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Jonathan Evan Maslow

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Jonathan Evan Maslow : 'BIRD OF LIFE, BIRD OF DEATH' before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised 'BIRD OF LIFE, BIRD OF DEATH':

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Bird watching and civil war By Bob Newman A little anger isn't bad. When you think of the collection of knaves, brutes, and simple ^\$%@#s who rule many of the world's countries, you can get pretty steamed up, especially if you happen to see some of the happy results in person. What would be weird is if you didn't get angry. OK, Jonathan Maslow did go to Guatemala to trace the fate of the quetzal, a long-tailed bird that is not only the national symbol of that troubled Central American nation, but also gives the name to its currency. The quetzal has been important to Central Americans perhaps for thousands of years. Their great green tail plumes of the male bird were traded up and down from New Mexico to Peru. Indian armies believed that the quetzal flew overhead and blessed their endeavors. To kill a quetzal merited the death penalty. Just as the Maya people survived (despite all attempts to wipe them out) in Guatemala and make up more than half the population today, so the quetzal survived as a symbol. There's even a Quetzal Restaurant right near here, in Lynn, Mass., run by Guatemalan immigrants. But Maslow did not just let it go at that---a trip into the forests to find the quetzal. He took note of what was going on around him and got angry. Good for him. The vulture was more of an apt symbol for the brutal, even crazy military rulers of Guatemala in the 1980s, unhappy country. He went to check out the vultures too, in a hellish dump. Massacres, executions, assassinations, disappearances, torture---these were the norm in Guatemala. When it was all over, some years after Maslow left, it is estimated that 200,000 people had died. Nobody will ever really know.

At the same time, the country's poverty (in a rich land with hard working people !) meant that Indians had to keep on cutting the forest to make more cornfields, which, thanks to total lack of care by the government, would erode quickly. Maslow paints two sides of the picture very clearly---the beauties of nature, the general kindness of the local people (quetzal)---and the suspicion and disinterest of the official class living in gated luxury coupled with the signs of war all around (vulture). Such an approach could be simplistic, but it is very effective. One man, a rich landowner named Don Alfredo, who owns part of a mountain where quetzals live, seems to straddle the two groups, trying to protect his property at the same time as preserving the quetzals and treating the local peasants fairly. BIRD OF LIFE, BIRD OF DEATH is a good book because besides being well-written, it doesn't hesitate to go beyond its original objective---birds---and portray with considerable ironic or sarcastic anger the ugliness of a society at war with itself. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Always give it to friends that want to learn more about Guatemala's history. By Mama Guacamole So, I'm from Guatemala and a lot of times it is hard to explain where you come from without shocking people so I give them this little book. Although this is a little outdated now, it gives a the reader the chance to learn about the horrors of the civil war and the impact it had not only on people but nature. It is very well written and accurate in regards to history. I was there then and that's how it all happened. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Overall it is a good read. By Customer I lived in Guatemala in the 80's and saw what was going on there. Maslow and his friend showed up for a month long visit. Their impressions were interesting, but the reality was far more nuanced. Still the book was very well written. I accompanied them into an area where a massacre happened and it was one of the scarier moments during my time there. We went through a number of military checkpoints and deep into the part of the country where the war was going on. Overall it is a good read.

From Publishers Weekly Originally, the journey was a search for Guatemala's national symbol, the endangered quetzal (bird of life). But Maslow, author of *The Owl Papers*, found in this beleaguered country that life itself is threatened. In city slums, wretched human scavengers are quickly followed by vultures (zopilotes, or birds of death). In the countryside, there is poverty and fear of the roaming militia the infamous death squads. Maslow incorporates history and natural science, people and society into this grim, incisive report. With a photographer friend, he drove from Guatemala City through devastated foothills to the Highlands, encountering frequent military checkpoints. They found the quetzal, but its resplendence was overshadowed by necrophagous zopilotes. This powerful, impressionistic story offers little hope for the future of this land of turmoil. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc.