

BREAK THE SKY



DAVID LUDERS

Second in the SAGA OF PACIFIC ISLANDS series

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A Novel By
David Luders



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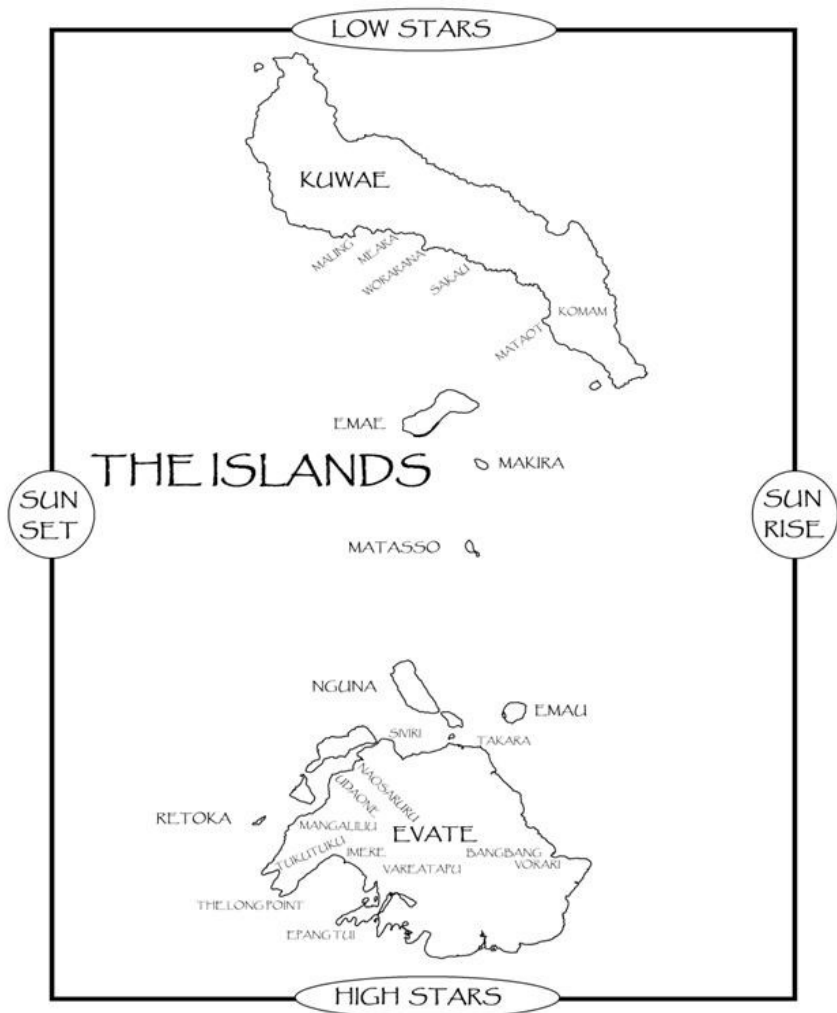
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In the modern convention, these islands lie at 17 degrees South Latitude and 168 degrees East Longitude

GLOSSARY

<i>ariki</i>	(In Polynesia) high chief
<i>ambat</i>	chiefly emblem or device, distinctive for each wota
<i>aore</i>	songmaster
<i>atavi (sing. and plur.)</i>	person performing priest-like functions
<i>bilel</i>	A softwood tree of many uses
<i>Evate</i>	the central island of Vanuatu, now called Efate or Vate
<i>fire mountain</i>	volcano
<i>great winds</i>	south-east trade winds
<i>Ipare</i>	An island in the south of Vanuatu, now known as Tanna
<i>kainanga</i>	subject(s) of a chief
<i>kamal</i>	see, varea
<i>kava</i>	A shrub from which a mild narcotic beverage is prepared
<i>lelelel</i>	a woman's dance
<i>mandai</i>	fermented breadfruit; earth pits where this is made
<i>manuvasa (sing. and plur.)</i>	a chief's herald, mouthpiece and historian
<i>munwei</i>	clairvoyant, seer
<i>mwalala</i>	secluded open area reserved for men's activities
<i>napauna wota</i>	'chief's head': his council of sub-chiefs, his 'wisdom'
<i>narei (plur., nareii)</i>	untitled people, commoners
<i>nasanga</i>	one of two designated to carry out a chief's edicts
<i>nasaotonga</i>	tribute symbolizing fealty
<i>ngolongol</i>	hand-held gong of bamboo or carved hardwood
<i>plantain</i>	large-fruited banana often picked unripe and cooked
<i>poka</i>	wooden slit-gong, made from a hollowed tree trunk
<i>red wind</i>	cyclone, hurricane
<i>saeana</i>	men's 'dart' game played with 'javelins' of light cane
<i>silonaka</i>	large carved wooden plate used in ceremonies
<i>siit</i>	dance for light entertainment, for men and women
<i>sirikat</i>	mat hung from the back of a woman's waist-band
<i>sumusumol</i>	waist-mat and suspended mats in front and behind
<i>takoari (sing. and plur.)</i>	war chief, accomplished warrior
<i>talatok</i>	undergarment of a waist-rope and breechcloth
<i>tapa</i>	cloth made from beaten tree bark, 'bark cloth'
<i>tapu</i>	taboo; forbidden or sacred
<i>varea (also, kamal)</i>	chief's 'seat' – chiefly house and domain
<i>Viti</i>	Fiji; the Fiji islands
<i>wota (sing. and plur.)</i>	chief
<i>wotalam (sing. and plur.)</i>	high chief
<i>yam</i>	a crop harvested annually, a year

circa A.D. 1250

CHAPTER 1

Up here, high on the side of Tavalapa, it was cooler than down at Komam. Almost the highest of all on Matasso na Mata's domain, Vango's garden faced the breeze. He looked out over Kuwae's green hills to Sasamaki's domain and beyond that, sea to the horizon. To the right were the smaller islands, then the long dark shape of Evate.

Turning back to his task, Vango began to dig again, his mind returning to what had happened earlier in the morning and the way Matasso na Mata's daughter had looked at him. Other women had looked at him like that, but she was of high rank, the eldest daughter of his wotalam! Surely he was mistaken! With her rank, he was much too low for her to think of him in that way. Was she just being gracious to one of her father's people? It had seemed much more than that.

With two others she had come across him talking with Kopan and Lukai on the path. Talking with those two he had been at ease, for although one day Kopan would become the wotalam Taripoa-mata, he was still only a youth, not much different from all the others who liked to be with him. But when Lei-manu and the other young women came up they had all been of rank above him and their talk had made him feel awkward. Then, when he had excused himself to come up here, Lei-manu had said, 'Oh, stay and talk, Vango Alil. We do not see enough of you.' That was when she had looked at him like that. But she should have known that their talk was not for him to hear. When she had asked, Kopan had answered to say that he and Lukai were going to Taripoa-mata's kamal-tapu, the place where chiefly secrets were kept. It was improper for him, Vango, to hear even that - and Lukai had looked annoyed. That was when he had come away.

He could guess what Kopan and Lukai were doing at the kamal-tapu down there. They, the wotalam's heir and the heir of the wotalam's manuvasa, would be there to be instructed in secret things. Though only the second son of an unimportant wota, Vango knew that among those was the wotalam's chiefly history. Both a wotalam and his manuvasa had to know that history besides whatever else there was. Vango looked down towards where the three kamal-tapu were, of Taripoa-mata and Matasso na Mata and Matasso Tonoriki. Trees hid everything and it was best that he not think of that and get back to digging.

As he did, Lukai was thinking of Vango, instead of memorising what his father Manaser Tarikaiwa had so far told Kopan and him. At the encounter on the path, Vango had behaved quite properly. It had been thoughtless of Lei-manu to ask him to stay and it could only be because Vango was the most handsome man in Komam, or perhaps the whole of Kuwae. Foolish girl! As soon as Vango had gone, she had stopped asking questions. She had only been pretending to talk to them. Thank goodness Vango had enough sense not to take advantage of his good looks.

By the time Kopan and he had come to the kamal-tapu their minds had been composed again. His father had met them at the outer palisade. After some warning words, he had led them inside and here for the first time they had seen the memorial stones. Lukai looked across at them, slender, shin-high and standing in their rows before the inner palisade that hid the inner things. Each of the stones, each one a little different from the others, just as every man looks different from every other, stood for one of the Taripoa-matas or Tereweres, going all the way back to the first, Kopan Terewere. Now at last he knew how the long history was remembered and he and Kopan had to fix in their minds what his father had been telling them. Lukai glanced across at Kopan's earnest face beside him and recalled his father's words.

The first stone was Kopan Terewere, who had arrived at Bangbang on Evate in the canoe *Navasor*. He had moved from there to Epang Tui and when he had moved on from there he had left two wota, Reiman and Masiel. Lukai's mind followed the story and the reasons for each move. Udaone, Siviri where he rebuilt his canoe and left a Taripoa-mata, Emae and Worarana. Then the manvasa Tarikaiwa had moved to the next stone.

'This is Kopan Terewere's son, Aman Terewere,' he had said. 'He was the first to receive the title on Kuwae. After him were five generations.' He paced the stones, naming each and stopping at the seventh. 'This is the second Aman. He was the last of your line buried at Worarana, Kopan. He bestowed two titles on his two eldest sons, first-born of two wives. The elder of them was Karis, who was the first Taripoa-mata.' Tarikaiwa, Lukai's father, gestured to the eighth stone. 'He moved here to Komam and named his first son Kopan. His younger brother Saanku took the title of Terewere at Worarana and his line remains there to this day.'

Lukai's head began to swim as he tried to remember the next part. The next stone, the ninth, was that Kopan, the second Taripoa-mata. Then there was a Seule, named after the second son of the original Kopan Terewere. Yes, that was it. After that, his father had paced the stones, naming them Kopan, Seule, Kopan, Seule and stopping at the last, the seventeenth. He had said to Kopan, 'This is your grandfather, whom you remember. When it comes time for your father Seule to join these generations, you will place

his stone next in the line. Then your son, who must be Seule, will place your stone next after that. Now come, Kopan, and repeat the names to me.'

Lukai watched Kopan, slender and now growing tall, move hesitantly from each stone to the next as Tarikaiwa listened to him. It must be true, Lukai thought, that Taripoa-mata came to Komam after the two Matassos. That was a thing he wanted to know, for nowhere save Komam was there three wotalam in one place. Thinking of Matasso na Mata, his mind slipped back to his daughter Lei-manu. This morning she had been so very full of life, surely because of Vango. It had been immodest, the way her eyes had travelled over the fine moulding of his muscles. Surely Vango had noticed it.

Vango in his garden tried to get Lei-manu out of his head, putting his back into the digging. Driving his digging stick into the soil, wrenching it loose and driving it down again, he yet could not dislodge her from his mind. When he had finished digging she was still there and he gave up the effort. She was there in his mind's eye, slender and lissom, with those firm and shapely breasts and that fine light skin. But it was her eyes in that lovely face that held him, large and dark and brimming with meaning. But it must be that she was only playing with him, admiring him perhaps, because there could never be anything between them. Yet the thought set his body tingling.

'Enough of this!' he said aloud. Looking out along Kuwae, he turned his eyes towards Evate. He stopped, looked again. There, sailing from the windward side of Evate towards Sasamaki's domain, were two canoes. That was odd. Canoes coming from Evate always sailed down the leeward side of the island, for safety. Even craft from further away followed that course. He watched. Presently he was sure: the vessels were very big and sailing fast. They were not like any he had ever seen, and the number of men on them! These were stranger canoes! Where could they be from? He must warn Komam. Taking one last look, he grabbed his tools and hurried to the path.

Skidding at wet places, dodging tree roots, he sped down the familiar track to where the steepness lessened, loped on. As he neared Komam, people stared, calling out questions. 'Canoes!' he called back and ran on, to halt outside Matasso na Mata's great house. Breathlessly, he gave the word to Tarinua.

Tarinua, the wotalam's manuvasa, listened carefully and put questions, then said, 'Well done, Vango. Go now and tell Taripoa-mata's manuvasa. Then return. There will be more for you to do.' Then he spoke urgently to a man at his side. 'Sound the poka for the takoari to come. We may need fighters. Find also the nasanga. You – go to Matasso Tonoriki's manuvasa and tell him.' Turning, he stooped through the entrance of the great house to where Matasso na Mata waited.

Hurrying to Taripoa-mata's great house on the other side of Komam, Vango heard the poka drumming to summon the takoari. Today I might do my first real fighting, he thought, and I must not miss the chance. Arriving, he was told that Tarikaiwa was not at the kamal. What was his purpose in seeing him? 'I am sent with urgent tidings to be given to Taripoa-mata.' Well then, he could tell the nasanga, who would be summoned. Vango waited, fretting, Then it came to him that the manuvasa would be at the kamal-tapu, with Kopan and Lukai. Impatiently, he waited until at last the nasanga came.

Dismissed after passing the message, Vango hurried. The conch sounded behind him, calling Tarikaiwa, as he came up to the crowd of men gathered at Matasso na Mata's great house. The takoari was telling them, 'Fetch your arms, then wait here. If there is to be fighting with these strangers, we will be under Taripoa-mata's orders.' Setting off to gather up his spear and war club, Vango glanced across at the watching women. Lei-manu was following him with her eyes.

Until the conch called him, Tarikaiwa had been engrossed. Once he had been satisfied that the two youths had the names by heart he had gone on to the next thing. 'Until today you have thought as others do that Taripoa-mata is wotalam and owner over all the lands and people of Komam. Doubtless you have wondered why the two Matassos have the status of wotalam. Now you will hear and learn. Taripoa-mata came to Komam seven generations after Matasso na Mata, who arrived here after Matasso Tonoriki. The domain was first taken up by Mwasoe Visava of Mataot and Matasso Tonoriki held that part that is Komam for him. It was Matasso Tonoriki who first settled Komam. When Matasso na Mata came, part of the domain was given into his care and he holds it to this day.

'Now, mark my words. Taripoa-mata is wotalam of Komam only by a right given him by those two, who stand behind him. They are the owners of the land and of the people, save for the people who belong directly to Taripoa-mata. How can such a thing be? It is because when Taripoa-mata came, he ranked by blood above the two Matassos and had more people – but he had no land. When that happens, always the one arriving takes on the duties of wotalam on behalf of the others. It is like this.' Tarikaiwa drew a triangle on the ground. Touching the upper corner, he said, 'Taripoa-mata.' As he pointed to the lower corners of the triangle, the conch sounded in the distance. He stopped, then heard it give again the signal that was his alone. He looked at the two youths, pointed again at the lower corners and said, 'The two Matassos. Taripoa-mata is the head, but they are the two feet on the land. But now I am summoned. We will take our leave of the forefathers watching and listening here, and return on another day.'

Coming to Taripoa-mata's great house, Tarikaiwa went straight in, to where the wotalam awaited him. Informing him of the stranger vessels, Taripoa-mata declared, 'They must be sky-breakers, Manaser. The men on them may try to land. They may be friendly or hostile. I have given orders that the takaori have fighters ready. We must think of how to receive them should they come ashore. It does not sound as if they are in distress, so they must have some purpose.'

Tarikaiwa considered. Vessels so different probably did break the sky, come from far away, as Taripoa-mata had said. 'Until we meet them we cannot know if they are men like us, speaking our tongue. We know that Kopan Terewere with the first Tarikaiwa commanding his canoe came from islands under the rising sun known as Tonga. If they are from Tonga, they may be friendly, even distant relatives.'

'After eighteen generations they would be very distant relatives indeed. They may be hostile. We should keep the people back.'

'Ma, you will never prevent every man, woman and child from gaping at these vessels. Such a thing has never happened before.'

'That is true, but they must not crowd the landing places.' He thought for a moment. 'If the strangers are friendly we should not alarm them. Let there be fifty of my men armed and the others hiding their weapons. If the strangers land, you and the other two manuvasa should greet them.'

Excited, the men were disappointed to be told to hide their weapons, but Tarinua called Vango aside. 'Stay with me, Vango Alil. I may need runners. Let us go.'

Standing with the three manuvasa on the vantage point, Vango gazed. There, two hundred paces from the shore, were the great canoes approaching. They seemed even bigger than he had thought, each with two great hulls and a vast sailing mat. They were superb, slicing the waves proudly and smoothly. The men on them! They were big, too, with light skins, tawny. He tried to count them but they moved about – more than thirty on the first canoe. Their garments were as his own, but their hair! It was not tight on the head but blew in the wind. Not a weapon was to be seen.

The strangers were easing the sailing mat now, slowing, and looking back at them across the water. The man standing at the stern of the first craft must be the leader.

On board the first great canoe, Lo'au stood observing. This was surely a rich and abundant land. There must be three thousand well-fed people in that throng gazing back at him. Dark of skin like the people of Viti, they looked stalwart and more curious than warlike. The group of armed men did not look hostile and on a hill were some with what seemed to be insignia of rank. These people did not look to be the savages he had half

thought they might find. Should he give the order to approach the land, or not?

This did not seem to be the place of legend. What had been handed down for generations was a land with a protected anchorage facing the rising sun. That was more like the island they had just passed. Here, there was no anchorage worth the name. The seamen were glancing at him, wanting him to make up his mind. Perhaps further on, behind what looked like a headland, there might be an anchorage. Lo'au made up his mind.

'Sail on.'

Vango was disappointed. For a time it had looked as though the great canoes would come to shore, but no. Others began to shout and wave then, but too late to entice the strangers. How smoothly they sailed, those wonderful craft! What must the men on them be like, to build such things? Some of them were waving now, but already looking back. Through the commotion that broke out came Tarinua's voice.

'I will not be needing you as a runner, then, Vango. Go up to the top of Tavalapa and watch. Send word of where those vessels go. We have not seen the last of them, I think.'

At least two hundred men climbed to the summit and followed the canoes with their eyes, arguing over what sort of men those were, from where they had come and why. They were the first of many, coming to invade Kuwae: there would be fighting. No, they had no weapons. They were looking for land, or women. Perhaps they wanted to exchange things. What things? No one had an answer. The canoes sailed on, then turned towards Emae.

All of this coast was the same, thought Lo'au aboard the first canoe, save for a modest bay behind the headland. He could return to it, but he must have a safe anchorage. That other large island might be the place to find it. He ordered course altered to the left and the other canoe signalled to follow, though that was hardly needed. Kae would follow without it.

The steersmen leaned on the great oars, the sheets were hauled in and the vessel rounded to the new course. Ahead lay two smaller islands and another further on. These seemed to be clear seas and the great canoe settled to the swells.

This was the twentieth day after leaving Tonga and Lo'au tingled with the exhilaration of raising these islands. Since boyhood he had dreamt of making a voyage like this one and whatever may come to pass, to have made this discovery was reward enough. It had not been as difficult as he had feared. The great winds had scarcely slackened and had he not found these islands he would have continued for ten days more before thinking of giving up. But here they were, the canoes undamaged, the seamen in good

health and heart, with large and fertile islands before and behind. It would be ingratitude to ask for more – but yet there may be.

What were these islands? When as a youth he had burned to sail into the setting sun, it was to search for the fabled homeland of long ago. Every child was told of Pulutu, whence had come the first people, so far back that none could say. And there was the goddess Hiku Le’o who gave the people fire and water and whose garden was beneath the sea under the setting sun. When first he had said he would one day find it, he had been hushed for his impiety. Thinking back now, he smiled to himself. The disapproval had only sharpened his curiosity and made him wonder if the goddess’ land was another name for Pulutu. On how many long nights at sea since then had he cherished the notion of making this voyage, envisioned it? So often he had imagined Hiku Le’o’s land as one of fire mountains and cataracts, strange and fantastic, an undying source of fire and water. The hankering to go and see, the pull of the horizon, had been just an inner dream until that day when he had heard the tale of the chiefs who had sailed away. There had been many to scoff that Pulutu and Hiku Le’o’s land were myths, but this tale was no myth. The old man had insisted that it was no more than twenty generations ago that many chiefs had taken their people and sailed into the setting sun into a new land.

Were these islands that new land? Those chiefs had known that there was land at the end of a star path, marked by a fire mountain. Fire! Hiku Le’o’s fire? None could say, and the star path was only dimly remembered, but the legend told of an anchorage, that the chiefs had sailed for it. The anchorage might not be far away. Last night they had seen a dim glow to the left that might have been from a fire mountain and then this morning these islands were before their eyes. How the men had shouted their jubilation!

Lo’au looked fondly at them, stout fellows who had come to him when word had spread that he would make this voyage. They were the best, able to sail and if need be, to fight, men knowing all there was to know of the sea and canoes – but most of all avid for adventure. What might they all find on this island now coming closer and closer?

When it was clear that the stranger canoes were sailing for Evate, men began to leave the top of Tavalapa until, at mid-afternoon, there were only Vango and a few others to see the distant dots disappear behind Retoka.

Descending, Vango was silent with his thoughts. It would be a marvellous thing if they should return and he could go aboard and talk to those light-skinned men. Perhaps he could go with them when they sailed away to their own land. Where might that be, how far away? Would it be like Kuwae, or different? What if he could go there, do something

outstanding and win renown? He might then come back and be given a title of his own. Then he might be worthy of any woman... even Lei-manu.

'Well, Vango?' Tarinua's voice broke the daydream. 'What have you to tell me?'

After he had heard him out, Tarinua dismissed him, 'Well done, Vango. You have a good pair of eyes.'

With a flush of pleasure, he turned away and those eyes sought the sleeping houses of Matasso na Mata's household. There she stood, Lei-manu, her eyes piercing his. He gave her a broad smile, then discreetly turned away, to hide his sudden flame of feeling.

The canoe's movement eased as they closed the other big island. To Lo'au, it too looked lush. Smaller islands lay off it and as they coasted, they glimpsed a sheet of water behind them. It was a temptation, but so was the long point to be seen ahead. Men looked at him for orders but he merely pointed with his chin to the long low point.

Soon they were doubling it, sailing wide, and a great bay opened out ahead. The nearer shore was low, an unbroken line of jagged coral rock, exposed and with no protecting reef. Lo'au ordered course set for the far side of the bay where there would be sheltered water. If all went well, they might find a place to anchor before dusk.

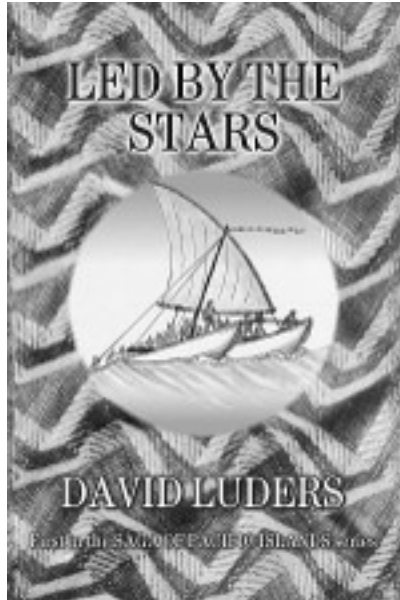
This was a shore of cliffs and hills, with a beach to be seen in the depth of the bay. Then the gods smiled. Behind a steep islet was, plainly to be seen, a sheltered harbour. Lo'au and the navigator beamed at one another. The wind held, the great canoe surged in, Kae's craft following at three hundred paces, and as fine a harbour as Lo'au had ever seen met their eyes. If this was not the anchorage of legend, it mattered not at all. Any vessel would be safe from storm and tempest here, and from here he could explore. That is, he thought, if the natives are not hostile. To the left, beyond a sheltered cove, smoke was rising.

Rejoicing, the seamen let go the anchors in the cove. The sailing mats were furled and the great craft were at rest, scarcely tugging at their lines. The last of the day's sun lighting the farther hillsides seemed to deepen shadows where they lay. After twenty days of the hiss and slap of water, the creaking of deck and spar, the wind in their ears, silence enfolded them. Were it not for the smoke drifting upwards perhaps three hundred paces beyond the mangroved shore, they might have been alone in all the world. How strangely simple a finish it was to the outward voyage that had for so long filled his imaginings! Tomorrow, they would see what manner of men were here.

END OF SAMPLE

OTHER BOOKS IN THE SAGA OF PACIFIC ISLANDS SERIES

LED BY THE STARS
(circa A D 750)

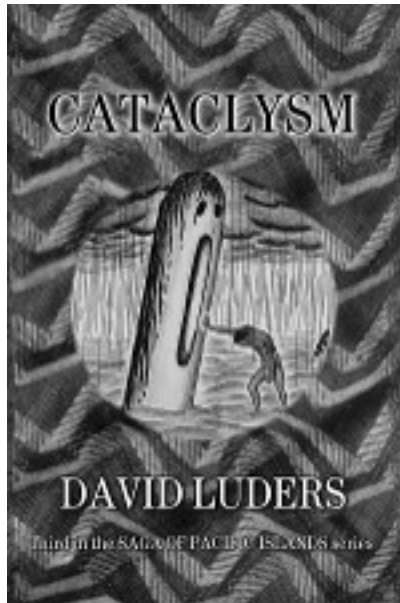


300 years before William the Conqueror brings feudalism to England, there is a like case in the Pacific islands. But there, two races meet, neither knowing until then that there are any others in the world. Polynesians, voyaging in quest of a place to start new fiefs, discover islands occupied by tribal blacks.

Amazement, fear and curiosity give way to fascination, prejudice and ambition, but across the racial divide friendships form. Antagonisms amongst the colonisers lead to conflict. Alignments emerge, families struggle with setbacks and misfortunes. Through it all, young people form liaisons, building a society unimagined when first the two peoples met. Who then are the conquerors, and who the conquered?

Out of the past, in the lush isolation of some Pacific islands, comes a story based on spoken histories told exclusively to the author. It is one that resonates strangely with issues of the present day.

CATAclySM
(circa A D 1450)



It happened in 1452. A colossal volcanic explosion broke one island into five; for five years its dust pall blanketed the globe. What happened on the spot is a staggering story handed down for almost 500 years.

Tricked into an odious crime, a humble youth is punished and humiliated. Shamed, outraged, he vows revenge and obtains magic to destroy the island. Earthquakes begin and none can say if the cause is him, or the wrath of the ancestors for another reason. The catastrophe strikes before evacuation is complete.

By astounding luck, two young people survive the stupendous blast. Rescued, they live through the severity of the aftermath. Wed, they begin restoring life on the remnant of their former home. Their lifelong struggle brings success marred by human frailty and the cataclysm leaves beliefs deeply shaken.

Forthcoming books are set in circa A D 1600, 1774-1845 and subsequent eras.