

The Age of Eternal Fire

C. D. Shelton

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In C.D. Shelton's debut novel, tween readers are catapulted back 13,000 years, to the Amazonian rainforest where tribes of hunter-gatherers dwell. Members of one such group, the Deer People, worship flames, which they call the Eternal Fire. Shelton's story chronicles the life of Etok, a member of the Deer People, as he grows from boy to man, and from warrior to tribe leader.

Against this backdrop of South American prehistory, Shelton uses his knowledge of biology and medicinal plants to create a lush world for his characters. The author's years of teaching college-level biology and writing science texts and curricula lend authenticity to his detailed descriptions of rainforest flora and fauna.

The Age of Eternal Fire moves at a breakneck pace. Each chapter presents a new adventure or obstacle for Etok, a device that keeps readers turning the pages. Battles mingle with narrow escapes, hunting, and romance. Shelton deftly creates a culture alien to our own, yet one where the familiar values of love, friendship, and bravery prevail. Shelton rounds out the character of Etok particularly well, and readers will warm to this bold, loving young hero. Through the exploits of Etok and his friends, readers gain knowledge of how ancient indigenous people may have lived, without feeling like they are reading a textbook. In addition, the author sneaks in vocabulary his readers may not know—not enough words to stymie youngsters, but just the right amount of vocabulary to encourage readers to use a dictionary.

Though Fire possesses an engaging plot and protagonist, inconsistent grammar and questionable use of punctuation detract from the book's otherwise professional presentation. For example, "Eternal Fire" is always capitalized, but sometimes the phrase is written in quotation marks as well. Commas also disappear and reappear without logic, and exclamation points are overused. In addition to these grammatical snafus, many characters have confusingly similar names. Important male characters include Batok, Matok, and Datok. A daughter and her mother are named Amika and Zamika.

The male-dominated culture depicted here gives this novel particular appeal to boys. Overall, The Age of Eternal Fire is a satisfying debut, sure to ignite a desire to read in boys aged eight to twelve.

JILL ALLEN (May 18, 2010)

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