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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

The Alaskan Sting

John Herold
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The Alaskan Sting lingers in the mind. The story moves along briskly with unexpected twists, but John Herold's action novel reads like the script for a B-grade, made-for-television movie. It even looks like a script, with extra white space between paragraphs. Eventually the mystery is solved, right before the final commercial break.

The hero, Thomas Arthur Courier, who does not reveal his own name until page twelve, narrates *The Alaskan Sting*. A single man from San Francisco, Tom is at loose ends when his cousin Scott offers him a free cruise to Alaska. During the flight to Seattle to catch the boat, and after several bourbons, Tom meets the flirtatious Amanda, who he assists after the plane suffers a sudden loss in altitude, resulting in injuries to several passengers. Among the injured is Amanda's grandson, Lester. Upon landing, Tom and Amanda deposit Lester at a hospital to recover and they retreat to a remote cabin for an evening of intense sex. So begins a series of improbable encounters and adventures. In fact, booze and women are a major theme.

Important to a good story is an enticing beginning or hook that grabs readers' attention. Here, The Alaskan Sting fails in two major respects. First, the introductory action is plodding and unimaginative. At one point, Tom is caught in a traffic jam crossing the San Francisco Bay Bridge and Herold writes, "*Hurrah! Hurrah!* The chubby female traffic cop was finally raising her arm and waving us on."

Second, the early part of the novel is poorly written and edited, which is distracting. Explaining how he was given the free cruise to Alaska, Tom says, "I simply had to show your identification and walk aboard the Nordic Princess, an Italian cruise ship." Whose identification did Tom show? Later, referring to Tom's tiny apartment, Scott says, "I bet you can't stow more than an (sic) deflated rubber raft in that place of yours, it's so small."

Even with its faults, *The Alaskan Sting* is worth the trip. John Herold has the ability to construct and spin an exciting yarn. He is also an artist and has included several of his own illustrations in the novel.
JOHN MICHAEL SENGER (August 29, 2012)

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