

# The Lost City of the Monkey God: A True Story

*Douglas Preston*

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**The Lost City of the Monkey God: A True Story** Douglas Preston

**NAMED A *NEW YORK TIMES* NOTABLE BOOK OF 2017#1 *New York Times* and #1 *Wall Street Journal* bestseller!**

**A Best Book of 2017 from the *Boston Globe***

**One of the 12 Best Books of the Year from *National Geographic***

**Included in *Lithub*'s Ultimate Best Books of 2017 List**

**A Favorite Science Book of 2017 from *Science News***

**A five-hundred-year-old legend. An ancient curse. A stunning medical mystery. And a pioneering journey into the unknown heart of the world's densest jungle.**

Since the days of conquistador Hernán Cortés, rumors have circulated about a lost city of immense wealth hidden somewhere in the Honduran interior, called the White City or the Lost City of the Monkey God. Indigenous tribes speak of ancestors who fled there to escape the Spanish invaders, and they warn that anyone who enters this sacred city will fall ill and die. In 1940, swashbuckling journalist Theodore Morde returned from the rainforest with hundreds of artifacts and an electrifying story of having found the Lost City of the Monkey God-but then committed suicide without revealing its location.

Three quarters of a century later, bestselling author Doug Preston joined a team of scientists on a groundbreaking new quest. In 2012 he climbed aboard a rickety, single-engine plane carrying the machine that would change everything: lidar, a highly advanced, classified technology that could map the terrain under the densest rainforest canopy. In an unexplored valley ringed by steep mountains, that flight revealed the unmistakable image of a sprawling metropolis, tantalizing evidence of not just an undiscovered city but an enigmatic, lost civilization.

Venturing into this raw, treacherous, but breathtakingly beautiful wilderness to confirm the discovery, Preston and the team battled torrential rains, quickmud, disease-carrying insects, jaguars, and deadly snakes. But it wasn't until they returned that tragedy struck: Preston and others found they had contracted in the ruins a horrifying, sometimes lethal-and incurable-disease.

Suspenseful and shocking, filled with colorful history, hair-raising adventure, and dramatic twists of fortune, **THE LOST CITY OF THE MONKEY GOD** is the absolutely true, eyewitness account of one of the great discoveries of the twenty-first century.

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## The Lost City of the Monkey God: A True Story Details

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# From Reader Review *The Lost City of the Monkey God: A True Story* for online ebook

## The Pfaeffle Journal (Diane) says

Who knew that there were so many civilizations in the Northern Hemisphere, *The Lost City of the Monkey God* takes us deep into the Mosquitia region of the Gracias a Dios Department in eastern Honduras, where the legendary "White City" supposedly existed.

The first third of the book tells how documentary filmmakers Steve Elkins and Bill Benenson have spent 20+ years searching for the "White City". using a million-dollar lidar scanner, they were able to fly over the valley, probing the jungle canopy with laser light. Lidar is able to map the ground even through dense rain forest, delineating any archaeological features that might be present. What they found was a huge city. Was it the legendary "White City"? Who knows.

What ensues is the physical search of the area. If you have read any books on entering tropical rain forests you know they are fraught with dangers, while I appreciate the amount of time, effort and money invested in this project I am not wholly convinced that it is the riveting tale we are lead to believe we are getting. It is more a long version of the National Geographic article. From here Preston, takes off on a tangent about how those in the archaeology of Central America community attacked their expedition because Elkins billed it as finding the LOST "White City" which they (archaeologist) believe is a myth.

The last part of the book is about Leishmaniasis, the disease that Preston and many of his fellow crew members caught. It was interesting to learn what treatment they went through to contain the disease. Preston then goes on to speculate that the people of the city they found were wiped out by some disease that occurred during the contact period with explorers. There is nothing to back this up.

I read this book because Dana Stabenow rated with 5 stars and provided a rave review. I was not so impressed. **This review was originally posted on The Pfaeffle Journal**

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## Montzalee Wittmann says

*The Lost City of the Monkey God: A True Story*

Written by: Douglas Preston

Narrated by: Bill Mumy

This was such an exciting audible book and filled with rich history and science. Mr Preston starts the book with how he got started on this trip and all the investigations he had to do to get information on finding what he could. He explained many trips that were tried and failed. I find this all fascinating. This was NOT a fiction book. Then the trip they make to South America takes a tremendous effort. The trek is so dangerous and they almost die several times. When they finally make it back home and think they are safe, they find that over half the members had the deadly leishmaniasis! He describes the problems of treatment and so much more. Wow, I learned so much from this book. This was just an exciting and captivating book. I enjoyed this more than his fiction books. This was an audible book and the narrator was very clear and his voice was pleasant to listen to.

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## Miranda Reads says

3.5 stars!

*People need history in order to know themselves, to build a sense of identity and pride, continuity, community, and hope for the future.*

**The White City (aka the Lost City of the Monkey God) was a legend...until now.**

For the last 500 years, **rumors have flooded** every major news outlet.... only you be proven false - every single time.

However, with the **invention of new technology** and a dogged determination, several explorers, architects and writers (including the author) set off to discover whether or not there's an entire **undiscovered city** hidden in Honduras in the 21st century.

(spoiler alert)

**There is.**

**And it's glorious.**

But that journey was not easy, the artifact excavation was even more dangerous and the aftermath? Well, let's just say that there might be something to that death curse after all...

Overall - **rather interesting book!**

It had an Indiana Jones tone that certainly held my attention - I loved hearing about the peril and the danger (and those snakes! Yikes!).

I wish the author would have **given more page space** to the city exploration. And I feel like the history lesson bit could have been **edited to seem less dry.**

Other than that - wow. To think that there are "old school adventures" still waiting to be had in the modern era. **Amazing!**

### Audiobook Comments

Read by Bill Mumy. Fairly good audiobook...though it is always a pet peeve of mine when authors don't read autobiographical journeys

Blog | Instagram

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## Jim says

For centuries, since the days of Hernán Cortés in the 1500's, rumors abounded regarding a lost city in

Honduras called the White City or the Lost City of the Monkey God. It was reputed to be a city of immense wealth. Indigenous tribes warned that anyone who enters this sacred city will fall ill and die. There have been many stories about sightings of this lost city. Some of these outright hoaxes. None have proven its existence. In the twentieth century there were several expeditions to locate this lost city. Probably the most famous being an expedition led by Theodore Morde in 1940. He returned with thousands of artifacts to back his claim of having discovered the city but committed suicide and never revealed its location.

In 2012 Preston joined a group of explorers searching for Ciudad Blanca ("The White City"). Using an advanced laser-imaging technology called LIDAR they were able to penetrate the dense jungle canopy to detect man-made anomalies at two locations. The LIDAR images were sufficient to obtain funding to explore the sites. Flying in a rickety plane, Vietnam era helicopters, sleeping in a jungle infested with venomous snakes and disease carrying insects. They had returned from the first expedition thinking they were lucky to have all survived only to discover later that half of them had contracted a horrific, sometimes lethal, and incurable disease.

It was part Indiana Jones and part Robert Ballard's search for the Titanic. There is a bit of history and politics here too. I had heard stories about the impact when the Old World and New World collided and how disease wiped out many of the indigenous tribes. This book reminded me of how devastating it was. There was the difficulty of dealing with the seeming ever changing Honduran government and obtaining permits. Then there were the problems with the academic community which labeled the expedition as adventurers and treasure hunters.

The book ends with a warning about climate change and the increased danger of pandemics as the world is shrinking and a disease is only a plane ride away from any civilization. An adventure story with a message.

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## **Barbara says**

### **4.5 stars**

For centuries rumors swirled about an abandoned ancient settlement in the jungles of Honduras, a region called 'The White City of the Monkey God.' The remains of the White City was reputed to contain gold, priceless cultural artifacts, and the remnants of temples and buildings - a veritable cornucopia for treasure hunters, archaeologists, and anthropologists.

Over the years many explorers tried to find the White City. Some never came back, others returned in defeat, and some were charlatans - pretending to explore while they searched for gold. Obstacles to success included ignorance of the city's exact location, impassable jungles, venomous snakes, biting and stinging insects, jaguars, and - in recent times - narcotraficantes (drug cartels).

Then, in 2012, documentary filmmaker Steve Elkins got the idea to use LIDAR - a type of radar that uses laser beams - to look for the White City. Elkins arranged for a LIDAR-equipped plane to survey 'La Mosquitia' - the easternmost part of Honduras along the Mosquito Coast (named for the Miskito people, not the insects). The LIDAR scans revealed the remains of three formerly populated areas, called T-1, T-2, and T-3.....which might very well correspond to the White City.

Elkins was thrilled with the results, and arranged an expedition into the jungle in 2015. Elkins' team included

himself, a photographer, an archaeologist, an anthropologist, filmmakers, a squad of Honduran soldiers, pilots, technicians, a jungle safety expert, and others. Also joining the group was writer Douglas Preston, who had been in Honduras with Elkins for the LIDAR survey. This time, Preston was assigned to pen an article for National Geographic Magazine.

In this book, Preston writes about the search for the White City.....and much much more.

The entire escapade into La Mosquitia was dangerous and difficult, starting with preparing landing sites for the team's helicopters. This was followed by setting up camping areas, hacking through the impenetrable jungle with machetes, wading across rivers, hiking up hills, sliding down hills, encountering snakes, being bitten by insects and spiders, and so on. In addition, the team members were continually soaked and muddy, had trouble keeping a fire lit in the wet jungle, and subsisted largely on MREs (freeze-dried meals).

Preston describes his first campsite, where he set up his hammock under a tree inhabited by squawking spider monkeys - who didn't want him there. When the author stepped out the first night - to relieve himself - the ground was writhing with a carpet of rainforest cockroaches. (When I lived in a tent for six weeks for geology field camp, I learned not to drink anything after 6:00 PM....to avoid night trips to the loo. Ha ha ha)

Preston also tells a memorable story about encountering a six-foot-long, venomous fer-de-lance near his camping area. The writer summoned the jungle safety expert, Andrew Wood, who decapitated the snake after it squirted his hand with burning venom. Wood had to wash his hand immediately.....otherwise he would have just relocated the serpent with a forked stick. (The expedition carried antivenom shots, just in case.)

Even more ominously, Preston's tent was invaded by tiny sandflies night after night, which he took to skewering on one of his notebooks - a ledger that became so damaged he had to throw it away. Unfortunately the writer - and other members of the expedition - were repeatedly bitten by the little critters, which had dire consequences later on.

Though there were hardships, the team members were able to make their way to T-1, where they found a treasure trove of pre-Columbian remains, including asymmetrical mounds and a large cache of (almost) buried artifacts. These artifacts include beautiful stone bowls and carved stone figures, some of which have half-human, half-monkey features. One striking statuette resembled a jaguar - which led to the site being called 'The City of the Jaguar.' The explorers' tenure in the jungle was limited by weather, finances, and helicopter rentals.....so the archaeological sites were marked and left for future exploration. By now, extensive studies are under way.

In an article about the 2015 expedition, Colorado State University anthropologist Dr. Chris Fischer - who was a member of Elkins' team - notes: "The excavated area [at T-1] encompasses less than 200 square feet of the enormous archaeological site, which includes at least 19 prehistoric settlements, probably part of a single chiefdom, spread along several miles of a river. One of the nearby sites has two parallel mounds that may be the remains of a Mesoamerican ball court similar to those left by the Maya civilization, indicating a link between this culture and its powerful neighbors to the west and north. The ballgame was a sacred ritual.....that was sometimes associated with human sacrifice, including the decapitation of the losing team or its captain. While the City of the Jaguar is spectacularly isolated now, at its heyday it was probably a center of trade and commerce."

So what happened to the historic city? Why was it abandoned? No one knows for sure but Preston suggests that infectious diseases decimated the population. It's well known that European explorers brought deadly

illnesses, like flu, measles, and smallpox, to the New World. The native people, having no resistance, died in droves....often horrifically. According to Preston, Old World diseases wiped out 90 percent of many New World populations. It's possible that most residents of the 'T-sites' died, and the remaining occupants - thinking their gods had forsaken them - just walked away from their homes.

Another illness may also have contributed to the ancient carnage. Months after Preston returned home, he noticed a 'bug bite' that refused to heal. The author came to learn that he (and many other members of the 2015 trip) had contracted leishmaniasis, a flesh-eating disease caused by a protozoan parasite that's transmitted by sandflies. Left untreated, leishmaniasis can cause skin ulcers; mouth and nose ulcers; and damage to internal organs. In the worst cases, the disease eats away the nose and mouth, causing horrible disfigurement. Luckily, Preston responded to treatment -which is harsh, and can take a long time.

The disease didn't stop Preston from returning to T-1 for one more visit, however, during which he lamented the inevitable changes caused by official visitors, scientists, and the military - who protect the site from looters and narcotrafficantes.

In addition to detailing the recent visits to La Mosquitia, Preston tells stories about early explorers to the New World; native peoples of the region; disease germs brought to the Americas by sick sailors; fortune hunters looking for the White City; the current President of Honduras - who's all for archaeological and anthropological exploration; Elkins' efforts to finance his expeditions and films; the author's (and his colleagues') struggles with leishmaniasis; and more. I liked all the stories and enjoyed the book, which I highly recommend to readers interested in the topic.

You can follow my reviews at <https://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot....>

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## **Dana Stabenow says**

For centuries Hondurans have told their children the myth of the Lost City of the Monkey God, but myths are often rooted in fact, and in the early Oughts cinematographer and inveterate searcher for lost cities Steve Elkins starts looking for it. National Geographic/New Yorker writer and novelist Douglas Preston, in the way nosy journalists do, hears tell of this search and talks his way into the 2015 expedition. Preston begins his story with a briefing by an ex-soldier experienced in jungle travel who passes around a photo of someone on a previous expedition bitten by a fer-de-lance. It isn't pretty. More cheery news of the local fauna follows in the way of mosquitoes and sand flies eager to pass on lovely diseases like malaria, dengue fever and the dread leishmaniasis. Never heard of it? Me, either, and Preston, either, but he'll hear a lot more about it shortly. At the end of that first chapter he writes "I paid attention. I really did." No, he didn't, or not enough, but it wouldn't have mattered even if he had.

This book is simply packed with information on a dozen different topics, to begin with a history of archeology in Central and South America and worldwide, legal and not

*It must be said that, in general, if archaeologists refused on principle to work with governments known for corruption, most archaeology in the world would come to a halt; there could be no more archaeology in China, Russia, Egypt, Mexico, most of the Middle East, and many countries in Central and South America, Africa and Southeast Asia. I present this not as a justification or an apology, but as an observation on the reality of doing archaeology in a difficult world.*



a history of Central American pre-Columbian civilizations--or at least the discovery of their existence--which were much more wide-spread than previously thought and why that is important to Hondurans

*While the Spanish history of Honduras is well known, its pre-Columbian history is still an enigma. People need history in order to know themselves, to build a sense of identity and pride, continuity, community, and hope for the future. This is why the legend of the White City runs so deep in the Honduran national psyche: It's a direct connection to a pre-Columbian past that was rich, complex, and worthy of remembrance.*

a story about the politics between archeologists, which from an outside perspective looks a lot like jealousy on the part of the people who didn't discover the Lost City of the Monkey God directed at the people who did than it does legitimate differences between academics; a brief but uncomfortably vivid history of the US in Honduras which kind of makes you feel like it may be more than time for the American empire to just, you know, stop with that shit now; and new technology in the form of lidar stabilized by a kind of top secret electronic gyroscope that pings lasers at the spaces between leaves to reflect back the features of the ground beneath them. FYI? The rain forest has a lot of leaves, but the lidar confounds even that dense canopy and discovers the Lost City (and maybe two) just three days into the mapping process.

*I could see Sartori's spiral-bound notebook lying open next to the laptop. In keeping with the methodical scientist he was, he had been jotting daily notes on his work. But underneath the entry for May 5, he had written two words only:*

*HOLY SHIT.*

If John McPhee writes the way Yo-Yo Ma plays the cello Preston is at least first chair. When I finished the book I immediately went on line to look at the expedition photos on National Geographic's website (<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/20...>) and from his descriptions easily recognized the people, the artifacts and especially the place, this stunningly, dangerously beautiful tropical wilderness untouched for five hundred years. Preston is clearly a man in love

*Once again I had the strong feeling, when flying into the valley, that I was leaving the twenty-first century entirely. A precipitous ridge loomed ahead, marking the southern boundary of T1. The pilot headed for a V notch in it. When we cleared the gap, the valley opened up in a rolling landscape of emerald and gold, dappled with the drifting shadows of clouds. The two sinuous rivers ran through it, clear and bright, the sunlight flashing off their riffled waters as the chopper banked... Towering rainforest trees, draped in vines and flowers, carpeted the hills, giving way to sunny glades along the riverbanks. Flocks of egrets flew below, white dots drifting against the green, and the treetops thrashed with the movement of unseen monkeys.*

I'm glad he's that good a writer because the only way I want to experience this place is through his prose and the photos, thanks. I certainly would never even attempt to keep up with Chris Fisher or Dave Yoder in the jungle, that's for sure.

And then there is leishmaniasis, a ghastly disease which infects Preston and half of the expedition. It's like cancer in that the cure is as bad as the disease and as of writing the book Preston's has recurred. In even cheerier news, due to the enabling offices of climate change leishmaniasis is steadily making its way north, occurring now in Texas and Oklahoma. Goody. Although Americans dying of it may be the only way to get the drug companies working on a cure, because why bother if it's only killing poor people in the Third World? I mean that's no way to make money.

But the leishmaniasis gives him the final clue to perhaps solve the puzzle: Where did the people of the Lost

City go? And why did they leave and, especially, when? Also known as: Disease as destiny.

Impossible to recommend this book highly enough.

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Read an expanded version of this review on the Los Angeles Review of Books,  
<http://www.lareviewofbooks.org/articl...>

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## **Steven says**

Special thanks to Netgalley and the publisher for providing me with an ARC in exchange for an honest review.

It's no secret that I love Douglas Preston. I've read (and reread) his co-authored Special Agent Pendergast series multiple times. I've worked with the publishers for the past few years for ARCs of that series and interviewed Mr. Preston and Lincoln Child, his Pendergast co-author. I've read pretty much everything they've both ever written, with a few things still remaining on my to-read pile.

I also love adventure stories. Lost temples, jungle treks, scary wildlife, special teams going in to discover the past... so when I saw this one hit Netgalley, I knew I had to request it. I subscribe to Preston's email newsletters, and I was aware of his long-term interest in the lost White City of Honduras. I paid attention when they used the lidar to map some potential locations of this city in the Honduran jungles, and gobbled up details when they set out on their expedition.

This book provides Preston's account of his take on the whole scenario -- from the history of the search for the lost city, to his actual involvement, to the aftereffects of that fateful journey. It's a solid read, which I expect from Preston, who is a fantastic writer.

My biggest gripe is the end. I know it's a non-fiction weaving of historical detail into modern day adventure memoir, but the last few chapters focus solely on the deadly and scary disease that affects much of the third world, and hit many of the explorers. It turns from a lesson on the White City and a recording of the adventure into a public service notice about the future of the disease and the need for treatments to be researched and available to all, not only because the disease is quickly passing from third world into first world, but mostly because of the millions of people it affects and the tens of thousands it kills on a yearly basis in the third world, where they have no financial ability to pay for treatment and big pharm sees no profit in it.

Don't get me wrong -- I entirely agree with Preston's views on the subject. I think my problem was that the book was about the adventure into what might have been the source for the legends of the Lost City of the Monkey God, so rather than ending on the disease chapters, those could have been put into the middle and the ending been something more suited to the adventurous side of the tale and how much more we have to learn from the past.

Just my opinion, but that's what reviews are. Either way, I read very little non-fiction, and this book kept my focus and my attention, and showcases Preston's strong talents. You should really take the opportunity to follow in Preston and team's footsteps into the jungles of Honduras. Just watch out for the venomous and aggressive fer-de-lance snakes and the leish-transmitting sandflies... among the bazillion other deadly things waiting for you out there. Lucky for you, you're safe on your couch. ;)

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## Dem says

### 3.5 Stars

**An interesting story of a lost age and an adventure that is informative and educational.**

Douglas Preston's account of his adventure to La Mosquitia an unexplored, uninhabited region of forest in the Honduran wilderness in search of the Lost City of the Money Gods.

Since the days of conquistador Hernan Cortes, rumours have circulated about a lost city of immense wealth hidden somewhere in the Honduran interior, called the White City or the Lost City of the Monkey God.

Indigenous tribe's folklore warn that anyone who enters this sacred city will fall ill and die. A journalist by the name of Theodore Morde returned in 1940 from the rainforest with hundreds of artefacts and an incredible story of having found the city of the monkey Gods but died before revealing its exact location.

In 2012 the Author Doug Preston joined a team of scientists along with a new machine that would change everything: lidar, technology that could map the terrain under the densest rainforest canopy.

I really enjoyed this book and the trials and discoveries of the team of adventurers. Books like these are different and I enjoy learning about undiscovered sites, the rain forest and its inhabitants of monkeys, snakes and insects but its certainly a place I don't intend visiting after reading this account. These previously unexplored sites are now in danger of looting, deforestation and tourism and a debate on how to explore and protect them can be daunting for all concerned.

I read this on Kindle and there were quire a few pictures at the end of the book but am sure the quality would be much better with a hard copy.

An interesting and informative book that I really enjoyed and I will be keeping this site on my radar as the exploration is on-going and I am sure we will hear more from The City of the Monkey Gods and Doug Preston.

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## J.L. Sutton says

In The Lost City of the Monkey God, Douglas Preston presents an engaging account of an expedition setting out to (re)discover a lost city in the jungles of Honduras (the White City or City of the Monkey God).

Preston begins by offering historical research of an earlier search for the city which, despite the hype, probably never located the city and might not have even been looking for it. However, comparing his expedition with the one 80 or so years earlier allows him to discuss scientific advancements (especially of lidar) which will revolutionize the field.

Despite any advancements, adventure and danger go hand-in-hand during Preston's expedition. That danger doesn't seem to be ill-founded. The expedition had to overcome impenetrable jungle, quickmud, one of the world's most aggressive and deadly snakes, the fer-de-lance, and disease carrying insects. In fact, tropical disease strikes most of those in the expedition (something they don't realize until they're back in their home countries). Identifying and treating the disease they have contracted becomes another mystery to solve; this mystery and discussion of the disease dominates the final sections of the book.

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## Matthew says

Fascinating and terrifying! A non-fiction story about pre-history, history, and the lessons it teaches us about our potential mortality. A cautionary tale that we may have no control over; the fate of ancient civilizations may hint at our eventual fate as well.

Douglas Preston always impresses. I am a huge fan of his fiction work (the Pendergast series with Lincoln Child) and his detailed, but not so much that it is inaccessible, non-fiction. Every time you enter either the real or made up world with Preston, you know he is going to make the mysterious real for you . . . sometimes too real . . . sometimes too scary.

This book starts out with the search for a lost civilization in Honduras. Along the way, stories of deadly flora will convince you how scary nature can really be. When the ancient ruins are revealed, it is not just a matter of exploring a long gone city or collecting artifacts – a mysterious terror is unleashed that will affect those on the expedition for the rest of their life. What you find out is not for the faint of heart – especially because it is all true!

Some may not know that Douglas Preston is the Brother of Richard Preston (author of *The Hot Zone: The Terrifying True Story of the Origins of the Ebola Virus*). Without revealing/spoiling too much, I will say that Douglas appears to be venturing into his brother's brand of writing. I wonder how much he may have consulted him while writing this book? If you like Richard's books, definitely check this out!

I will close by saying that I thought this book was great. History/archaeology fans will love most, if not all, of it. However, I hesitate to just randomly throw out recommendations since the terror that is unleashed may be too much for some!

Proceed with caution!

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## Char says

**The Lost City of the Monkey God: A True Story** is not my normal cuppa, but came to me highly recommended. I'm glad that I reserved the audio at my library.

I enjoyed this story, but was slightly disappointed at the time spent actually exploring. The beginning of the book goes into previous expeditions to areas near this city and the problems faced due to the fact that Honduras can be a very dangerous country. Not only due to the insects, snakes and other poisonous creatures, but also because of drug cartels.

The brief portion that involved the actual exploration was fascinating. Imagine going into an area *completely untouched by mankind* in 500 hundred years. How exciting! However, the actuality of exploring such an area means exposing oneself to thousands of dangers from extremely deep mud, insects of all kinds, snakes and even jaguars, to name just a few.

There was another brief section talking about the problems with other archaeologists and academia throwing shade on this expedition, some of them doing so with no REAL knowledge of what went on, how LIDAR

worked and what was found.

Lastly, and the part I found most interesting, was what happened to many of the explorers after they got home and that is: Leishmaniasis. OMG. This is a disease, (actually many diseases and symptoms, grouped under one name), which is mainly carried by tiny sand flies. The havoc this disease can wreak is almost unbelievable. This led to another section of the book which spoke about new world diseases and how they affected the Americas. There is talk of how some of the early civilizations disappeared and how that may have been caused by parasites and diseases. I found all of this fascinating but extremely scary. Most especially when it was mentioned that cases of Leish have now been found in Texas and the speculation about how that is because sand flies are moving northward due to climate change.

What I found most surprising is that many of the explorers that were diagnosed and treated for Leish, jumped at the chance to go back to the site. I can only assume that they were CRAZY!

I enjoyed this book and I learned a lot about Honduras and its history. I recommend **The Lost City of the Monkey God** to anyone interested in learning more about Honduras, the city and the history of the world, in general.

\*I checked out this audio from my local library. Libraries RULE!\*

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## **Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says**

As a longtime fan of the Pendergast series that Douglas Preston writes together with Lincoln Child was I curious to read this non-fiction book about a lost city. Personally, I find mysteries like this very intriguing. I mean a lost city that is mentioned in old documents, but no one has found? What's not to like? And, what makes this book so fantastic is that Douglas Preston himself was part of the expedition to what could be White City or the Lost City of the Monkey God. A place where no one has been for centuries, a place with a lot of deadly creatures like the deadly fer-de-lance, one of the most deadly snakes on the planet.

The Lost City of the Monkey God captivated me from the beginning, Preston has written a well-researched book, which gives the reader both the historical background as well as the impressions from the expedition. I always love books that are entertaining and learning as well, and Preston has managed that. The only thing I found a bit dreary was the technical descriptions of the equipment that they used to pinpoint the city, but I got the gist and that was enough for me. I'm just not that interested in technical things so stuff like that always makes me a bit bored. But, I fully understand the need for it to be included in the story. Especially since it pissed off archaeologists who think that it's cheating to use lidar to find lost cities. I loved that part of the story, how petty some archaeologists were.

As much as I enjoyed reading the historical background must I admit that reading about the expedition, how they were the first ones there were very thrilling. I could easily picture the scenery and I found the discovery of the city and artifacts fascinating. Although I'm not sure I would want to travel there with all the bugs and deadly snakes.

The Lost City of the Monkey God was a truly great book. I loved learning more about the history of Honduras and it made me sad to think how the Europeans arrival pretty much killed off most of the natives all over America thanks to the sickness they brought with them.

## 4.5 stars

*I want to thank the publisher for providing me with a free copy for an honest review!*

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### Diane says

My jungle terrors continue! This is the second book I've read this summer about how deadly the jungle can be, and if I read any more I'll need a Xanax.

*The Lost City of the Monkey God* is about an archaeological discovery in La Mosquitia in Honduras. Douglas Preston was reporting on the search for the ruins of an ancient civilization, nicknamed the White City, or the Lost City of the Monkey God. In 2015, researchers used technology called LIDAR to scan the interior, and when they found potential evidence, Preston was part of the group that went deep into the jungle to investigate.

*Trigger warning: If you are scared of snakes, this book will make you FREAK OUT. I am terrified of snakes and this book made me so twitchy and jumpy that I became certain there was a rogue python hiding under my dishwasher (I've seen too many news stories, I know).*

But seriously, there are a lot of snake stories in this book. I'd break the book down like this: 30 percent archaeology, 30 percent snakes, 30 percent terrifying diseases. The other 10 percent consists of scary tales about flying in and out of the jungle.

I loved the history and archaeology discussions, and I was interested in the theories about why the mysterious civilization may have been abandoned a thousand years ago. There is also an alarming section on the spread of diseases, because several members of the crew got sick from a parasite. Really, the whole book is fascinating.

Despite my jungle fears, this was a nice follow-up to *The Lost City of Z* by David Grann, which was about the search for an ancient civilization in the Amazon. I highly recommend both books, but I'm going to take a break from jungle stories for a while.

### Meaningful Passage

[On Preston's first night in the jungle he spotted a giant venomous snake that one of the crew members wrestled with and killed.]

"When I retired that night to my hammock, I could not sleep. The jungle, reverberating with sound, was much noisier than in the daytime. Several times I heard large animals moving past me in the darkness, blundering clumsily through undergrowth, crackling twigs. I lay in the dark, listening to the cacophony of life, thinking about the lethal perfection of the snake and its natural dignity, sorry for what we had done but rattled by the close call. A bite from a snake like that, if you survived at all, would be a life-altering experience. In a strange way the encounter sharpened the experience of being here. It amazed me that a valley so primeval and unspoiled could still exist in the twenty-first century. It was truly a lost world, a place that did not want us and where we did not belong. We planned to enter the ruins the following day. What would we find? I couldn't even begin to imagine it."

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## Constance says

Most of the events in this book happened relatively recently, and although it makes the book feel slightly more relevant, it also feels like the book was very hastily written - it's kind of a rambling mess.

This book is not really actually about the "Lost City of the Monkey God." It's more a journal about the experience of being a part of the mostly old white male team that basically had so much money/power/free time that they were able to "discover" previously unexplored settlements of a previously under-studied culture (due to these settlements being located in dense rainforests in politically-unstable Honduras). Which still sounds like it might be interesting, but actually turns out to be like watching a slow survivalist show on TV, interspersed with periods of fumbling amateur descriptions of artifacts and academic theories.

At points, the author also mentions people critical of the narrative of this team "discovering" the "Lost City of the Monkey God," e.g., people who want to talk about "issues such as those of colonialism, white supremacy, hypermasculinity, fantasy and imagination [and] indigenous rights," all things that are obviously present in the book. Instead of acknowledging these issues, the author is infuriatingly defensive and navel-gazing about it all.

Really, I'm really not sure why this book is getting so much positive press. Are people actually reading it? I'd really love to read about the culture and the excavation of the site from an anthropologist's perspective, or really anyone who knows what they're talking about.

I learned that people actually get hurt on survivalist shows like Bear Grylls's. It's not all fake!

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## Jeffrey Keeten says

**"I peered out the window, transfixed. I can scarcely find words to describe the opulence of the rainforest that unrolled below us. The tree crowns were packed together like puffballs, displaying every possible hue, tint, and shade of green. Chartreuse, emerald, lime, aquamarine, teal, bottle, glaucous, asparagus, olive, celadon, jade, malachite--mere words are inadequate to express the chromatic infinities."**

Douglas Preston was always interested in lost civilizations, so when he got the chance to join an expedition into the mosquitia jungle in Honduras to find the Lost City of the Monkey God, he was more than interested, he was all in. There had been many explorers before who had attempted to find this "mythical" place, but except for the Indiana Jones style journalist Theodore Morde who emerged from the jungle in 1940 with a horde of fascinating objects and a story of finding the fabled White City, there had been nothing to substantiate the legend. Morde committed suicide shortly after returning from his adventures, taking his secrets with him.

## Had he been cursed by the Monkey God?

The team focused in on one valley that was isolated and difficult to access easily on foot. They were going to bring new technology to the search by borrowing what is called a lidar machine. It shoots thousands of lasers

at the jungle floor from a plane. It records the reflections that bounce off the objects on the ground. The software eliminates leaves, trees, and any other objects that are not part of, hopefully, the man made structures hidden beneath the canopy.

All hell broke loose over the use of this technology. The academic world, outside of the normal petty jealousies, suspicion of success, and paranoias that afflict all centers of higher learning, seemed to be more offended by the use of this technology, as if the expedition were cheating by using it.

See, the problem was the lidar mapping found not one large site of manmade structures, but two. The irrational feeling that they didn't deserve these finds because they didn't outfit an overland mission that went blindly slashing through the jungle hoping to stumble upon something interesting, and the fact they didn't lose about a third of their party to disease, snakebit, and jaguar attack in the process, is frankly ludicrous.

I do have to admit it does take some of the romance out of the whole swashbuckling archaeologist image that I grew up with. The cities were still there unmolested because no one had been able to penetrate the jungle effectively to find them.

Despite being able to drop into the site with a helicopter, and despite having better gear than what most explorers can haul into the jungle in the traditional overland expedition, the group still experienced difficulties with, to name a few, sand fleas, torrential rain, and snakes. Let me share a bit about one particular snake that kept turning up over and over again in the ruins of this civilization.

*"The fer-de-lance, he said, is known in these parts as the barba amarilla (Yellow Beard). Herpetologists consider it the ultimate pit viper. It kills more people in the New World than any other snake. It comes out at night and is attracted to people and activity. It is aggressive, irritable, and fast. Its fangs have been observed to squirt venom for more than six feet, and they can penetrate even the thickest leather boot. Sometimes it will strike and then pursue and strike again. It often leaps upward as it strikes, hitting above the knee. The venom is deadly; if it doesn't kill you outright through a brain hemorrhage, it may very well kill you later through sepsis. If you survive, the limb that was struck often has to be amputated, due to the necrotizing nature of the poison."*

\*Shudder\* #reason number one why I don't go into the Honduran jungle.

So why did this civilization abruptly disappear at around 1500? Preston pulls together some pretty good theories regarding that event. Some are based on the greed of the rulers doing to their civilization the same thing that the rich and powerful are currently doing to the United States. Unmitigated greed makes even the most robust economies vulnerable to a similar collapse. The celebrated author of Guns, Germs, and Steel, Jared Diamond, has some wonderful examples, and Preston shares that wisdom with us, as well. The one that I found most interesting points to a celebrated event that happened in 1492 when Christopher Columbus "discovered" America.

**The foreigners came and "withered the flowers."**

Preston includes a wonderful chart that show the catastrophic effect of native populations making contact with the disease ridden crews of the Columbus exploration mission. *"What would a 90 percent mortality rate mean to the survivors and their society? It does not just kill people; it annihilates societies; it destroys languages, religions, histories, and cultures. It chokes off the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. The survivors are deprived of that vital human connection to their past; they are robbed of their stories, their music and dance, their spiritual practices and beliefs--they are stripped of their very identity."*



There is no proof that the diseases that killed so much of the indigenous population of the Americas was also the culprit that killed the civilization of the Monkey God, but the timing does make it a valid consideration. It was unavoidable that the Old World would meet the New World, so it was just more a matter of when.

The Monkey God expedition members returned to their regular life, relieved that they did not come down with any major diseases; the bites and rashes that they all suffered from disappeared, but then weeks later over half the group had a sore appear that would not heal. It became a miniature volcano. After much deliberation by doctors and contagious disease specialists, they determined that they had come down with leishmaniasis. Among the half that came down with this frankly disgusting and alarmingly difficult disease to contain was Douglas Preston. It is called white leprosy if that gives you any indication of what it does to the body once it gains enough control of your immune system.

### **The curse of the Monkey god?**

**My signed copy of the book also came with a signed postcard of the author in the mosquitia jungle. Ephemera is always fun for a collector.**

I just finished reading *The Lost City of Z*, set in the Amazon, a few days ago, and it seemed a perfect pairing to read a similar book about another lost city further north in Central America. Any thoughts of chucking my rather pedestrian job as circulation manager/owner of a farm publication and joining a jungle expedition have been firmly squashed like a blood bloated flea beneath the tread of a kevlar boot. Not to mention, even the thought of tangling with one of those damn Fer-De-Lance snakes makes me break out in hives. I am a firm believer in doing my jungle travelling from the safety of my favorite reading chair.

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