



House of the Tiger King: The Quest for a Lost City

Tahir Shah

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In 1572, the Spanish Conquistadors stormed the Inca stronghold of Vilcabamba in Peru, searching for great golden treasure, only to find the city deserted, burned, and already stripped of its wealth. A legend says that the Incas had retreated deep into the jungle, where they built another magnificent city in an inaccessible quarter of the cloud-forest. And for more than four centuries explorers and adventurers, archaeologists and warrior-priests, have searched for the gold and riches of the Incas, and this lost city of Paititi, known by the local Machiguenga tribe as 'The House of the Tiger King'. decade, he could stand it no more. He put together an expedition and set out into Peru's Madre de Dios jungle, the densest cloud forest on Earth. He teams up with a Pancho, a Machiguenga warrior who asserts that in his youth he came upon a massive series of stone ruins deep in the jungle. Pancho's ambition was to leave the jungle and visit a 'live' bustling city so the two men make a pact: if Pancho takes Shah to Paititi, then he will take Pancho to the Peruvian capital. Here is the tale of Shah's remarkable adventure to find the greatest lost city of the Americas, and the treasure of the Incas. Along the way he considers others who have spent decades in pursuit of lost cities, and asks why anyone would find it necessary to mount such a quest at all.

House of the Tiger King: The Quest for a Lost City Details

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Colin says

Of the travel adventure books I most enjoy are those where the journey not the destination are the focus of the book. In the House of the Tiger King, Tahir Shah is looking for Patiti - the lost city of the Incas. His journey is a rough jungle stew of "fear-and-loathing-in-Las-Vegas" drug crazed lunatics, incomprehensible tribal shaman, a gaggle of Christian missionary indoctrinated jungle tribesmen, crazy drunks, corrupt politician henchmen, and an odd Swedish film crew all pulsing together in a tumultuous cauldron of fun. The author does a great job of describing, seemingly incomprehensible events - like avoiding an vengeful tiger cloud spirit - with calm aplomb and a matter of fact quality that it is poignant and often hilarious.

The stew is good, heartily recommended.

Jeff says

I chose this because I'd read Trail of Feathers: In Search of the Birdmen of Peru by the same author. He brings us back to Peru this time in search of the lost city of Paititi, although this time it's not as an enjoyable of a journey for them or us, well for me it wasn't at least.

Ed says

Shah maintains that anyone can be an explorer - and shows us the way! Fantastic and inspiring read!

jen8998 says

In this memoir, Tahir Shah searches for the lost Incan city of Paititi through the jungles of Peru. It reads like the world's worst trip as the author trudges through the jungle accompanied by two Swedish filmmakers, their Bulgarian groupie, a rich Russian banker and a mutinous band of hired porters. The quest seems doomed from the start as their guide implodes due to a combination of PTSD and copious hallucinogen abuse. Shah persists beyond all reason as calamities follow him with every step. Fascinating and entertaining to be sure but left me with a strong desire never ever to traverse the Amazon basin on foot.

Graham says

A sordid and most excellent tale.

This is a book I read very quickly . Just like Tahir's other books . I found this tale gripping and very entertaining. It is a fascinating look at exploration which is a rare thing in the 21 century. A great book.

Julian Walker says

Tales of lost cities and Inca gold have swayed many a sensible imagination and Tahir Shar writes brilliantly about how his own was stirred into action. Full of his usual humourous take on life, entertaining musings and characters which are so full they almost burst from the page, this is a real treat for anyone looking to take a step into a new world (even if via their armchair.) This is great fun and a very entertaining read.

Austin Briggs says

This is breathtaking true tale of leadership in the midst of jungle. Tahir not only is able to lead his motley expedition through the wilderness, he's also able to tell a great tale.

I loved the book. It really excited my imagination.

Sophie says

How everyone would like to journey into the darkest jungle of South America... with ex US army aide, and locals who are duped into thinking that pot noodles have aphrodisiac properties, using a digby bought from the equivalent of Friday Ad. Exploring on a low budget for the mythical city in El Madre de Dios...

Toni says

House of the Tiger King.

If you like Victorian explorers or 'The Worst Journey In the World by Apsley Cherry-Garrard', you might like the House of The Tiger King.

A journey couched in pain: rain like knives, dengue fever, inedible food, raw feet, aching muscles and other people's loads. AND beset by the hostility any real exploration is likely to generate.

See Apsley Cherry-Garrard: the best of friends often did not speak to each other for twenty-four hours for fear of saying what they should not.

Amundsen. Scott. Ranulph Fiennes.

What else is in this book???

Lots... whatever is the smallest mathematical measure, or glow worm in the dark.

So many entry points that difficult, to be coherent.

How about

'Don't confess anything they said,' (the Swedes said) 'it will blow our cover.'

Looks like a clue to me.

Jungle ballerinas, who have become a chain saw gang, felling the environment that gives them life as fast as they can.

Shamans who have diluted their knowledge with clap trap and are yet withal charismatic.

Guides who know the way but are not going to do all the work for one. Some things, have to be done for oneself. Dreams of having things handed on a plate; just that, dreams.

The frightening Richard (frightened me anyway) see Evelyn Waugh in 'Brideshead Revisited'...
'I never built anything, and I forfeited the right to watch my son grow up. I'm homeless childless middle aged loveless Hooper.' Alcohol and drugs complete the damage.
The river is the serpent, fighting for its life and the life of others. Knocked back again and again by the propensities of man: his greed especially; human being, a polite title.
Tahir Shah, would appear to have helpers, his old explorers for one.
And huge 'more easily seen' enemies, embodied in that government/oil excavating official.
Those pot noodles, what are they? Placebos...??? Just pot noodles, when you are cold and hungry and despairing???
A suggestion that anything is magic, according to what we know and don't know. Or everything IS magic.
This is an old explorer's route; lucky even to get to read about it.
Recommended again and again.

Thomas says

A very readable and entertaining account of the author's attempts to discover the location of Paititi (El Dorado) in the depths of the Madre de Dios jungle in Peru. The physical aspects of jungle trekking, the discomfort, the pain, the raw, wet feet with no skin between the toes, the worms in the thighs, are expertly drawn to induce a kind of repulsive shiver in me and make me question the sanity of anyone who would subject himself to such terrain. Admiration, however, was harder to find. Shah's motives are suspect, moving from fame and fortune to private glory without a huge amount of interest in the cultural background that surrounds him. The natives are portrayed as one-dimensional and primitive (admittedly we are dealing with indigenous tribes with very little contact to the outside world) and the gulf between his immense intellect and ambition and Pancho's childlike desire to see the "city" only to feel the call of the wild and return immediately to the jungle, seem a bit cold and colonial. Certainly Shah's seeming nostalgia for the cruel, slave-driving explorers of the past makes his treatment of his porters border on the sadistic and seems almost romantically (in the explorers eyes) reminiscent of the glory days of European exploration. 4

Nancy says

I love adventure tales and this one is a corker. It's as if Tahir Shah purposely chose the nuttiest, most unstable, dangerous elements for his journey, yet somehow lived to tell about it. Shah is one of my favorite authors because of his amazing ability to tell a story with humor, grace, and restraint. This book is not currently in print & I ended up with a library edition that was removed from circulation. Well worth the effort to locate a copy.

Ita says

'A journey is a fragment of Hell.' This Arab proverb is quoted at the start of 'The House of the Tiger King,' the book where Tahir Shah tells of his obsession to find Paititi, the city built by the Incas in Amazon cloud forest.

With him on the plane to Lima are a father-and-son film crew weighed down with equipment, a Bulgarian film student who is filming the film crew, and a Ukrainian banker. They fly to Iquitos to persuade a Vietnam

vet to join the expedition. The latter agrees, provided he can bring his personal shaman; and the shaman insists on first going to Nazka to find a mummy to bring with them. It soon becomes clear that their intended protector and his shaman spend most of their time stoned on hallucinogenic drugs.

A bus ride from Cusco takes them to the Madre de Dios forest, where they meet Hector who advises and accompanies them. Hector is a Seventh Day Adventist, but also a dreamer prepared, if necessary, to lay down his Bible and rely on older beliefs. The journey through Hell has started. Acting as porters are Machiguenga tribesmen, strong and capable of enduring indescribable hardship, but terrified of the Paititi ruins and of El Tigre, the ghostly predator which haunts the jungle. Progress is painfully slow, mostly on foot through water. Skin is lost from between toes, bees feast on sweat, and the men become host to guinea worms, chigger flies and the virus that causes dengue fever. Impassable rapids block the first attempt, and Tahir is forced to admit what Hector has been telling him: the time is not right.

The second attempt is even more hellish than the first. Ferocious storms add to the expedition's misery and Tahir finds himself the object of the porters' hatred. Journeys can bring out the best, or the worst, in people, he reflects, and this one has brought out the worst in him.

As you read this beautifully written book, you begin to feel that it is more than a single team's search for a lost city. You will gain insight into Tahir Shah's work, but you also begin to realise that what this extraordinary writer is retelling is no less than the journey of Man, when he seeks his own glory above all else.
