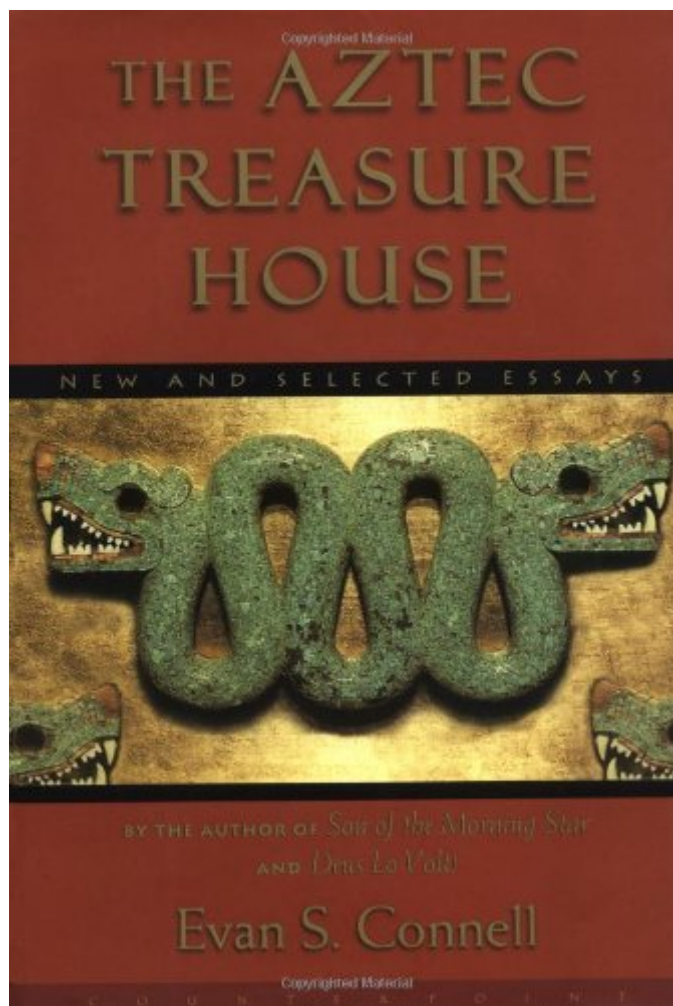


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Aztec Treasure House



Synopsis

Here are tales of fabulous advances made in anthropology, archaeology, astronomy, and linguistics, stories of the Anasazi, the "old ones" of the southwestern desert, of the great explorers, eccentrics, dreamers, scientists, cranks, and geniuses. "There's no end to the list, of course," Connell says, "because gradually it descends from such legendary individuals to ourselves when, as children, obsessed by that same urge, we got permission to sleep in the backyard."

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Customer Reviews

Connell was my favorite writer, and the 18 essays from "The Long Desire" and "The White Lantern" that were reprinted in this book (along with two more from the 1990s) stand with "Son of the Morning Star" as my all-time favorite pieces by this magnificent author. Anyone who likes "Son of the Morning Star", but who somehow has missed these essays, should try this wonderful book. I love all of these, but prefer "The Long Desire" as a whole, so I think people coming to the book for the first time might want to start with the 8th through 18th pieces, which were the ones that first appeared in

that volume. Now if only he will put his biography of Goya on Kindle!

These essays are an exquisite treat for the reader of history, both factual and speculative. The Author's is at his best when he explores nooks and crannies of history when legend mixes with fact, as in the Vinland essay, or in the essay on the Etruscans. In these cases, the Author is objective as can be, but he reveals his sympathy for the more imaginative theories. I loved also his essays on the legends of Priester John, El Dorado and the Seven Cities. How easily is man prey of fancy notions and fanatical beliefs, like in the Innocent's crusade! These essays are thought-provoking as they are learned.

This wonderful book flows along like a river. Sometimes it bumps into boulders, swirls in an odd corner, or leaps down a waterfall. Connell throws in extraneous facts, skips from here to there, and gives enjoyable reading. He would be an author of great stature if he could refrain from his heavy-handed pose of jaded cynicism. Yes, we know there are nasty people in the world without being reminded at every possible cue. Yes, we know that many people in the English-speaking world are execrable, too, even though we have produced nobody of Hitler's rank: where he uses Dresden to provide an example of an apartment crumbling during WWII, London also provided plenty of firebombed apartments, and they didn't even start the war. And anyway, all that is thoroughly traveled territory, inappropriate for a book that takes us into untraveled lands and unknown people. These are great stories, told superbly. One thing puzzled me, though. Connell's eloquence failed him on perhaps the greatest journey of all. Compare his telling of the Cabeza de Vaca to the same story in DeVoto's *Course of Empire*. Strange. But don't let this get in your way. Read and enjoy!

Evan Connell knows how to capture the reader with an array of fascinating details woven into wonderful journeys that weave through different corridors of human history. Take the adventure and read this collection of essays!

Connoisseurs of obscure history and fantastic legend will delight in this collection, which gathers together the contents of Connell's twenty-year-old (and long out of print) books *A Long Desire* and *The White Lantern*, and adds two more recent pieces. The twenty essays are a mostly entertaining and fascinating bunch, touching upon all manner of historical curiosities. In every case, the topic has been previously dissected with great detail by "professional" historians - witness the 300 or so

books that appear in the bibliography. Yet one should be thankful that an armchair historian and accomplished writer such as Connell has distilled many thousands of pages until only the the most potent brew remains to excite the imagination. Ranging in length from 10-65 pages, the essays delve through the back corridors of history in wide-ranging, chatty fashion. Their topics are generally either quests of a physical or intellectual nature. The former tend to be the more engaging, as they involve feats of derring-do, greed, folly, and old-fashioned adventure. For example, in various essays Connell covers the following: hundreds of years of attempts to locate the Northwest Passage, the search for the passage to India, Norse settlement of Greenland and America, the race for the South Pole, the prodigious wanderlust of 14th-century Moroccan traveler Ibn Battutah, the mass hysteria and lunacy of the dual 13th-century Children's Crusades, the futile Spanish quest for El Dorado, the Spanish quest for the mythical Seven Cities, and Mayan gold. The intellectual quests are also generally interesting, but by their very nature more abstract. These include Atlantis, the mythical Christian King Prester John, the search for the "missing link", an overview of medieval alchemy, decoding ancient languages, interpreting the heavens, the origin of the Etruscans, the mysterious cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde in New Mexico, and finally, graffiti carved into a monolith in New Mexico. Probably my favorite piece fits into neither category, "Gustav's Dreadnought" describes a 17th-century nautical folly spawned by Sweden's King Gustav. Connell's relates everything with a natural storyteller's voice. The prose is always lively, however can be choppy at times due to his propensity for short paragraphs. And of course, not every essay will appeal to every readers - I personally skimmed two of the longer ones about linguistics and astrology. In general, the more specific the focus, the stronger the essay. The collection's one significant flaw is the absence of maps. On the whole though, this is a great book to dip into, say one essay a week, allowing the reader to revel in the mysteries and adventure of the past.

This is a collection of a number of travel essays - travel essays of the historical kind: the search for El Dorado, for the Northwest Passage and the Seven Cities; the voyages of Columbus, Walter Raleigh, the Vikings to North America; and the explorations of Scott, Amundsen, and the number of scientists (Copernicus, Kepler, etc.) who searched the heavens through crude telescopes. There are 20 essays in all, most of substantial length. Connell is a fascinating writer who infuses his narratives with just enough quirky factual information to keep the reader always intrigued; he gives the impression of being endlessly amazed and awed by the subject at hand, which he conveys effortlessly to the reader. The essay on Scott and the explorations of Antarctica is a masterpiece; so too is the one on deciphering ancient tablets. But all of these essays are a delight to read and

produce wonder and admiration for those people who risked everything to dream wild dreams, to pursue them, and then to simply marvel at what they found.

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