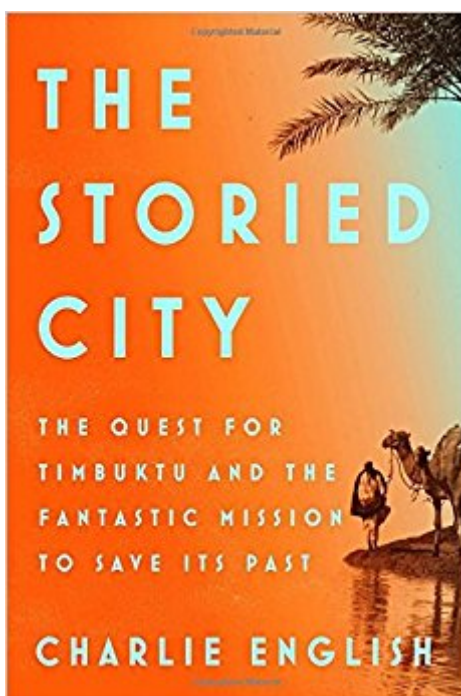


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# The Storied City: The Quest For Timbuktu And The Fantastic Mission To Save Its Past



## Synopsis

“Timbuktu is a real place, and Charlie English will fuel your wanderlust with true descriptions of the fabled city’s past, present, and future. Fodor’s Two tales of a city: The historical race to “discover” one of the world’s most mythologized places, and the story of how a contemporary band of archivists and librarians, fighting to save its ancient manuscripts from destruction at the hands of al Qaeda, added another layer to the legend. To Westerners, the name “Timbuktu” long conjured a tantalizing paradise, an African El Dorado where even the slaves wore gold. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, a series of explorers gripped by the fever for “discovery” tried repeatedly to reach the fabled city. But one expedition after another went disastrously awry, succumbing to attack, the climate, and disease. Timbuktu was rich in another way too. A medieval center of learning, it was home to tens of thousands—according to some, hundreds of thousands—of ancient manuscripts, on subjects ranging from religion to poetry, law to history, pharmacology, and astronomy. When al-Qaeda-linked jihadists surged across Mali in 2012, threatening the existence of these precious documents, a remarkable thing happened: a team of librarians and archivists joined forces to spirit the manuscripts into hiding. Relying on extensive research and firsthand reporting, Charlie English expertly twines these two suspenseful strands into a fraught and fascinating account of one of the planet’s extraordinary places, and the myths from which it has become inseparable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“[Charlie English] reconstruct[s] vivid scenes | A classic nonfiction braid fits perfectly into ongoing narrative of Timbuktu, a place where the magnificence of the tale can occlude the plain fact of what’s there.” —New York Times Book Review

“Spellbinding.” —The New Yorker

“Thrilling...English tells the new and the older tales in parallel...The two stories illuminate each other... a brilliant device.” —The Economist

“An exemplary piece of investigative journalism that is also a wonderfully colourful book of history and travel. Above all, it is a work of intellectual honesty that represents narrative non-fiction at its most satisfying and engaging.” —The Guardian

“Insightful...interesting|[The Storied City] shows that the sort of willful delusion behind much of the 18th and 19th century quest for Timbuktu continues to this day.” —The Wall Street Journal

“Timbuktu is a real place, and Charlie English will fuel your wanderlust with true descriptions of the fabled city’s past, present, and future.” —Fodor’s

“Captivatingly considers the mythic quality Timbuktu attained in the collective imagination, and the failure to understand the city’s continued importance as a treasure trove of knowledge.” —Shelf Awareness

“English writes vividly of explorations of the past and complications of the present, with a focus on the Indiana Jones-style account of the evacuation of the manuscripts.” —The BBC

“A piece of postmodern historiography of quite extraordinary sophistication and ingenuity.” —The Times Literary Supplement

“Part reportage, part history, part romance and wholly gripping | a riveting read.” —Sunday Times

“A compelling work of history and historiography|[An] engrossing history of a city with the enduring power to fascinate.” —Kirkus Reviews

“Clear eyed and straightforward...[English] thoroughly dispels the myths about Timbuktu to reveal a truth that is, in many ways, even more remarkable.” —Booklist

“English shares his firsthand observations of the region’s people and its treasures, offering a no less fantastical or unlikely tale than those imagined in the fever-dreams of the first Europeans to venture up the Niger.” —Publisher’s Weekly

“A fascinating interweaving of past and present: meticulously researched, powerfully written and riveting.” —Ben Macintyre, author of Rogue Heroes and A Spy Among Friends

“In this enthralling book - part historiography, part detective story - Charlie English leads the reader on a treasure hunt through Timbuktu’s labyrinthine past to reveal how fact and fable have always commingled there - and continue to do so today. Like the beguiling place it describes, The Storied City is fascinating and surprising at every turn.” —Scott Anderson, author of Lawrence in Arabia

“A stirring, page-turning story of thrilling discovery and heroic resistance, peopled by an unforgettable cast of heroes, villains, swashbucklers, scammers,

sheikhs, kings, and learned men. —Amy Wilentz, author of *Farewell, Fred Voodoo: A Letter from Haiti* — “A taut, mesmerizing journey to the legendary desert city that, for generations of Europeans, sat like a shimmering mirage just beyond reach and understanding. The actuality of Timbuktu’s history, and the remarkable story English tells of the secret 2012 rescue of its invaluable manuscripts, is far richer than the mounds of gold envisioned by the many explorers who perished trying to get there. — Peter Stark, author of *Astoria: Astor and Jefferson’s Lost Pacific Empire* — “The Storied City is a lovely read. The dramatic present and past of Timbuktu are masterfully interwoven by Charlie English, who has a writer’s pleasing prose style, a reporter’s nose for the truth and a novelist’s ear for narrative structure. Peopled by memorable real-life heroes and villains and with an epic rescue mission at its heart, this is a model of fine storytelling. —Jon Lee Anderson — “In this riveting duel narrative of Timbuktu, juxtaposing Europe’s audacious African explorers of yore with Mali’s current culture-keepers heroically defending sacred manuscripts from jihadist occupiers, Charlie English manages to do a remarkable thing: he pulls back the veil of mystery that enshrouds the marvelous, dusty city—but only enhances its magic. —Dean King, author of the national bestseller *Skeletons on the Zahara* —

Charlie English has held numerous positions at the *Guardian*, most recently as head of international news. A fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and the author of a previous book, *The Snow Tourist*, he first journeyed to Africa at nineteen, and has traveled widely there and elsewhere around the globe. He lives in London with his family.

Informative book on the fabled, but very real Malian city of Timbuktu. Focuses on the colonial European attempts to reach the city in the 1700’s and 1800’s, interspersed with the Islamic fundamentalist takeover of the area in 2012. In 2001, I traveled by traditional boat up to Timbuktu and saw in the crumbling sandy city many of the sites mentioned in the book. Although stacked on simple shelves and exposed to the elements, the manuscripts at the Ahmed Baba Institute commanded reverence. This book details the heroic efforts that citizens and admirers of the Saharan city made in order to safeguard the manuscripts from the jihadists.

This is a follow-up of the earlier *Badass Librarians of Timbuktu*. It sets the first book in context, provides a bit of very helpful fact checking, and explains the complexity of the rebellion which generated a cultural crisis in Africa’s primary center of learning in “Black Africa.” English is a very

spirited and entertaining writer, showing how horridly disappointed the first European explorers were upon reaching Timbuktu, and how the descriptions of Timbuktu from the 1750's on were really mirrors of the cultural prejudices of the writers, rather than factual accounts of what is actually there. Incidentally, English also explores the wildly divergent intentions of the Islamist occupiers of the city in these recent events. An extremely valuable book.

Interesting for the history of Western Africa and the sequestration of the documents. But, what's really in them???

Well told story of past and present in a dangerous region.

The book was fascinating! I couldn't put it down.

I liked much of this book but there are places where it drags into discursiveness. I did not finish it.

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