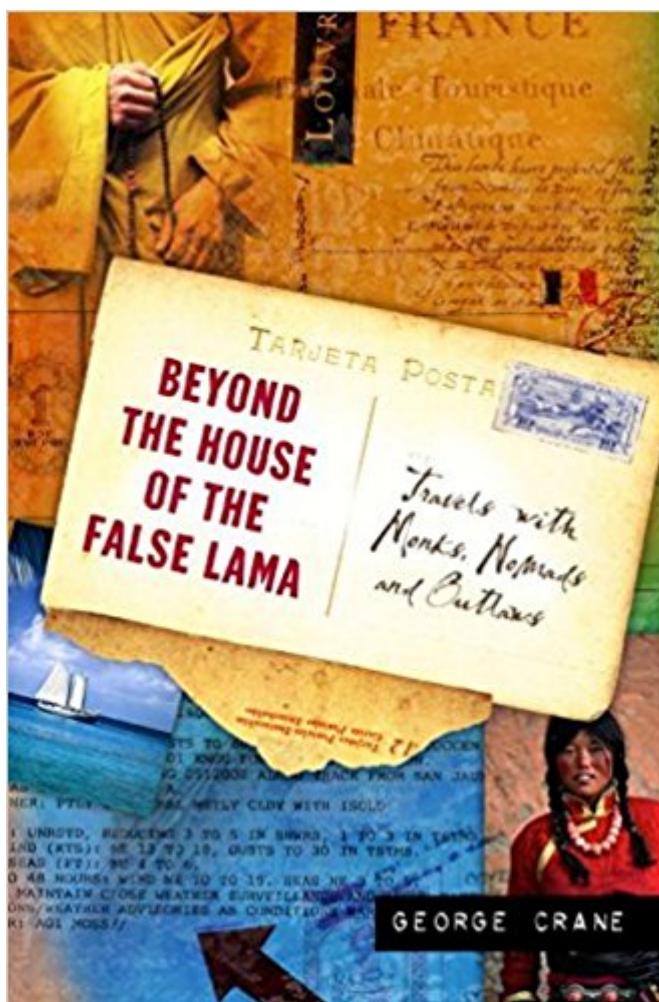


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Beyond The House Of The False Lama: Travels With Monks, Nomads, And Outlaws



Synopsis

Beyond the House of the Lama traces Crane's adventures as a writer, wanderer, and anarchic but still failing student of Zen. It begins in 1996 at the edge of the Gobi Desert in Inner Mongolia, where he and his teacher and friend, Zen Master Tsung Tsai, are forced by a sandstorm to end their quest to find the lost temple at Two Wolf Mountain. It continues with a harrowing, near disastrous attempt to deliver a ratty, 58 foot ferrous cement sailboat to Granada. Setting sail from Key Largo into the heart of hurricane season, with a crew of eccentrics and outlaws, led by the infamous Captain Bananas. They run with a disintegrating sailboat into the perfect squall. The tale ends in the winter of 2003, when after weeks of desert travel, Crane and his companions—“the nomad Jumaand and the young, beautiful Mongol girl Oka, his bed mate and bodyguard—stand beneath the remote cliffs of Delgaz Khaan in Outer Mongolia's South Gobi. Here, Crane, after burying his long dead father, sets out on a new quest, looking to find what the nomads call Windhorse, "the beginning of the wind," but finds what every nomad knows, that every road is more a direction than a destination.

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Customer Reviews

In the southwestern reaches of the Gobi Desert of Inner Mongolia, near the Wolf Mountains, beyond the House of the False Lama, lies a lost temple, one of the few that escaped the mass destruction by the Communist Chinese. Readers of *Bones of the Master* (2000), Crane's book about his earlier travels in the area with the Zen monk Tsung Tsai, might reasonably expect a second quasi-mystical nomadic quest, especially as that's the setup for this new book. But it doesn't happen. Instead,

Crane, an aging hippie-poet whose zeitgeist is unrepentantly lodged in the countercultural 1970s, uses the excuse of a failing marriage to leave home (Woodstock, N.Y., where else?) to spend a couple of years on the roadâ "solo. First, he signs on to help deliver a boat from Key Largo to Grenada. Next, he's off to Paris to reminisce about past adventures, past loves, old friends. Late in 2003, he does get to Inner Mongolia, and it hardly matters that no temple is found. There's definitely a select audience for this kind of personal travel book, peppered with poetry and somewhat wacky though amiable reveries. Copyright Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Poet and renegade Crane chronicled his trip to Mongolia with the Chinese Buddhist monk Tsung Tsai in *The Bones of the Master* (2000). Tsung Tsai is still trying to orient Crane to the path to enlightenment, but Crane is resistant to routine, convention, and staying put. As his third marriage disintegrates, he heads for the Florida Keys, where he and a friend launch a poorly refurbished cement-hulled sailboat smack into a hurricane. Crane's descriptions of the otherworldly power of the storm are matched by often startling musings on death and survival, subjects that continue to occupy his thoughts as he returns to Mongolia on what turns into a belated journey of mourning for his father. As Crane writes with bracing candor about his free-form approach to Zen Buddhism, the fictiveness of memory, and the wisdom of the body, he reflects on both Mongolia's austere beauty and terrible poverty. Crane's gusto, frank humor, insistence on freedom, cosmic sensibility, and compassion make him a boon companion and make his down-to-earth Zen an antidote to many ills.

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I really enjoyed *Bones of the Master*, but I regret to say that this book is awful. It reads like a 16 year old's diary--unbearably self-centered and self-absorbed, given to inane philosophizing and adolescent romanticism. It is somewhat astonishing that a sixty-something year old man has managed to abide at such a stage of arrested development. He may have inadvertently succeeded in his quest for literary recognition by writing what will one day be considered the definitive document of baby boomer narcissism and selfishness. I suppose it was the presence of Tsung Tsai that made *Bones of the Master* engaging, because without it the author is adrift.

The author certainly understands the grip of being in love with life and not wanting to let go. Good stories within the book. Some great lines. A good description about what Buddhism isn't!

George Crane spends a lot of time whining about the person he is not, rather than examining the person he is. Some interesting story telling, but the self-involvement frequently gets in the way.

While George Crane's first book "The Bones of the Master" was centered on his unique, funny and instructive relationship with the Mongolian expatriate monk Tsung Tsai, and for this reason assumed the shape of a disciple and master or to better put it a "buddy" book, this second work does not have a leading guide because we only briefly encounter Tsung Tsai at the beginning of the book. However, "Georgie" is always in search of buddies and so, leaving his routinary life in which things are not going so well, continues his encounters with rouges and border-line personalities. He travels to Key Largo, Paris and fatefully ends up in Mongolia, where fascinated by a name, that is actually a remote locality on the Winding Road (remember Owen Lattimore's The Desert Road to Turkistan), the House of the False Lama, he puts his heart in peace for what we know wont be long. I think he is now writing his third novel somewhere in Greece. This book is a delightful read but it deserves a cultural background to be fully appreciated and is written for middle age men and women. Only some points to reflect on: the Author's knowledge of Zen helps to put happenings and feelings in an ironic and off-hand perspective and many of his themes are very Zen indeed. The trip that is more important than the destination is one of the many subjects he dwells upon. The Zen culture is evident also in his poetry and style, that is choppy and lyrical at the same time. For those that remember Kant's "sublime", it is evident that Crane's deepest feelings and strongest emotions are awakened during a tempest or in the majestic scenario of the Gobi Desert and in these cases his poetic prose really reaches its best results. But indipendently of these peaks, the underlying thematic is his ageing and humanity in the sense of his unquenchable desire for women and love and the confort he gains from alcohol and smoke and drugs(?), like all people in this world. Naturally he is overindulgent with himself but in such a captivating way that we really feel he is a friend. I saw the previous reviewer focused his title on the False Lame, who is the False lama? Tsung Tsai that hasn't given the appropriate answers? The Author, that has no superior knowledge to convey? All the myths we live by? Or is just that place in that peculiar moment? A book to enjoy, to savour and appreciate with all our senses. Looking forward to number three !

If you want to read a disjointed account of random journeys this is your book. If you want your writer to be an old man who writes, thinks and acts like a 15 year old child (and not a child in the 'zen' sense) who's just seen Porky's, this is your book. If you want a book that sounds as though it's written by a recovering alcoholic and sex addict who hasn't quite gotten the 'recovery' part and has

somehow returned to middle-school humor (the bad kind, not the childlike wonder kind) and innuendo..This is your book.I don't know if the author is suffering from some kind of brain disorder or suffered a series of strokes since his first book, but this one is truly awful.Get it at the library, but get ready to set it down out of disgust and disappointment. Putting 'Zen' anywhere in/on this book is a disgrace to 'Zen' practice.

After the tremendous impressions Crane left us with in his first book "Bones of the Master", on this offering we're left asking: "What happened George?"This book starts off in disappointment mode - yet, if you work with George as he tries to shake off the wreckage of his 3rd marriage; if you stick with him as he tries to shake off his accumulated neurosis and persistant self-flagellating; if you cut him some major slack as he goes through his "Rand McNally approach to self-discovery" (Thomas McGuane) - then, just maybe, the value of his story begins to emerge.Fleeing the disintegration of that 3rd marriage, Crane and a buddy end up crewing a boat off the Florida Keys - until the hurricane hits. Then he's like Forrest Gump and that other guy riding out that storm in the middle of the Caribbean. Surviving that, he goes to Paris where we endure his wound-licking and self-indulgent whining. And somehow towards the middle of the book, he makes it back to Mongolia, on a vaguely defined quest to find . . . what?It is clear that George is adrift without his monk-friend Tsang Tsai from the first book. This narrative may very well be written for fellow mid-lifers who are in either pre- or post- crisis modes: tough to say.Anyway, like "Journey to Ixtlan", this roller coaster (or perhaps a bronco ride) of a narrative is a metaphor for what is found in the search and the journey; the destination may yet be only a mirage.As a writer, George Crane is still working out his Mojo - like a burner on the stove, one gets the feeling that he's just turned down the heat.Although the leaping around in this book is formidable, if you perservere with the guy to the end, it is a pretty decent book.Extracts: A Field Guide for Iconoclasts

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