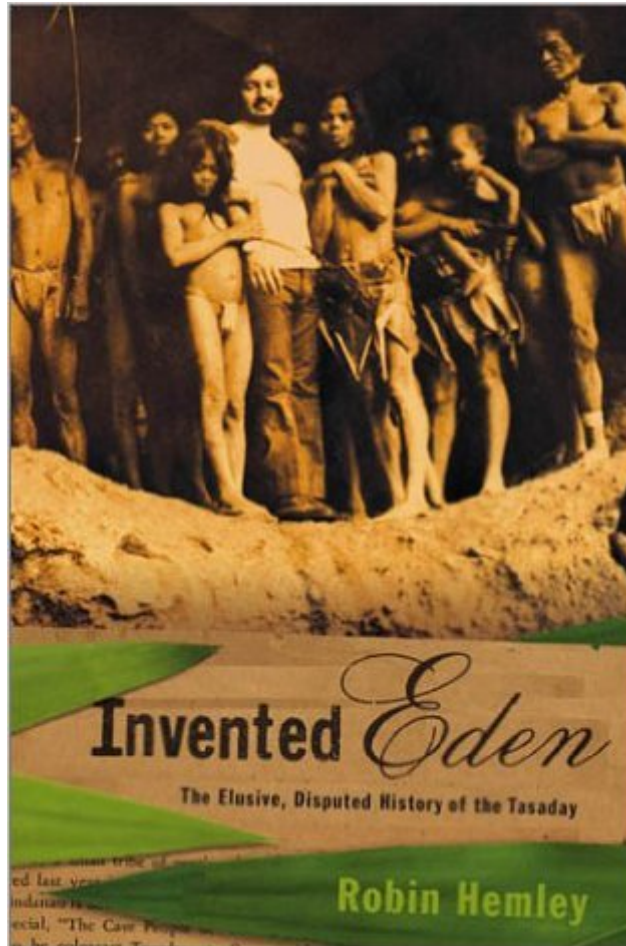


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Invented Eden: The Elusive, Disputed History Of The Tasaday



Synopsis

The riveting story of a modern Piltdown hoax "which may not have been a hoax at all. In 1971, a band of twenty-six Stone Age rain-forest dwellers was discovered living in total isolation by Manuel Elizalde, a Philippine government minister with a dubious background. The tribe was soon featured in nightly American newscasts and graced the cover of National Geographic. They were visited by such celebrities as Charles Lindbergh and Gina Lollobrigida. But after a series of aborted anthropological forays, the 45,000-acre Tasaday Reserve established by Ferdinand Marcos was closed to all visitors, and the tribe vanished from public view. Fast-forward twelve years. A Swiss reporter hikes into the area and discovers that the Tasaday were actually farmers who had been coerced by Elizalde into dressing in leaves and posing in caves with stone tools. Soon the anthropological find of the century has become the ethnographic hoax of the century. Or maybe not. Robin Hemley tells a story that is more complex than either the hoax proponents or the Tasaday advocates might care to admit. At the center of it is a group of very poor people who have been buffeted by forces beyond their control. Were the Tasaday the creation of gullible journalists, bumbling scientists, and an ego-driven madman, or were they the innocent victims of cynical academics and politicians? In answering that question, Hemley has written a gripping and ultimately tragic tale of innocence found, lost, and found again.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Invented Eden" is a very well-written book. Because it was so enjoyable, it was also a very quick read. There are a few things, however, that give me pause. In the book, Hemley tries to get to the

bottom of the Tasaday story: was their "discovery" as a primitive, secluded people with no contact to the outside world. Hemley's conclusion is very wishy-washy, although it is completely realistic and understandable. The conclusion is that the Tasaday were probably in contact with their neighboring tribes although not with the larger Philippine and academic societies, despite evidence of their existence showing up on a military map from the 1950s. This rings true. It is the middle ground between "the Tasaday made their first contact with the outside in 1971" and "the Tasaday were a fabrication." The last chapter is something of a "hit job" on the proponents of the hoax theory. Hemley quickly rattles off reasons why the proponents of the hoax theory should not be believed despite spending the entirety of the book discussing their qualifications, theories, and ideas. In this section, Hemley even throws out the idea that one of the hoax proponents should not be believed because he was a known member of a Philippine communist party. It seemed rather absurd to bring this up in passing at the end of the book after spending chapters devoted to the man. The author also dropped in something of a dead-end teaser. He helped coordinate conclusive DNA testing between various peoples in the area, sent the results to Hawaii. This kept my attention because Hemley claimed it would answer the hoax question. In the last chapter, we learn that the DNA testing was irrelevant because the sample size was too small.

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