

CATACLYSM



DAVID LUDERS

Third in the SAGA OF PACIFIC ISLANDS series

CATACLYSM

A Novel By
David Luders



Third in the SAGA OF PACIFIC ISLANDS series

TheEbookSale Publishing

Copyright © David Luders 2010

David Luders has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publishers or author, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

ISBN: 978-1-84961-055-1

Published by: **TheEbookSale** Publishing
Limerick, Ireland

www.thebooksale.com
info@thebooksale.com

GLOSSARY

ariki	(In Polynesia) high chief
ambat	chiefly emblem or device, distinctive for each wota
atavi (sing. and plur.)	person performing priest-like functions
bilel	A softwood tree of many uses
Evate	the central island of Vanuatu, now called Efate or Vaté.
fire mountain	volcano
kainanga	subject(s) of a chief
kamal	see, <i>varea</i>
kava	A shrub from which a mild narcotic beverage is prepared.
kuma'irr	Long-lived hardwood tree
lengaman	men's dance style of a series of 'acts' or depictions
maloku	kava
mandai	fermented breadfruit; earth pits where this is made
manuvasa (sing. and plur.)	a chief's herald, mouthpiece and historian
mbalas	song, dance of spiritual or other important nature
munwei	clairvoyant, seer.
napauna wota	'chief's head': his council of sub-chiefs, his 'wisdom'
narei (plur., nareii)	untitled people, commoners
nasanga	one of two designated to carry out a chief's edicts
nasaotonga	tribute symbolizing fealty
navell	A bush nut, the tree growing tall and narrow
nearu	Tree called she-oak or ironwood
ngolongol	hand-held gong of bamboo or carved hardwood
poka	wooden slit-gong, made from a hollowed tree trunk
red wind	cyclone, hurricane
saean	men's 'dart' game played with 'javelins' of light cane
silonaka	carved wooden plate
sirikat	mat hung from the back of a woman's waist-band
sumu, sumusumol	waist-mat and suspended mats in front and behind
takoari (sing. and plur.)	war chief, accomplished warrior
talatok	undergarment of a waist-rope and breechclout
tapa	cloth made from beaten tree bark, 'bark cloth'.
tapu	taboo; forbidden or sacred
varea (also, kamal)	chief's 'seat' – chiefly house and domain
woratongoa	<i>Solanum</i> sp. Weed growing to knee height
wota (sing. and plur.)	chief
wotalam (sing. and plur.)	high chief
yam	a crop harvested annually, a year

circa A.D. 1450

CHAPTER 1

Singan stopped chewing and cocked his head. A moment later, Leika felt Lopevi shiver to a low rumbling from below. It stopped and they ate again. Outside, dusk was lowering rapidly and she hoped that the night would bring no more than a common earth-shaking. But then a sudden clap like thunder came from high up on the steep peak. A low roaring followed and it seemed the whole island jumped and shuddered.

They stepped quickly outside. Already there was a wild glow. A thick rolling cloud of ashy smoke quenching the day's last light was lit red, bathing all in angry light and the staring faces of people, whom she saw every day, frightened her. Suddenly, loud cracking sounds came from the summit and a hot tongue of fire shot up into the blackness as Lopevi trembled and the shaking came up their legs. Looking up through the trees, the bright red light seemed like a vast fire lit at the very peak. Some men hurried down to the shore, to look up above the trees. Singan went, and in fear Leika followed. She felt the first hot ashes touch her shoulders and, looking up, saw small flashes of light in the roiling cloud.

Down at the shore they stood mute, looking up. Above the trees the red-yellow fire spewed out and from a dribbling grew and grew until it was gushing and running in rivers of fire. As they watched, the bright smoking rivers ran down to right and left, towards other villages. Someone said that perhaps Halohos would be safe, but there was fear in his voice and it made Leika clutch at Singan's arm. It was wrong to speak so. It might bring the fire to them.

Even from so far above, the fiery rivers were throwing heat down on their faces but strangely, a gentle wind began to touch their backs, as if the fire above was drawing in a breath from below. They stood uncertain, their eyes and minds drawn into the flickering sight, seeing the hot rivers run down into the first trees and the trees bursting into flames, toppling and throwing off whirling points of burning light. There was a pause. Lopevi was still and lay quietly.

Of a sudden, great cracking booms came again, shaking the island. An instant later, as they watched, more fire was hurled upward and out, then ran in violent fury, rushing down the steepness everywhere, a wide bright boiling tongue of it pointing straight at Halohos. Singan grabbed Leika's

wrist and they ran, others hard behind them, up to the village. Panting, they reached the house and looked upwards for a moment to the awesome redness, the flames of crashing trees leaping above it into smoke and steam. Fear high in her throat, Leika dimly heard the terror of children and cries of other women as she stumbled inside behind Singan.

‘Food and water, quick! To the canoe! We go to your sister.’ Singan was wrenching his spear and war club out of the rafters, throwing the canoe paddles and his digging stick through the entrance. Blundering, they gathered up some coconuts and a gourd of water and some taro, then Singan was pushing her roughly out.

Outside was panic. Through the yelling came the blood-stopping squeals of pigs as the fiery wall rolled down to their pens and over them. Leika stood an instant, in terror, and Singan dealt her a blow, shouting, ‘Run, woman! Your things!’ He had the paddles on his shoulder, was thrusting her basket at her as a terrified fowl flew onto his chest and he batted it off. She grabbed the things and bolted. Singan threw a glance upwards to see the first houses burst into flames before his feet were thudding behind hers.

At the rocky shore, a hot stinging rain had begun to fall. The fire behind burning their backs, they threw the things into the canoe, scarcely aware that others did the same to right and left. Seizing the cross-poles joining outrigger to canoe, they heaved. Leika never knew Singan had such strength, for his heave pulled her off her feet and she sprawled on the sharp-edged coral, pain stabbing from palms and breasts and knees. ‘Get up, wife! Get up!’ he almost screamed, and wrenched the canoe forward again. The hot red wall was through the village now and they could smell seared flesh and hear the screaming.

The prow touched the water as the heat and fire bore down on them, raising the sea to redness under the black stinging rain. ‘In! In!’ cried Singan, shoving her into the narrow canoe. At the back, he pushed in the scorching heat. The canoe bumped in the shallows, Leika poling with a paddle in a sobbing frenzy. For an instant she looked back and saw in horror the red river rolling over the last stones to the water; black pieces seemed to float on it and gobs of fire touched the water in hissing steam.

‘Pull, woman, pull!’ Singan gasped, and as he stretched in the last shove, a surge of the fire-stone slid into the sea and in the boiling water, he felt the fiery pincer fasten on his heel. He shrieked. He fell onto the canoe. Desperately, Leika paddled.

She knew he was on the canoe, by the weight. But he was silent and Leika dared not look back, her mind only on the dip and pull, dip and pull that would take them away. Dimly she could hear sounds receding - the hissing, the shrieking, the rumbling. Her eyes smarted and ran with the acrid

rain. The sea glowed red and she glimpsed her own dim shadow bending and rising. Then it came to her that there was no more of the rain and the air was cool. The sea moved only gently, so she dared then to look back.

Singan was sprawled, one leg and one hand trailing in the sea. His head hung inside the canoe. He did not move and Leika felt her panic rising. Then she lifted her eyes to Lopevi and was surprised they had come so far. It was all red and black above the clouds of steam rising from its wide foot. Blackish tendrils of rain hung from the cloud, angry above its pointed peak, and from the top to the wide shoreline great swathes glowed redly, with black between. Leika looked, her mind numb, and began to tremble. She shook and shook, until she was afraid of falling overboard and slumped into the bottom of the canoe, sobbing.

As her sobbing ceased and the trembles spent themselves, Singan stirred and muttered. Then Leika began to think again, and took his head into her hands and spoke endearments. She had no strength to move him and began to speak urgently, lifting his head, then felt life come into him again.

He moaned and moved and Leika touched his shoulders, meaning to lift him, and gave a cry. Her hands moved over him and, aghast, she felt the whole of his back, the backs of his arms, All was broken blisters and hard scorched pieces of skin. Her fingers travelled. The back of his neck was blistered and the hair on the back of his head burnt away. Then, in the starlight, she saw that he was almost naked, for in the last moment the back of his sumu had burnt through and the rest had fallen away.

Later, she wondered how she did it, but at last she had him lying on his face, half on the little platform, half on the canoe. The trailing leg she lifted in, almost vomiting to see that he seemed to have no foot, only black bone. She faced forward and took up her paddle.

They could not return to Lopevi. She must pull for the big island, Kuwae. But where on Kuwae? Singan had said they would go to her sister, Doreka, at Malala. That was so far and alone she could not, she knew. Other places were closer but still far and at them they knew no one. It would be easier, but she was afraid. Perhaps other canoes would go there and if she went there too, the people might be unfriendly. She strained to see other canoes but saw none, though her eyes were used to the starlight and she could see clearly the black outline of Kuwae. The hills behind Malala stood up for her to see and without thinking more, she began to pull for them.

Sometimes in the night she cried with the anguish and pain. Twice, in exhaustion, she laid down the paddle and dozed and woke to find that the stars had moved far. Where the coral had scored her breasts and knees she hurt, but her hands were numb. One arm was very sore. When Singan

stirred and uttered words she answered, but then she saw that he spoke in unconsciousness. Her thirst grew, but the gourd of water was lost. Once, she cracked a coconut and dribbled its sweet water into her mouth. When the stars began to fade she knew that day was coming and she rested.

The sun came up quickly, ahead and to the left. The air lay unmoving, the sea in a slow smooth swell. Wearily, she paddled on, hearing Singan stir and speak. Through the mist of fatigue it seemed the noises behind her meant that he was bringing himself upright and she heard the splash of his paddle, but no power came from his stroke. Glancing back, she saw him sitting slumped, the paddle rested. They were near half way to Malala. In dull misery, she thought only of how far she must paddle.

At Malala, they had heard the boom and crack of explosions and then stood gazing at the distant spectacle of red fire. Matuel had seen the distress on Doreka's thin face. Awkwardly, he said, 'In the morning, we will find a canoe and go, wife.'

They had no canoe of their own. He would have to beg one. In the starlight he had seen the set of her thin shoulders as she had protested, saying that they must have a big canoe and that it must go quickly. 'All right,' he had said. 'I will go now and talk to the wota.'

Making his way in the darkness, he thought it out. He would ask the wota to approach Ti Malala, the wotalam, and ask for his sailing canoe to go in the morning but he would borrow a small canoe, too. He and Bae would take it. There was no one else he could ask and it was for them to do. Leika was her sister, and family was family.

When he came back to the house, Doreka was waiting to hear. When he told her, she argued, 'But Bae is too young for that. It is a long way and he is not strong. You must ask one of the men to go with you. If a strong wind should come up –'

Irritably, he cut her off. 'He can do it.' She always tries to coddle him, he thought angrily. He is near his seventeenth yam but because of the hump on his back, she babies him. He is her only child, but he is mine, too. He is stronger than she likes to think.

Soon after first light, Doreka was there as they pushed out the borrowed canoe. She hunched herself, watching them paddle towards the distant dot to be seen on the sea.

They dipped and pulled, dipped and pulled, in silent rhythm. As yet no wind blew and the sea was gentle. Matuel, in the stern, watched Bae's stroke and it was straight and true and even, as though he did it often. Then a light breeze began and after a time Matuel looked back and saw the sailing canoe with its mat raised.

It passed them when they were yet three hundred paces from the other canoe with its two slumped figures. As they dipped and pulled they watched

it round up and pull the other alongside. Matuel recognized the two figures being lifted into the sailing canoe and then its sailing mat was pulled tight and it moved away across the light wind, leaving two men to paddle the small canoe. Matuel and Bae turned then, to the long pull back to Malala.

When they came, others had already carried Singan up to the house and Doreka had sent for the herb woman. Leika was already sleeping and Singan lay on his face as though dead. Unthinking, Bae ducked through the entrance, then checked. Doreka sat fanning the unconscious man. Man? Bae looked in horror. There was no skin, only a nameless mass of tortured meat, dirty and wet – and his foot! From below the calf there was no meat, just a blackened bone and a shapeless charred something where the toes should be. Nausea rose up in him and he turned and stumbled out.

His father gripped his arm as he bent, vomiting and wobbling. When he had done, Matuel said gently, ‘Go and raise the fire, son. Then find a fowl to kill. They will need food. Go, now.’

Bae worked and worked. He tried to think of all the things they might like to eat, and brought them all. The fire was a good one, roasting the taro and warming the water, and he walked and walked to bring extra firewood, hardly feeling the way it rubbed his hump. Leika was his small mother, his mother’s sister, and he had only a dim memory of her when he was little, when they went to Lopevi at the time she became Singan’s wife. And now she was here, hurt and half dead, and Singan whom he could not remember was that poor burnt thing he had seen. He must do all he could for them. They might die, he thought, and his throat thickened as his eyes pricked.

Leika slept a day and a night, waking briefly and eating a little food and sleeping again. Bae waited anxiously to be told what he might do but there was nothing. The herb woman had dressed Singan’s flesh with herbs and oils and covered it with soft leaves. After a time he had stirred and even spoken some words after he had drunk some sweet coconut water but then he had fallen unconscious again.

‘Will he become well again?’ Bae asked tremulously. The herb woman’s mouth tightened as she glanced at where Singan’s foot should be, but gave no answer.

On the third day, Leika was awake and taking notice of things but Singan began to toss hotly and sometimes spoke wild words in his sleep.

Then Matuel told Bae he should not go near the house and Bae just looked down dumbly, afraid to speak. He had heard them say Singan’s leg was turning a bad colour and he had heard him cry out once, a dreadful sound. When Leika came out of the house, she would try to smile at him but each time the awful look came on her face again and she turned away. And his mother never came out at all. Bae did not know what he should do,

so he took his father's three-pronged spear and went to the reef, hoping for a fish.

He went to the far end of Malala's share of reef. It was not a good place for fish, but sometimes he was sent away from the better places by people from the higher families and he did not want to have to speak with anyone. The sea almost reached his knees and each time he did see a fish and cast, he missed. He was not very good at this, but his mind would not stay on fish, either. Hearing voices on the shore, he looked back. It was Nisu who stood there, with Awus, and he hoped they would not tease him as they often did. They stood and watched him.

When he cast and missed again, Nisu said, loudly enough for him to hear, 'Is Bae cross-eyed too, Awus? I never looked.' Awus laughed, as he always did at Nisu's jests, then called out.

'Did you see a fish, Bae? We thought there were none here. Did you sing a spell to bring them?' He laughed again.

Nisu called out, 'Is your uncle still lying about in the house, Bae?' Then, to Awus, he said, 'They say he stood too close to the fire on Lopevi and burned his back. Do you know if it is crooked, like Bae's?' Awus laughed again.

He kept his eyes on the water and did not speak. After a time he heard them going and glanced back. They strolled, spears in hand, straight and lithe. Why must they always tease him so? They were only narei, like him. The wota's family never laughed at him like that. He thought of Singan in his pain, perhaps dying, and their cruel words. Singan was of better family than them, brother of a small wota, even if only on Lopevi where people said they were simpletons.

After that, he could not go back with empty hands and he stayed a long time. When he waded ashore he had only three small fish, but they were something. He made his way home, cutting through gardens to avoid seeing anyone and trying to forget his own unhappiness and think of Leika and Singan.

The leg turned bad and at last the herb woman said she could not do more. From the smell, they knew Singan must die. Sometimes he muttered feebly as he grew weaker. All the time, Bae felt he might cry like a child but he was nearly a man and he must not.

When Singan died, he was ashamed that he thought it was good that it was finished, until he heard Matuel tell his mother so. He and his father dug the grave and even though the women washed the body and wrapped it tight in mats, some of the smell lingered. Bae wished he could tell Leika how sorry he felt but he did not know the words.

Matuel had to borrow a pig for the funeral feast. There was no one else to give one, for Singan's family were all on Lopevi. Matuel's own sow

would soon farrow and he would be able to repay the pig. It was a small feast but it was the best they could do for Singan. Kindly, the wota came to eat with them and show sorrow. Matuel asked him shyly what he should do and the wota said that Matuel would have to go to other villages on Kuwae to find anyone of Singan's family who might have escaped, and tell them. When he saw that Matuel was afraid to go, he said he would arrange companions for him.

Days passed. Leika, sorrowing, hardly spoke but every day Doreka reminded Matuel that he must go down the coast and find Singan's family and he always replied, 'The wota will tell me when.'

When she urged him to speak to the wota again, he said crossly, 'Hold your tongue, woman. It is not you who has to go. Would you have me nag the wota?' Matuel had hardly ever been out of Malala. Bae knew that he did not like having to go.

Then the wota summoned Matuel and when he came back he told Doreka, 'I am going tomorrow. A wota from Mataot has come to see 'Ti Malala and he is going on down the coast. I am to go with them. Bae can come too.'

'Bae go too! Who will feed the pigs if both of you go?'

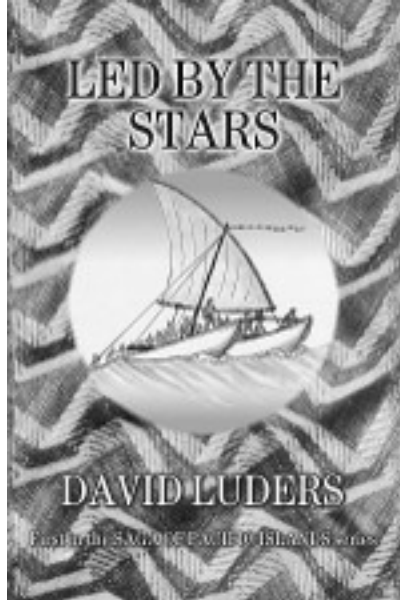
'You and Leika can. It is not for long.'

Doreka grumbled, but Bae was thrilled. He had never been down the coast, but now he was to go with important people. A wota from Mataot, Mwasoe Visava's big domain on the farther side of Kuwae, would have an escort. If he had come to speak to the wotalam and then was going on, he must be on important affairs. And his father needed him to go because he was afraid to go with them on his own. He would have to hurry, to see that Leika and his mother had all they needed, then wash and clean himself ready for the morning.

END OF SAMPLE

OTHER BOOKS IN THE SAGA OF PACIFIC ISLANDS SERIES

LED BY THE STARS
(circa A D 750)

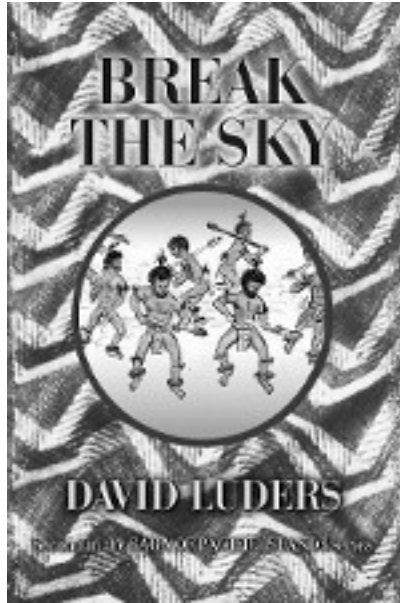


300 years before William the Conqueror brings feudalism to England, there is a like case in the Pacific islands. But there, two races meet, neither knowing until then that there are any others in the world. Polynesians, voyaging in quest of a place to start new fiefs, discover islands occupied by tribal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

BREAK THE SKY
(circa A D 1250)



It is 750 years ago. Coming across a tranquil island world, Tongan seafarers discover its hallowed narcotic drink made from a sacred plant and forbidden to all but local chiefs. Proposing to take it home to their ruler, they set off fierce disputes. At the same time, the budding romance of a high chief's daughter and a young man of modest birth is abruptly blocked by her betrothal and the train of events set off has dire results.

By subterfuge a trade in the drug begins, though the means of growing the sacred plant is jealously guarded. The trade grows, the contact bringing new ideas but also tensions. In distant Tonga's expanding island empire, rulers change. More than once, a force is sent to seize the hallowed plant but by curious twists of circumstances, the attempts are thwarted.

Even in a quiet corner of the world a drug, however mild, drives conflict and change.

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