

## The Butcher Dance

A man spent five years travelling all around the world making a documentary on a series of native dances. At the end of this period, he had every single native dance of every indigenous culture in the whole world on film. He ended up in Australia, at Alice Springs, and he popped into a local pub for a well earned beer. There he got talking to one of the local Aborigines and tells him about his project.

The Aborigine asked the guy what he thought of the "Butcher Dance."

The guy was a bit confused and asked, "Butcher Dance? What's that?"

"What? You no see the Butcher Dance?"

"No, I have never heard of it." He replied!

"Oh mate! You crazy. How you say you film every native dance if you not see Butcher Dance?"

"Ummmmm. I got a corroboree on film, just the other week. Is that what you mean?"

"No no no, not corroboree. Butcher Dance, much more important than corroboree."

"Oh, well how can I see this Butcher Dance then?"

"Mate, Butcher Dance right out in bush. Many days travel to see Butcher Dance."

"Look, I've been everywhere from the forests of the Amazon, to deepest darkest Africa, to the frozen wastes of the Arctic filming these dances. Nothing will prevent me from recording this one last dance."

"OK, mate. You drive north along highway towards Darwin. After you drive 197 miles, you see dirt track veer off to left. Follow dirt track for 126 miles 'til you see big huge dead gum tree - biggest tree you ever see. Here you gotta leave the car, because much too rough for driving.

You strike out due west into setting sun. You walk 3 days 'til you hit creek. You follow this creek to Northwest. After 2 days you find where creek flows out of rocky mountains. Much too difficult to cross mountains here though. You now head south for half day 'til you see pass through mountains.

Pass very difficult and very dangerous. Take 2, maybe 3 days to get through rocky pass. When through, head northwest for 4 days 'til reach big huge rock - 20 ft high and shaped like man's head. From rock, walk due west for 2 days and you find village. Here you see Butcher Dance."

So the guy grabs his camera crew and equipment and heads out. After a couple of hours he finds the dirt track. The track is in a shocking state and he's forced to crawl along at a snails pace and so he doesn't reach the tree until dusk and he's forced to set up camp for the night.

He sets out bright and early the following morning. His spirits are high and he's excited about the prospect of capturing on film this mysterious dance which he had never heard mention of before.

True to the directions he has been given, he reaches the creek after three days and follows it for another two until they reach the rocky mountains. The merciless sun is starting to take its toll by this time and his spirits are starting to flag, but wearily he trudges on until he finds the pass through the hills - nothing will prevent him from completing his life's dream.

The mountains prove to be every bit as treacherous as their guide said and at times they almost despair of getting their bulky equipment through. But after three and a half days of back breaking effort they finally force their way clear and continue their long trek.

When they reach the huge rock, four days later, their water is running low and their feet are covered with blisters. Yet they steel themselves and head out on the last leg of their journey.

Two days later they virtually stagger into the village where the natives feed them and give them fresh water. They begin to feel like new men.

Once he's recovered enough, the guy goes before the village chief and tells him that he has come to film there Butcher Dance.

"Oh mate. Very bad you come today. Butcher Dance last night. You too late. You miss dance."

"Well, when do you hold the next dance?"

"Not 'til next year."

"Well, I've come all this way. Couldn't you just hold an extra dance for me, tonight?"

"No, no, no! Butcher Dance very holy. Only hold once a year. If hold more, gods get very angry and destroy village! You want see Butcher Dance you come back next year."

The guy is devastated, but he has no other option but to head back to civilization and back home.

The following year, he heads back to Australia and, determined not to miss out again, sets out a week earlier than last time. He is quite willing to spend a week in the village before the dance is performed in order to ensure he is present to witness it. However, right from the start things go wrong.

Heavy rains that year have turned the dirt track to mud and the car gets bogged every few miles, finally forcing them to abandon their vehicles and slog through the mud on foot almost half the distance to the tree.

They reach the creek and the mountains without any further hitch, but halfway through the ascent of the mountain they are struck by a fierce storm which rages for several days, during which they are forced to cling forlornly to the mountainside until it subsides. It would be suicide to attempt to scale the treacherous paths in the face of such savage elements.

Then, before they have travelled a mile out from the mountains, one of the crew sprains his ankle badly which slows down the rest of their journey enormously, to the rock and then the village.

Eventually, having lost all sense of how long they have been travelling, they stagger into the village at about 12:00 noon.

"The Butcher Dance!" gasps the guy. "Please don't tell me I'm too late!"

The chief recognizes him and says "No, white fella. Butcher Dance performed tonight. You come just in time."

Relieved beyond measure, the crew spends the rest of the afternoon setting up their equipment - preparing to capture the night's ritual on celluloid as dusk falls, the natives start to cover their bodies in white paint and adorn themselves in all manner of bird's feathers and animal skins.

Once darkness has settled fully over the land, the natives form a circle around a huge roaring fire.

A deathly hush descends over performers and spectators alike as a wizened old figure with elaborate swirling designs covering his entire body enters the circle and begins to chant. Some sort of witch doctor or medicine man, figures the guy and he whispers to the chief, "What's he doing?"

"Hush," whispers the chief. "You first white man ever to see most sacred of our rituals. Must remain silent. Holy man, he asks that the spirits of the dream world watch as we demonstrate our devotion to them through our dance and, if they like our dancing, will they be so gracious as to watch over us and protect us for another year."

The chanting of the Holy man reaches a stunning crescendo before he moves himself from the circle. From somewhere the rhythmic pounding of drums booms out across the land and the natives begin to sway to the stirring rhythm.

The guy is becoming caught up in the fervor of the moment himself. This is it. He now realizes beyond all doubt that his wait has not been in vain. He is about to witness the ultimate performance of rhythm and movement ever conceived by mankind. The chief strides to his position in the circle and, in a big booming voice, starts to sing, He says, "You butch yer right arm in. You butch yer right arm out. You butch yer right arm in and you shake it all about..."

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