

The Lost Civilization of Suolucidir

Susan Daitch

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Daitch's novel is Indiana Jones for the introspective crowd—a continual, thrilling, and harrowing search for historical treasures.

Beneath the sands of Iran lies a civilization lost millennia ago, rumored to have housed the lost tribes of Israel. In Susan Daitch's *The Lost Civilization of Suolucidir*, generations of seekers journey into perilous spaces to validate the legend.

Discovery can be incidental, even for those trained in quests. So archaeologist Ariel Bokser finds, when almost-discarded papers yield a clue to the location of the mythical Suolucidir. Ariel makes his way to Iran during the final days of the Shah's leadership, and his discovery seems fated indeed: he falls into the concealed kingdom, walking streets left untraveled for centuries. Or so he thinks.

A violent regime change forces him out of the country, bearing only a few decontextualized relics. At home, he works to piece together a picture of life in that lost land—and finds that he was not nearly the first to make the discovery.

Daitch's pages take an intrepid trip back through generations of adventurers, all lost, in one way or another, to the sands above Suolucidir. A couple escaping the Nazis' advances find it—in time with two fiends who want to destroy it for their own gain; they, too, are preceded by two journeyers who also don't quite believe in the city until they see it. Again and again, the thrill of discovery is muffled by historical circumstance, and the lost city fades back into silence. Ariel, losing even what he smuggled out, must learn from those previous failures Suolucidir's most enduring secret: some memories are best left undisturbed.

Found papers and cautious bits of correspondence are used to flesh out the mysteries of past expeditions so that even engaging this story becomes an academic exercise: truths must be sifted out from intentional fictions, and the distortions of time must be chipped away with sharp discernment. Characters become relics themselves to succeeding generations, so even Ariel's documentation becomes part of the city's alluring history.

Daitch's novel is Indiana Jones for the introspective crowd—a continual, thrilling, and harrowing search for historical treasures that produces, time and again, the glittering notion that the present is more precious than relics of the past.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Summer 2016)

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