



Stan's Leap

Tom Duerig

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A unique vacation, one last hurrah before settling into parenthood, leaves Jenny and Stan Brown marooned for life on a tropical island. Thus begins *Stan's Leap*, Tom Duerig's first novel. After a rather superficial start—think Gilligan's Island and their three-hour tour—*Stan's Leap* gains momentum and readers realize that this is no comedy.

Jenny hides her early stage pregnancy and convinces Stan to try this adventure in paradise. Bound for Henderson Island, renamed New Eden, the young pair join nine other couples for immersion in an authentic, primitive, Polynesian lifestyle. Stepping onto the island, they begin to question their vacation choice, especially as they are asked to surrender all their worldly possessions. Their anxiety builds when their host, Kimo, reveals his dark side as a former Special Forces survivalist with raging personality disorders. Only Kimo's beautiful assistant and lover, Nani, can control him. Together they help the vacationers settle into a life without manmade trappings. Then a freak storm leaves them stranded, forcing them to build their own version of civilization.

Duerig's research enhances this compelling read that waffles between Dystopian and Utopian themes. The insight into survival, group dynamics, and relationships with a look at the South Pacific, island life, sailing, and the history behind the mutiny on the *Bounty* elevates this to something more than a simple adventure story.

At times the book resembles the television program *Survivor*, as people form subgroups and jockey for position in their new world order. Suspense grows with the mysterious locked bunker and the threats levied by an angry vacationer. Conflict escalates, especially between Kimo and male vacationers. The author tightly packs this existentialist novel, squeezing in foreshadowing references to the historic tale of *Bounty* mutineers who died on Pitcairn Island.

The writing flows well in a sparse style, yet the lack of details and a telling rather than showing style disengages readers on an emotional level, and stymies character development: "Early Thursday afternoon, the rain finally stopped. There was still no hope of starting a fire, however, partly because everything was saturated, but mostly because Kimo hadn't returned."

Two overriding problems plague Duerig's first novel. First, it contains two separate stories. The author jumps abruptly from the vacationers' story to a tale told by Stan and Jenny's seventeen-year-old son. Second, the author moves from a third-person omniscient point of view to a first-person perspective. Then he switches narrators several times, jerking the reader from one viewpoint to the next. Perhaps framing this book with the point-of-view of Bill, the final narrator, would provide cohesion and solve viewpoint problems.

Still, the novel rises above these weaknesses. The overall voice holds authority, substantiated by research and believable details based on the author's personal experiences in sailing as well as science and mathematics. This tale of the high seas and the hope of a utopian society will attract readers trapped in the drudgery of daily life. (November 17, 2009)

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