

BOOK: Author fictionalizes tale

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usual disclaimers about any resemblance to fact, and numerous basic facts, including the end, have been changed.

"It is not a historical novel. It is a work of fiction," said Corbett Torrence, an archaeologist who studies Calusa culture at the Randall Research Center on Pine Island.

Even though some aspects in the book may be real, he said, most of the book's content is not.

The book is largely set in the Everglades City-Marco Island area. It also makes the amulet's finder a girl, who was later found hanging from a tree.

In fact, the amulet was discovered by a boy on Pine Island, 14-year-old Ronnie David Taylor — who also died, hung from a tree.

That was several months after Taylor found the medallion along with human bones and glass beads.

Mysterious artifact

The gold amulet stood out.

White describes it like this:

"Picture a metal object about the size of your palm and shaped like a miniature shield. On the upper half of the shield are concentric circles upon a cross. The circles are intersected by three lines. Midway down the medallion are two square holes cut through the gold. They are placed in a way to suggest eyes, although that may not be the intent.

"Below the holes are a pair of inverted teardrop shapes and several half-rectangles, like doors within doors on the bottom half. On its back are two perfect and delicate crescent

moons."

Some say it resembles an alligator's skull, White wrote. Others say parts of it are a spider design, or doors of infinity, or roots of a sacred tree.

No one knows the certain meaning of the symbols. But archaeologists do believe the medallion was once worn by Calusa royalty.

Gold was virtually nonexistent in the Calusa culture, and the medallion is one of only four such golden objects known to exist.

Archaeologists are also reluctant to even talk about artifacts because of collectors and grave robbers.

"People have the idea they can find these things, even though their chances are less than winning the lottery," Torrence said.

Such looting is now illegal in Florida. But White and Bill Marguardt, the museum's curator of archaeology, say that's little deterrent.

Evil looters and crazed collectors play a big part in White's book as they pursue the amulet and other finds.

But the real story is equally dramatic. After finding the amulet in the fall of 1969, White wrote in early recounts for *The News-Press* and *Outside* magazine, Taylor started having bad dreams and nightmares about the object.

Taylor had been fascinated by the Calusa culture for years, and state archaeologists said he appeared to have an extraordinary gift for finding artifacts.

But Taylor's mother said he was upset about disturbing a grave.

In February 1970, three days after

a particularly disturbing dream, the boy was found hanging from a tree.

Some suggested suicide, perhaps instigated partly by the discovery he had epilepsy.

Still others thought it was an attempt to contact Calusa spirits in a semiconscious state. No one knows.

In the novel, the girl's hanging also remains a mystery until the end, when the question of how and why gets a grisly answer.

Ownership changes

The novel also ends with the hero — Doc Ford, who has a more than passing resemblance to White — wearing the golden locket around his neck.

"A gift from an old friend," is how Ford describes it.

That's not what happened in real life.

Shortly after Taylor's death, White wrote, his mother was contacted by a Southwest Florida treasure hunter, Leon Hurtado.

Hurtado, who has since died, arranged a seance. In that event, David Taylor — speaking through Hurtado — "told" his mother not to sell the amulet but to instead give it to Hurtado, Taylor's mother told White later.

At that time, Hurtado denied the story. He and Taylor's mother later told White that the mother sold it to Hurtado for \$200, with the provision he put it in a museum with David Taylor's name listed as finder.

Hurtado claimed it was displayed in a Michigan museum that soon closed. Taylor's mother, meanwhile, heard from other archaeologists that Taylor's name was not mentioned.

AMULET: Artifact one of only 1

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White said collectors have offered many thousands of dollars more for the amulet than the \$15,000 value appraisers cited when White agreed to give it to the museum two years ago.

"I never intended or wanted to sell it," he said. "There are some things that you can't put a price on. I never thought I owned it, I was just holding on to it for awhile until the right place could be found for it."

White now has the amulet in a lockbox for security.

The ultimate right place, he decided about two years ago, is the museum.

UF's archaeologists, including Marguardt, have worked with White for years on their Pine Island Calusa research.

The Indians, whose influence ranged from Florida's Keys across Lake Okeechobee and north to Cape

Canaveral, had their home base in Southwest Florida's barrier islands and coastal areas from about 500 A.D. to the Spanish arrival in the 1500s.

They were then wiped out by war and disease. Little physical evidence remains of their civilization, and UF archaeologists have studied what they can find on Pine Island for about 15 years.

But White's gift decision almost came undone in the midst of recent disagreements between university officials and White.

The problems centered largely around what White saw as university opposition to development of the Cloisters, a parcel located near the Randall Research Center for Calusa research on Pine Island.

The Cloisters was recently purchased by Rob Wells, a close, longtime friend of White's and the owner

of Cabbage Key restaurant and inn on another island.

Wells needed a rezoning for his planned development.

White White said he'd prefer to see the area stay as it is, he also believed Wells' plans for a small inn and restaurant would be better than condos or hotels others might place there.



WHITE

White said he thought Marguardt's questions about the rezoning translated into opposition, a perception Marguardt said was incorrect.

Recorded minutes of the meeting list Marguardt as neither for nor against the project, but as a general speaker who addressed historical issues.

agreed to sell
the amulet
to the museum