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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ ROMANCE

The Laughing Trout: A Novel of Fly Fishing in A Mad, Mad World of Love and Pandemonium.

Jim Ure
Jim Hayes, designer
CreateSpace (Dec 17, 2013)
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Raunchy humor and romantic romps distinguish Jim Ure's topsy-turvy tale.

When free-spirited fishing guide Jud Buckalew dupes his despised cousin, Mark Bosham, with a severely mutated frozen trout, hilarious consequences ensue as anglers cross paths and dangle lines to snag a live sample of the fish and its $50,000 reward. Only a fisherman of Jim Ure's caliber could serve up the tall tale of fishing turmoil found in *The Laughing Trout*.

Jud Buckalew lives as a fishing guide in the Island Park backwoods near Paris, Idaho. A solitary man, he's abandoned conventional life partly to recover from "the incident" with his ex-wife several years ago, and partly to escape his dreaded cousin, Mark, who has consistently and unfairly bested him. For revenge, Jud tricks Mark into believing a mutated fish carcass, dubbed the "Lago Poopo trout," is a genetic wonder. Mark convinces others that the fish is real and offers a $50,000 reward to whoever captures one. The offer brings an assortment of fisher folk, as well as a national television crew, to Paris for a series of comedic and romantic adventures centered around The Laughing Trout Bar and Grill and nearby Island Park fishing holes.

Ure is an accomplished writer, as his publications list illustrates. He proves himself again in *The Laughing Trout* with scenes of rib-tickling comedy and tender romantic drama. His easy-flowing humor sometimes leans toward the raunchy, as in the description of a fisherman with "a hard-on that won't go away." On the other hand, the depiction of Jud telling his newfound girlfriend, a wannabe TV anchor, about his painful, life-changing "incident" years ago is told in convincingly intimate and poignant language. The scenes of romance between the two are also well drawn, especially their heated confrontation over who has been telling the truth in their brief relationship.

The ensemble cast of characters encompasses the weird and the manipulative. Cousin Mark is constantly conning anyone he can, including Jud's girlfriend, who spots him as a phony after he misleads her into believing his time in Paris, Idaho, was time spent in Paris, France. A naked, singing environmentalist does his best to disperse the folks at the fishing holes while the well-endowed proprietress at The Laughing Trout Bar and Grill tries to keep her "full breasts tilted up like cannons" at an ex-military man wanting to rent Cabin 4. Even serious situations like the burning of a boat, camper, and truck get Ure's comic touch in the bumbling of their owners.

The shifts between characters and scenes occur seamlessly and enhance the pace of the story. So does the brevity of the chapters and their focus on a single character or incident. The characters, although often laughable, are never caricatures, nor is the humor mean-spirited. The consistently credible dialogue keeps readers laughing, and well-written prose details the many frantic antics in and around the contest to land the nonexistent Lago Poopo—the image of which smiles beguilingly in Jim Hayes's cover art.

A fun-filled, quick read, *The Laughing Trout* is for anyone fishing for a laugh or a gentle tug on a heartstring.
WAYNE CUNNINGHAM (March 4, 2014)

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