

# EVIDENCE OF A LOST CITY

a novel and a movie by d.n. stuefloten

*an excerpt from Chapter One:*

THE CITY IS CONSTRUCTED along the cardinal axes. This alignment persists even if, as often happens, a street suddenly twists into a series of curves: the loops and circumlocutions always trend towards the east or south, and in any case these circumlocutions, often surrounded by trees and lawns, are transitory: the preciseness of the avenue reasserts itself, and the swards of grass and heather return to brick and stone, although an occasional rose or camellia will protrude from some crack in some façade, becoming dusty, or perhaps a vine will remain clinging to the edge of an arched doorway: visible mementoes of a more organic pastoral, a suggestion of persistence which also clings, in a more subtle way, to neighborhoods: we have seen—and John will discover—areas which always suggest dilapidation, whose cornices are forever cracked and whose buildings, whatever their geometries, edge towards the same fragmentation: neighborhoods cluttered, ramshackle, even degenerate in the way that ripe fruit degenerates into redolent decay: an emblem of age, perhaps: the city is ancient and the years have a weight: this weight may be perceived in the names that appear on the streets and buildings, the Cortez Palace, the Avenue of the Caliph's Mistress, the Ishtar Gate, Sumerian rumblings, echoes of Toltec gods, the Quetzecoatl Boulevard, Tutankhamun's Tomb, as well as names that are gibberish, strings of consonants or transliterations of Cantonese vowels and Egyptian diphthongs, names whose meanings are today obscure even while they retain their strange power: names are incantatory, magical, they have a resonance that we can feel whether we understand them—or not. This book will therefore be full of names, both spurious and real, and we shall see who, or what, survives. Will John survive? We are writing of course about John's youth. In some sense he has survived. Today he is an old man with broken and missing teeth. How this came to pass is not the subject of this book. Nevertheless we must note: this morning the checker in the grocery store treated him like a doddering old fool, he was fumbling for his change, this is true, dimes, nickels, pennies, who can keep track of such things, he paid for his soy milk and his ibuprofen and returned home sullen and distraught. It is an ancient whine—a whine more ancient than we are—that the years have fled too rapidly, that time is a relentless enemy, that the world has become a strange and dishonest place. What was the world like in his youth? He met his wife then, in a manner of speaking, a meeting of sorts, he was drifting one night, for instance, somewhat drunk, along a row of buildings where women commonly stood in doorways, their faces powdered white and their eyes like tiger eyes, a look which has always fascinated us, the tight skirts, the nylons bunched at their clasps, the lips as lurid as any nightmare. "Hey, soldier," they murmured as John passed, he was not a soldier, we were not at war, but he was blond and blue-eyed and lean and muscular, a boy full of vigor, ready to piss against any wind, dreaming already of heroic adventures, of cities filled with soldiers, whores, beggars, innkeepers, the petit bourgeoisie of incipient capitalism, rich politicians and their concubines, drunken old men, lithesome women, the perfume of opium dreams drifting in the tropical air, aaah, he says, aaah, we say, a whole city to explore, in which to meander at our leisure....

"Must you go on like this?"

"I must."

We stand face to face. She understands this is our story. After a moment she laughs. We continue.