

# After Orchids With Pluck and Luck

**THE ORCHID HUNTERS.** *A Jungle Adventure.* By Norman MacDonald. Illustrated. With an introduction by Rex Stout. 294 pp. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. \$2.75.

**O**RCHIDS may resent the characterization given them by Rex Stout in the introduction to this book about the adventures of two young men from Nutley, N. J. "An orchid," says the creator of Nero Wolfe, the corpulent detective who got that way drinking beer, "is not a flower as a gladiolus or a poppy is a flower; it is a signal for seduction, a beckoning of the exotic, a banner of sophisticated romance."

Two imaginative office-workers succumbed to the beckoning of the exotic and rushed in where angels had had their toes trodden upon. They were successful in their ambition to obtain rare species, and one of them wrote a book that rates an orchid for its interest and workmanship.

They were fortunate in obtaining the backing of a metropolitan orchid grower, with an advance for expenses and an order for a large number of plants. They had studied the subject from every possible angle, and, thus armed,

with moderate funds, more than a little knowledge and unlimited enthusiasm, they set forth on a quest that was to lead them through the deep jungles of Colombia and Venezuela to the accomplishment of their mission.

The lads had the advantage of an introduction to an Englishman, long a resident in tropical South America and experienced in the hunting of orchids. The author lets it be understood that the success of the expedition was due largely to the fact that this Admirable Crichton joined it. He knew how to deal with the natives, and he was skillful in getting them to reveal the source of the rare varieties for which the group was searching. Because orchid hunters do not willingly give away the regions in which they pursue their quarry, the reason they gave for being in Colombia was the collection of medicinal herbs, and their inquiries regarding the *parasitos*, as their objectives are known in that country, were casual and guarded. Incidentally the author says that orchids are not parasites, but air plants that use the trees and rocks solely as a means of support, deriving their nourishment from the atmosphere.

They are none too easy to obtain. One must combat malaria and other tropical diseases, endure insect pests, keep on the lookout for jaguars and venomous snakes, be physically fit—and lucky. It is hardly possible to meet all these contingencies without misadventure, and the group of which the author was a member had some blood-chilling experiences.

The descriptions are alternately exciting and amusing, and the quality of wide-eyed wonder that is preserved by the author in his narrative is very engaging. He also handles with skill the element of suspense, and brings his book to a climax at almost precisely the last page. The information on rare varieties of orchids, their growth and the manner of gathering and shipping is well worth reading.

A foreword warns the literal-minded reader not to try to follow the trail of the orchid hunters on the map. "In keeping with the close-lipped tradition of the profession, the real names of towns and rivers in the region in which our richest strikes were made have been deliberately changed."

EDWARD FRANK ALLEN.

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