



Echoes Over Water

Stephen Cline

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Stephen Cline teaches writing and literature in Hawaii. He drew on his interest in sailing, expertise in music, and knowledge of Celtic history and literature to write *Echoes Over Water*.

The novel depicts two groups of sailors traveling in opposite directions and in different time periods across the north Atlantic Ocean. Even with the help of electronic navigational devices, Alan Griffin, known as Griff, and his crewmates find themselves in uncertain situations as they head east to deliver a sailboat to its new owner in the British Isles. Griff seeks to forget recent disappointments in his life, while he imagines the westward advance of his Celtic ancestors.

The book's parallel story concerns Griffin, a Celtic minstrel living in the Middle Ages, and several of his compatriots, who escape their Saxon conquerors in a small vessel. They rely on the stars and accounts of mythic heroes to guide them.

In their travels, both Griff and Griffin encounter dream-like visions and meet women capable of perceiving the men's inner thoughts. When Griff's boat stops in Newfoundland, he sets out to explore the island. There, he meets Heather, an anthropology student at the university who tells him about the island's Celtic settlers. She shows Griff her grandfather's replica of a cittern, a guitar-like instrument.

Meanwhile, Griffin and his crew witness volcanic eruptions off the coast of Iceland and attribute this strange activity to angry spirits. When their modern counterparts arrive in Iceland, the volcanoes appear quiet. Griff feels drawn to nearby lava caves, and the sulfur smell grows stronger as he glimpses a red glow deep in the cylindrical cavern. He sees vague images: "Men in a small boat ... rowing hard, stretching out ... in fear. They were rowing for their lives amid swirling fire. A man stood, in his hands was a harp."

In this well-written book, Cline provides gripping action scenes and captures the complexities of human interaction with believable characters. The first chapter, which concerns Griff's ruminations about his failed life prior to this voyage, however, lacks the compelling forward movement of subsequent chapters. Typographical errors increase as the book progresses. Examples include: "slipped the bade into the heavy fold of her robe" and "we pushed the wheel of time along by rehearsing our adventurers."

Nonetheless, readers who value thoughtful literary content will appreciate *Echoes Over Water*, as will those interested in human migration, Celtic mythology, and seafaring adventure.

MARGARET CULLISON (October 7, 2011)

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