



Mentawai Shaman: Keeper of the Rain Forest

Charles Lindsay

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A rare glimpse of an exotic and imperiled rain-forest culture is the extraordinary record of a Western photographer's eight-year friendship with a tribal medicine man.

Mentawai Shaman tells in images and words the story of "the original people," or Mentawaians, an archaic tribe who from time immemorial have lived on Siberut--an isolated, ecologically unique jungle island in Indonesia. It is a place where everything, from plants to rocks to animals and man, harbors a spirit. San Francisco-born Charles Lindsay, an ethnographic/naturalist photographer based in Tokyo, first entered the rain forest of Siberut in 1984: ironically, he hitched a ride in a dugout canoe with a team of Indonesian government "modernizers." He has returned time and again, intrigued by the Mentawaians' courageous attempt to retain their original culture. Lindsay's guide through the rituals of this arcane society is Aman Lau Lau Manai, a shaman, or *kerei*, who has become his friend as well.

During Lindsay's second visit, he began to compile a phrase book for the unwritten Mentawaiian language and was permitted to join a ritual monkey hunt. Subsequently, he was invited by messenger to help celebrate the important festival culminating Aman Lau Lau Manai's shamanic studies. Their friendship had begun. After surviving a life-threatening fever, which Aman Lau Lau Manai treated by conjuring his spirit, Lindsay became an adopted member of the new shaman's family.

As year's passed and their reciprocal trust grew, Aman Lau Lau Manai allowed Lindsay to photograph him collecting indigenous herbal medicines, hunting with poison-tipped arrows, raising his children, and performing sacred duties to maintain the Mentawaians' harmony with nature. Seldom-observed rituals include tattooing, teeth chiseling, rites of healing and mourning, animal sacrifice, frenetic dance, and trance--all captured by Lindsay's unassuming camera.

The result of this intimate relationship is *Mentawai Shaman*, a color portfolio of more than eighty dramatic photographs, augmented with excerpts from Lindsay's journals. Together they detail his warm personal interaction with Aman Lau Lau Manai and the community in which he plays a central role. A historical essay by Dr. Reimar Schefold, an internationally respected anthropological authority on the Mentawaians, provides a learned yet accessible overview to their esoteric way of life and the extent to which it is menaced by progress.

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