



Legends of the American Desert: Sojourns in the Greater Southwest

Alex Shoumatoff

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For his brilliant reportage ranging from the forested recesses of the Amazon to the manicured lawns of Westchester County, New York, Alex Shoumatoff has won acclaim as one of our most perceptive guides to the oddest corners of the earth. Now, with this book, he takes us on a kaleidoscopic journey into the most complex and myth-laden region of the American landscape and imagination.

In this amazing narrative, Shoumatoff records his quest to capture the vast multiplicity of the American Southwest. Beginning with his first trip after college across the desert in a station wagon, some twenty-five years ago, he surveys the boundless variety of people and experiences constituting the place--the idea--that has become America's symbol and last redoubt of the "Other. From the Biosphere to the Mormons, from the deadly world of narcotraffickers to the secret lives of the covertly Jewish conversos, Shoumatoff explores the many alternative states of being who have staked their claim in the Southwest, making it a haven for every brand of refugee, fugitive, and utopian. And as he ventures across time and space, blending many genres--history, anthropology, natural science, to name only a few--he brings us a wealth of information on chile addiction, the diffusion of horses, the formation of the deserts and mountain ranges, the struggles of the Navajo to preserve their culture, and countless other aspects of this place we think we know.

Full of profound sympathy and unique insights, *Legends of the American Desert* is a superbly rich epic of fact and reflection destined to take its place among such classics of regional portraiture as Ian Frazier's *Great Plains*. Alex Shoumatoff has created an exuberant celebration of a singularly American reality.

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