

Journeys in the Primal Forest

C. D. Shelton

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C. D. Shelton's second novel, the sequel to *The Age of Eternal Fire*, continues the saga of the Deer People, a hunter-gatherer tribe in the prehistoric Amazon. Set ten years after *Fire*, *Journeys in the Primal Forest* finds the Deer People adapting to a new homeland and encountering new challenges. Etok, the protagonist of *Fire*, is the chief of his village and the father of ten-year-old Etik. The book follows Etik and Etok's friend, Batok, as they venture downriver to seek out peoples with whom to trade. Batok finds a mate and Etik matures as the pair negotiates predatory animals, intertribal relations, and natural disasters.

This second installment possesses the same constant action as its predecessor, along with Shelton's trademark vivid description of rainforest flora and fauna. In addition, readers are treated to the separate yet intertwining stories of a boy (Etik) and a man (Batok). The interplay of man and child adds a level of drama as the protagonists experience their own adventures. This age difference also means that older teen boys will enjoy this book as much as their tween counterparts. In fact, the discussion of mature themes, such as adultery and the nature of honor, would provide useful discussion fodder for talking with younger and older boys alike. In *Journeys*, Shelton provides names for important rivers and islands, thereby grounding the novel more firmly in its setting. Punctuation errors that were a distraction in the first novel do not exist here. Shelton also ramps up his introduction of new vocabulary to readers; as in *Fire*, readers can glean most of the definitions from context clues so as not to interrupt their enjoyment of the book.

One minor oversight may distract readers. In *Fire*, the Deer People worship flames. In this book, one character tells another that God is in all things. It is unclear, how, and indeed, if, the Deer People have changed their belief system. This assertion is never mentioned again. In fact, no form of higher deity is alluded to in *Journeys*, which seems bizarre, given how prevalent the Fire God is in the first novel. This inconvenience aside, *Journeys in the Primal Forest* takes readers on a rollicking journey into the Amazon.

JILL ALLEN (May 18, 2010)

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