Clarion Review

Historical

From This Far Distant Shore
Richard Curtin
978-1-4259-4286-1
One Star (out of Five)

In Richard Curtin's first novel, a rambling story of the Vietnam War, David, a sheltered American youth, is deployed to a division based outside the city of Da Lat. Upon his arrival, David finds himself lost and begs a ride to the Fort from Mr. Desjardins, a well-to-do resident. Instead of driving David directly to the Fort, Mr. Desjardins takes him to his large mansion, where David meets his beautiful daughter, Elizabeth. David eventually makes his way to the Fort, but not before he finds himself involved in the lives of the troubled Desjardins family.

Military life is full of obstacles for the FNG. He is assigned to the wrong barracks, which gets him a beating by the elite gunship crew. Battle in the jungle is bloody and difficult, and David has to deal with the deaths and disappearances of his buddies. Occasionally, David finds it easier to escape the Fort and rendezvous with Elizabeth in Da Lat. As he comes and goes from the base, Mr. Desjardins begins to see that naÃ¯ve David may be able to help his financial situation and plans to enlist his unwitting help in his opium trafficking scheme, a move that has tragic results.

There are other storylines here too, including the mistreatment of elephants and the higher-ups' attempts to strategize troop movements. But between the book's convoluted sentence structure, confused tense, large cast of characters, and excess of mundane detail, it is difficult enough to follow David's story. Curtin tries to show the realities of life in Vietnam, but readers won't get far before they find that it is too difficult to pick out the wheat from the chaff.

Curtin has evidently written this massive book with a thesaurus by his side and with little knowledge of the art of creative writing. More often than not, he begins his sentences with a participial phrase. For example, when David first encounters Elizabeth dancing in the Desjardins' mansion, Curtin writes:

> *Enjoying the groovy hallucination he gazes at the figurine*

> *spinning on a shaft of sunlight. Transfixed by a prism of changing colors he gawks at the hypnotic pulse of the alternating light. Agog in pleasant bewilderment he follows the image waltzing to the tingling crystal spheres.*

The narrative also switches between past and present tense several times on each page. By varying his sentence structure and correcting this problem of tense, Curtin would create a more dynamic and comprehensible story. But it would take copious editing to make the story appealing.

A tighter focus on David's experiences, and the elimination of extraneous detail and needless repetition would make the book less of a doorstop and more of a manageable novel.

Curtin would also be well advised to hire an editor to correct typographical errors, add "ed" to the end of past-tense verbs, and correct distracting punctuation errors that include the placement of question marks at the end of dialogue tags rather than after the quoted dialogue.

In its current form, this novel is neither enjoyable nor informative. A revision of focus and drastic editing are necessary before the reader can assess the merits of the story itself.