il, modernitenin y?k?c? ?ehrinden, ?errinden kaç?p do?aya dönme vard?r; yola böyle ç?k?l?r. Ancak isyankar o?lu Jerry'nin yerinde tabiriyle "Osurukçu" Allie'nin -nam-? di?er son insan?n- do?aya teknolojik müdahalesi cang?l? zehirler, ya?anmaz hale getirir. Ba?ka bir dünyaya do?ru yeniden yola dü?ülecektir.

Peter Weir taraf?ndan beyazperdeye de aktar?lan bu roman? evin büyük o?lu Charlie'nin dilinden dinliyoruz,

ki bu okura Allie'ye katlanma imkan? sa?l?yor. Kendinden gayr?s?na kör bir do?rucu Davut'un ö?reten adam, gardiyan, zorba hatt?nda ilerleyen y?k?m?ndan bir al?nt? ile bitireyim yaz?m?, herkese iyi okumalar.

""Yirminci yüzy?l?n hastal?klar?ndan biri mi?" dedi. "Size en kötüsünü anlatay?m. ?nsanlar yaln?z kalmaya dayanam?yorlar! Buna katlanam?yorlar! Bu yüzden sinemaya gidiyor, arabalar?yla hamburger al?yor, telefon numaralar?n? paçavralara yazd?r?p " Lütfen beni ara!" diyorlar. Bu, hastal?k. Kendileriyle olmaktan nefret ediyorlar, kendilerini aynada görünce a?l?yorlar."

Anastasia says

Although I agree with some of the views of the protagonist's father, I find the character so obnoxious that I don't even know if I can read any more.

Jen says

An overzealous father uproots his family in the middle of the night to leave America, with only their clothes on their back, to journey to the deep jungles of Honduras. Here he has grandiose hopes to build a radical new civilization in which he is the leader of. Although a brilliant inventor, he is both paranoid and manic and the journey that transpires is both disastrous and dangerous, putting his family at risk. The story is taken from the perspective of his eldest son, Charlie, who throughout attempts reconcile the man whom he loves with the mad man whom he has become. Themes of water, fire, religion rebound throughout the novel. What started out as a slow burn became a raging inferno of a story. 4 ***

Brad says

Paul Theroux understands fathers and sons like few authors I have read, but I still struggle with Allie Fox's descent into madness. Part of me feels that we are supposed to struggle with his descent, to feel pity and empathy for him, but part of me feels that I am expected to feel anger and hate towards him -- things I do not and can not.

Whether this is the failure of the author or the reader is beyond me, but it is enough to drop this book out of my true favorites (and it was one of my favourites before my most recent rereading), making it a mere curiosity that I am compelled to return to once every decade. Of course, that in itself tells me that The Mosquito Coast is definitely worth the time I spend immersed in its world, but I can't help wanting to apportion blame to myself or Theroux or both of us with a degree of certainty.

The more I read Theroux's work, however, the more I think that he and I are simply incompatible. We are that high school couple that should fit perfectly but don't. I want to love him, but I can't, and I think it is about time we break up. *C'est la lecture.*

Meredith says

Part adventure story, part comedy, part travelogue, part horror story. This is a gritty YA novel written for adults. Google Maps just won't help you finding your way here in this jungle world of divine retribution against the man who dares to change nature and ultimately pays for his blasphemy. It's a three-part chronicle of the gradual descent into murder and madness by a man of great intelligence, individuality, photographic memory and deeply analytical genius. That descent would be even more rapid were he not surrounded by a Greek chorus of four stoic, hardworking children and a wife, unnamed, who is the most patient and astoundingly loyal woman in the world. The refrigeration engine Fat Boy and the seething Honduran river the family travels on are characters as much as any of the humans of the story. The ending is a Greek tragedy in itself. I suspect it will be a long time before I forget it.

Marvin says

Allie Fox is a genius, a fool, a loving father, a madman, a dreamer, and a selfish SOB. He is sort of Don Quixote's evil twin. Both Don Quixote and Allie Fox pursued noble dreams but Quixote didn't imperil his entire family in doing so. But it isn't just the character of Allie Fox that makes *The Mosquito Coast* such a riveting and brilliant novel. It is the interaction with his family as they struggle to understand this brilliant but insane man. The book reads like an adventure; an adventure that you know will go wrong. I really enjoyed how Allie Fox mastered his environment in the jungle but could feel the dominoes falling for him and his family. This is one of those books that stays with you and deserves to be called a Twentieth Century classic.

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Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

Sometimes you just have to say, this is not the book for me. I could plow through it for the sake of my book club, but why put myself through 3 or 4 hours of angst and misery, reading about a wildly dysfunctional family trying to create their own utopia in the jungles of the Honduras?

In an intellectual way I appreciate that the father, Allie Fox, is an amazing character, but he's just painful for me to read about. It was like fingernails on a chalkboard. He pursues one scheme after another, with his family deep in poverty. He thinks society and technology are degenerate (unless it's something he himself has invented). He's brilliant, loud-mouthed, rude, abusive to his family, mentally unbalanced, a know-it-all, and doesn't listen to anyone. It's a combination guaranteed to drive me nuts in real life, and I just can't enjoy reading about him, or what he puts his poor wife and kids through.

So I skipped to the end and read the last few pages. Don't tell my husband -- he hates when I do that.
#sorrynotsorry

DNF @ 22%.

Ruth says

Funny, funny book.

Well, that was my review the first time I read it. Now, after a reread some 20 years later, I wonder why I didn't pick up on what was really going on with the father. This time it was clear to me, and gave the book, despite its comedic moments, a sense of ever-increasing dread.

J.K. Grice says

THE MOSQUITO COAST is a marvelous novel by Paul Theroux. Brilliant writing and great characters. Highly recommended.

Patrick Gibson says

It's not the craziness and hypocrisy of American evangelical Christians and other nuts building utopias, or realizing their personal dreams among the ignorant and poor peoples of the under-developed world, but writing descriptions of rare sights:

"It sank [an outboard engine:] into the weeds and began bleeding rainbows."

of nature:

"The howler monkeys were drumming in the thunder rumble across the black lagoon, and the rains boom and

crackle made a deep cave of the earth and filled the sky with dangerous boulders, too big to see. And all around us in the wet and dark was this dark edge of monkeys."

and thoughts and feelings (of Charlie, the first-person narrator):

"Once, I had believed that Father was so much taller than me, he saw things I missed. I excused adults who disagreed with me, and blamed myself because I was so short. But this was something I could judge. I had seen it. Lies made me uncomfortable, and Fathers lie, which was also a blind boast, sickened me and separated me from him."

The last quote is an example of Theroux's grasp of the way a teenager thinks (in this he is very much like Ian McEwan). But in the end it is the mind of the perfectionist near-religious nut, Father (Allie Fox) that stands out. His crazy philosophy, the way his mind works is what drives a great part of the message of this book home:

"Man sprang out of this faulty world, Charlie. Therefore, I'm imperfect. What's the use? It's a bad design, the human body Skin's not thick enough, bones aren't strong enough, too little hair, no claws, no fangs. Drop us and we break... We weren't meant to stand up straight, our posture exposes the most sensitive parts of the body, heart and genitals. We should be on all fours, hairier, more resistant to heat and cold, with tails. What happened to my tail, that's what I'd like to know. I had to turn inventor. I was too weak to live any other way... Yes, sir, I'm going to live on all fours from now on. And that's what I'm fit for, hands and knees!"

With such an extremist, furious madman of a father, it's no wonder Charlie, the narrator, and his family, fear him as the followers of some ancient religion would fear their god after going through some terrible natural catastrophe or war:

"There were moments when we half-expected him to show up, although we knew he was dead-- expected him to appear somewhere astern and fling himself aboard and howl at us... Seabirds rested on this boat. I saw them, and heard Fathers howls in the wind... It made us watchful. We never talked about him, not a word."
