ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

The Mystery of Table Mountain
William Post
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Fans of the Western genre might expect a stoic hero astride a trusty horse intent on setting things right. They'll get a measure of that in The Mystery of Table Mountain, but William Post's first volume in a proposed trilogy is slightly different from the traditional Western, though it does contain desperate escapes, Indian attacks, and more pretty maids than one man should rightfully meet before he settles down.

The novel begins with rich young James Raymond fleeing west after greedy and manipulative relatives wipe out his family. Raymond is a student at Harvard when his father is murdered shortly after the Civil War. He is aided in his escape by his father's attorney and the parents of a college friend. In St. Louis, he meets a young man who'll become his adopted brother, Billy Two Shirts. He spends a year or two in St. Louis before sending Billy to Harvard and setting out on a wagon train journey toward Billy's home near Table Mountain.

Along the way, James, traveling under the name of Jim Ryan (he later becomes Eason Livingston), meets Ellen, whose husband died on the way west. He later discovers his own Western Eden atop Table Mountain, where he meets Rachel, the soon-to-be-widowed daughter of ranch owners Cab and Opal Murphy, Billy's adoptive parents. Next there is Rosa Marie de Troise, who Jim rescues from an Indian war party camped at the foot of Table Mountain. Finally, there's Annette, the survivor of a war party raid on another wagon train. It's with Annette that he spends a sensual winter in a snowbound mountain cabin.

The story moves along well enough, although the reader's attention might stray when they encounter occasional anachronisms. For example, Rachel tells Jim, "I could tell she didn't care for me, and it wouldn't take the acumen of a psychologist to know why." Readers might also be troubled by plot devices and serendipitous occurrences that facilitate the hero's journey. There always seems to be enough money, and the right person—often one of the invariably beautiful female characters—seems to show up at the right time.

The story, which contains a strong religious vein, is told in the first person. There is a great deal of exposition, and too much happens within the confines of fewer than three hundred pages. The last chapter, "The Sting," in which Billy plants himself in Baltimore to bring to justice the true murderers, could be expanded into a novel of its own.

While there are occasional grammatical missteps and instances of poor editing ("In a

horse whisper and with a smile he said…”) neither distract from the protagonist’s saga. James Raymond/Jim Ryan is an appealing character, and the Western elements of the story are enjoyable. Readers also will find The Mystery of Table Mountain comes to a satisfying conclusion in spite of being the first part of a trilogy.

Gary Presley