

ForeWord Reviews

ForeWord Clarion Review

FICTION

Raiders of the Primal Forest

C.D. Shelton

Choice Publishing

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Four Stars (out of Five) “Very Good, ForeWord Recommends”

Raiders of the Primal Forest is C.D. Shelton’s fourth novel, and his first to break out of the young adult genre and into a contemporary timeline. Protagonist Jon Andersen, a field biologist, accepts a position at Brazil-based Jari Pharmaceutical to pursue the discovery of plant-based medications. As he embarks on a quest to determine the cause of infertility in a nearby village, he is hindered by local prejudice and regional intrigue.

Among the more serious conflicts Jon encounters is the prevalence of land burning by area gang members working for a local land czar, an action which seriously threatens potentially valuable plant life. Soon Jon is involved in an attempt to stop the burning of harassed farmers’ homes and fields, defending his own life and that of his new love, and at once pursuing the research into the Bird Village infertility causes.

Action is fast-paced from the start, and Shelton’s impressive knowledge of the rainforest locations and the biological and ecological issues are showcased well. While there are a few odd time shifts in the beginning, the structure soon takes shape and progresses at a natural and effective pace.

Characterization is generally good if occasionally stereotypical, particularly in the portrayal of the local thugs. The biggest problem for some readers may be the utter perfection of the protagonist. Smart, handsome, well-intentioned and unfailingly polite, Jon Andersen is able to take on nearly a dozen adversaries at a time and always come out the winner. He makes short work of solving local issues, wins the heart of a beautiful woman, and handles everything that

comes his way with calm and unerring proficiency. No matter the challenge, Jon Andersen just can't lose. Even the local law enforcement welcomes his help, praising his bravery and allowing him to take an active role in the capture of potentially dangerous criminals by deputizing him with a surprising simplicity:

“Alright,” said Officer Esteban. “Raise your right hand. Now, do you swear to uphold all the laws in our village?”

“Yes, I do,” said Jon.

“Good! You are deputized!”

This overwhelming ease and guaranteed success in every situation becomes too predictable, and by the halfway point there is never a doubt that whatever comes his way, he will overcome it swiftly and emerge unscathed. His capable personality makes for an effective hero, but leaves the reader wishing for a little humanizing chink in the bright armor.

Raiders of the Primal Forest is a good story hampered by a too-good-to-be-true protagonist. As interesting and sincere as Jon Andersen may be, his character would benefit from a flaw or two, or a conflict that presents some difficulty for him. Regardless, the story is effectively written and maintains reader interest throughout. All in all, Shelton has achieved a creditable debut into the contemporary adult fiction genre.

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