

Clarion Review ★★★★☆

CHRISTIAN

## Prairie Dog Town: A Civil War Novel

**Karl A. Bacon**

Historical Chronicles Press (Jul 17, 2016)

Softcover \$12.99 (362pp)

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*This wonderful wartime story set in a fascinating era is equal parts action and romance.*

The South is torn by the Civil War in *Prairie Dog Town*, a story punctuated by shells blasting and the continual threat of Union invasion. This is a sweet and engaging addition to Karl A. Bacon's continuing Shiloh Trilogy.

Teenage Union soldier Stanley Mitchell of Ohio, having been injured at Shiloh and taken in by a kind Southern woman in Tennessee, is delivered to a Southern slave trader, LaVache, who treats him miserably. LaVache sells Stanley into the service of a Confederate riverboat captain. As far as Stanley is concerned, he's done with this war, and he just wants to return to Tennessee and the girl he has fallen in love with, Anna. The threat of Union invasion looms in the background.

Though this is certainly Stanley's story, the narration is delivered in a neutral voice. Stanley's point of view comes in a subtle fashion, and the book sometimes switches perspectives to LaVache and the object of his desire, Olivia. Stanley himself is in a complicated position, inhabiting a gray area in this devastating war: "I am a class of one," he writes to Anna. "I belong to neither North nor South, but am caught between the two, almost a man without a country." Stanley is innocent in many ways, but his strength and increasing maturity show through.

LaVache, in contrast, is an interesting villain, and is appropriately assigned some rather vile actions. His one redeeming quality is his fascination with a lovely, regal woman in Vicksburg. His violence and cruelty help to keep the plot moving.

The prose is very easy to read, with just the right amount of description illuminating the scenes. Strong research—the author visited some of the novel's settings—is evident. Visual context is provided by a sketch of the *Evangelina* riverboat, a map of its Mississippi River route, and a map of the town where Stanley settles.

Woven throughout the text are themes of determination, overcoming extreme hardship, faith in God, and understanding those who are different. There is also requisite exploration of racial divides, serving to draw a contrast between Stanley and other characters who treat those of color harshly. Driven by his faith and compassion, Stanley sees the value in all human beings. He suffers much, but still maintains his faith and thankfulness for God's provision—via a sympathetic doctor and a helpful slave—as his lot slowly improves.

*Prairie Dog Town* is a wonderful wartime story set in a fascinating era, with equal parts action and romance.

BILLIE RAE BATES (October 5, 2016)

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