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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

Local Tribes

Thomas Hansen Hickenbottom
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“Pushing harder, he squatted with head lowered and arms outstretched in front, charging into the green/gray tube as the wave lined up the full length of the beach. The wall of water pitched him over and he was locked inside.” So begins the story for Marco D’Giorgio, nineteen, surfer for life, and fisherman’s son in Santa Cruz, California.

Although the social conflict between the “cove” and the “valley” is firmly in place, the real challenge lies just beyond the wake. During an icy autumn in 1966, Marco’s idyllic life as a promising young surfer is in jeopardy. A month after his father’s death, while living with friends in a house abandoned by their parents, he returns home to his mother to find an expired draft notice from the US Army. While trying to figure out what to do, Marco works, surfs, and parties with his Coast friends. When the stakes are raised, Marco convinces his friends to join him on an epic quest to Mexico on his father’s fishing boat. What he does next is what makes *Local Tribes* more than just a book about rebel surfers and big waves during the late 1960s.

Local Tribes by Thomas Hansen Hickenbottom is a poetic statement about freedom, desire, duty, and honor. The setting around Monterey Bay is both magnificent and frigid, a testament to the fickleness of nature and its nurturing and destructive qualities: “Dawn light slid over Loma Prieta, the highest peak in the Santa Cruz mountain chain, showering its rays on the bumpy surface of Monterey Bay and Surf City. Seals stirred on the catwalks under the wharf and sea birds nesting among the pilings ruffled their wings after the cold, wet night. Sandpipers huddled in an angry pack against the shale cliffs of the Cove, upset they weren’t able to pick for crabs with the intense waves sweeping the shoreline.”

In life, as in the surf, protagonist Marco takes notice of his surroundings and sees in the faces of waves, cliffs, animals, friends, relatives, or crowds, the reactions of his decisions, both right and wrong, and can reflect upon them when he goes astray. His strong resolve is never shaken, even by family secrets as they emerge and threaten his identity. He shows respect for nature and place and eventually for those who came before him.

Local Tribes is an honest portrayal of a deeply entwined local community dealing with the influx of permanent tourists, changing local politics, the challenges of both society and nation, and ultimately time itself.

Hickenbottom is also the author of the nonfiction book *Surfing in Santa Cruz*, as well as five limited-edition poetry books. He has been riding the waves since 1959 and was one of the Santa Cruz’s first sponsored surfers.
DEREK CRAM (June 23, 2011)

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