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Young Adult Fiction

Shanghaied
David Paul Collins
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> *I loved Lord Jim by Joseph Conrad, seeing myself in his wonderful stories of faraway places, strange-looking people, and magnificent adventures. I wanted my own magnificent adventure, just like them.*

Jack Sligo, a fifteen-year-old Irish Catholic kid growing up in Boston in the 1950s, sneaks out of his home one night and hitchhikes to New York hoping to get a job on a ship to see the world. And he gets his wish, waking up on an African merchant ship bound for ports unknown, with no idea how he got aboard or if he'll ever see home again.

Life at sea quickly turns out to be more effort and less fun then he had hoped, the backbreaking work leaving him sun burnt, callused, and eaten alive by mosquitoes. Still, even at the moments he wonders if the next painful tiring task will be his last, he thinks about the stories he'll be able to bring back to his classmates, the money he'll earn to take back to his parents, and the boasting he can do as a real-life sailor.

Shanghaied moves just slowly enough so a reader who doesn't know a boat from a ship can pick up on the terminology and slang, but quick enough to convey the break-neck pace of working on a merchant ship. There are some wonderfully drawn action scenes, like the chaos on deck as the ship battles a hurricane. Still what draws a reader in is the diverse cast of characters Sligo meets on board, from the ship's Bo'sun, who quickly gains Jack's respect, to Winston, a boy who's been on the ship since he was twelve and desperate to get back home to see his mother before she dies. He sees Jack as his brother, as they plot their escape together.

Sligo seems younger than fifteen in an accurate way, with the naivety about the world a young teen that had never left the insular community of his hometown would have. The novel touches on issues of race relations in the 1950s, and Sligo's naïve indignation at the way his

black shipmates are treated in a Southern diner is written perfectly, full of anger but mostly confusion about the situation.

Though this is the author's first book, it is his first-hand experience, having been shanghaied aboard an African freighter, that makes the book come to life.

Fans of other sea-set teen novels like Avi's *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* will like this book, which captures well the story of an utterly inexperienced kid being thrust into a situation he isn't quite ready for, as well as the adventure he has in exploring new countries and learning to survive on the open sea.

Molly Horan