Clarion Review

General

Cargo of Hate: A Sailing Story
Kermit R. Mercer
Trafford
978-1-4669-6327-6
Three Stars (out of Five)

Fans of sailing and seafaring stories will find Kermit R. Mercer's *Cargo of Hate: A Sailing Story* to be a rewarding read. General readers, however, will find it to be something of a struggle, albeit one worth enduring.

In the preface, Mercer states that his book originated as a supplement for a sailing course he taught over several years. Thus, the purpose for his story about forty-something, divorced, industrial arts teacher Allen Reed is "to answer the many questions that arose during the class discussions" about various aspects of sailing along Canada's north coast of Lake Ontario. It is a story, he says in the prologue, "for people from twelve years to old age," but he adds that "the sailing sections were written to be instructive, concerning matters at sea." It is this combined intention of providing education and entertainment and to appeal to both a special and a general audience that results simultaneously in the book's strengths and imperfections.

On the positive side, Mercer's narrative descriptions of how to sail alone on a nearly four-ton, thirty-two-foot wooden sailboat named *Reed's Sturdy* during calm and troubled waters, day or night, are clear, concise and easy to follow. Easy, that is, for readers steeped in the technical vocabulary of sailing and knowledgeable about the layout of such vessels. General readers lacking this background, however, will have trouble comprehending references to "the clew" or "the gooseneck," for example, without a much-needed glossary.

Novice sailors searching for instructive nautical guidelines won't immediately identify a book titled *Cargo of Hate* as what they want. And both audiences will also find the several typographical errors in the text to disrupt smooth sailing. Additionally, the twenty-five black-and-white reproductions of pages from the *Sturdy*'s log are of poor quality due to shading. Several of them are signed by Mercer, although the log and sailboat are supposedly Reed's. Elderly readers of any stripe could be critical of the relatively small font size of the text.

Again on the positive side, once into the book, readers will find the narrative of *Cargo of Hate* to be a suspenseful, action-filled adventure that brings Mercer's storytelling talents to the fore. Allen, an American, and his older, newly met Canadian friend follow clues of a different sort than those on the *Sturdy*'s sails, as the two intercept terrorists attempting to create chaos with an explosives-laden cargo ship in the St. Lawrence Seaway. Through the intensity of these episodes, the tension, like a sail on the Sturdy, crackles and snaps.

Sailors and landlubbers alike will be inspired by the courage both men display under fire and will appreciate the insights into the resulting military tribunal to explore the terrorism involved. Equally, readers' heartstrings will be pleasantly tugged over a romance between Allen and a single mom divorcée and her daughter who both have surprising connections to Allen's friends, especially the one who helped him battle the terrorists.

Imperfections aside, mariners and general readers alike could profit, each in their own way, from sailing leisurely through Kermit R. Mercer's *Cargo of Hate*.

Wayne Cunningham