Clarion Review

Historical

An Indian Star Among Suns
Helen Oswalt
BookSurge
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Set in the tumultuous world of French-Indian conflict in eighteenth-century Mississippi, An Indian Star Among Suns offers a lush, richly detailed account of Natchez life. The story follows Star Eyes, a young and vibrant Indian maiden as she struggles to reconcile her desire for foreign love with the rigid social expectations of her tribe.

A descendant of the Great Sun—the powerful leader of the Natchez people—Star Eyes enjoys the privileges of upper class life in a bustling Grand Village, but yearns for the unknown. She is captivated by the French settlers and intrigued by the wanton sexual adventures other Natchez women enjoy with French soldiers; she is eager to blossom into womanhood so she too can explore the benefits of this quickly changing world. Unable to curtail her desires for hot-headed Natchez warrior Painted Crow, Star Eyes begins a passionate, unpredictable sexual relationship with the young brave but soon finds herself falling in love with Louis, a half-Indian, half-French settler. This lovers' drama unfolds amidst the rumblings of war when Star Eyes must face the catastrophic demise of her people at the hands of the French.

Oswalt's background in anthropology and experience editing history texts about American Indians is evident in the meticulously detailed, historically accurate passages on Natchez life. These details—like the ritual of body painting before the harvest ceremony—are all well selected and bring the Natchez past vibrantly to life. Complex issues such as battle tactics and the growing animosity between the French and English are woven into intimate conversations between the main characters, making the information both accessible and enjoyable. However, in the consistent melding of these two elements—fictive characters with historical facts—Oswalt falls painfully short.

The narrative voice lacks necessary fluidity and transitions awkwardly from introspective moments with the characters to abrupt paragraphs of historical analysis and

explanation. These passages read like unwelcome insertions from a history text and disturb the natural flow of the story. While the information is important; the narrative style is flawed. While all the elements for a successful historical novel are present in this work and show valuable potential, the novel would benefit from a narrative voice that seamlessly interweaves these rich historical facts with fully developed, believable characters that do not require extraneous explanations for their actions. Star Eyes, for example, is a vivacious character, the perfect heroine for a historical novel—daring, rebellious, beautiful—but her abrupt questioning of Natchez custom early in the novel seems forced, and her feelings superficial. The reader should be allowed to sink deeper into Star Eyes' skin to understand her desire to defy prescribed rules. Instead, Oswalt resorts to a reportage style of explanatory narration that distances the reader throughout the novel.

Despite these deficiencies, An Indian Star Among Suns has a truly compelling storyline. With its historically accurate rendering of French–Indian relations, it will be a worthwhile read for anyone with a keen interest in American Indian history and a penchant for romance.

Shoilee Khan