Clarion Review

General

Land of Men
Edward Muesch
iUniverse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Combining the mystery of a ghost ship with the romance of the open sea Edward Muesch weaves an intriguing story about two men's journeys to find adventure and true love in his novel *Land of Men*. Muesch winner of a 2007 Indie Excellence Award for a work of creative nonfiction sailed around the world in 2001 and adds his experience and knowledge of maritime history to this incredible tale. The novel opens with Samuel Dover who has recently separated from his wife of twenty-seven years. He is looking to heal the wounds of his failed marriage by setting sail across the globe in his newly purchased yacht *Fog Witch*.

Muesch artfully concocts an intricate story about Sam and his first mate Mike. Sam is intrigued when he learns that his ship was originally named *Dark Trader* and undeterred by unexplainable occurrences he and Mike set a course that follows the exact route *Dark Trader* has taken two times before in its strange past. When *Dark Trader* reaches Marquesas both captain and first mate find that they have traveled farther than just a few thousand miles: they have traveled back to 1864—the date of *Dark Trader*'s initial voyage to Marquesas. Here on an island called Te Heuna Enata which means "Land of Men" Sam meets Kaitu a woman who has haunted his dreams and he finds that their future is entwined with a past that they have both experienced twice before.

While the intrigue seems to be culminating at this point in the novel the author pitches a plot curve ball with a tragic and unexpected twist and the focus shifts to Mike and the choices he is faced with. The change of course for the novel seems to mimic the twisted journey of the *Dark Trader*. It's this complexity of plot that provides momentum for the novel and makes for a suspenseful tale.

However clever the plot is though the writing often feels elementary and simplistic. Muesch consistently relies on simple sentence structure causing many paragraphs to feel

choppy. Because the dialogue follows a similar structural pattern the conversation between characters has an unnatural ring to it and direct speech is clumsy. The author may be aiming for stylistic simplicity in order to highlight the fictional elements that he manages so well but the opposite is achieved and the style flaws interfere with the plot's success.

In the end readers may be able to overlook some of the writing's inadequacies because the story is so engrossing; ultimately the novel is an enjoyable escape into another time and place. It is a moving story about each man's quest to discover his destiny and unravel the mysteries and choices of true love.

Jessica Higgins