

# LED BY THE STARS



DAVID LUDERS

First in the SAGA OF PACIFIC ISLANDS series

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A Novel By  
**David Luders**



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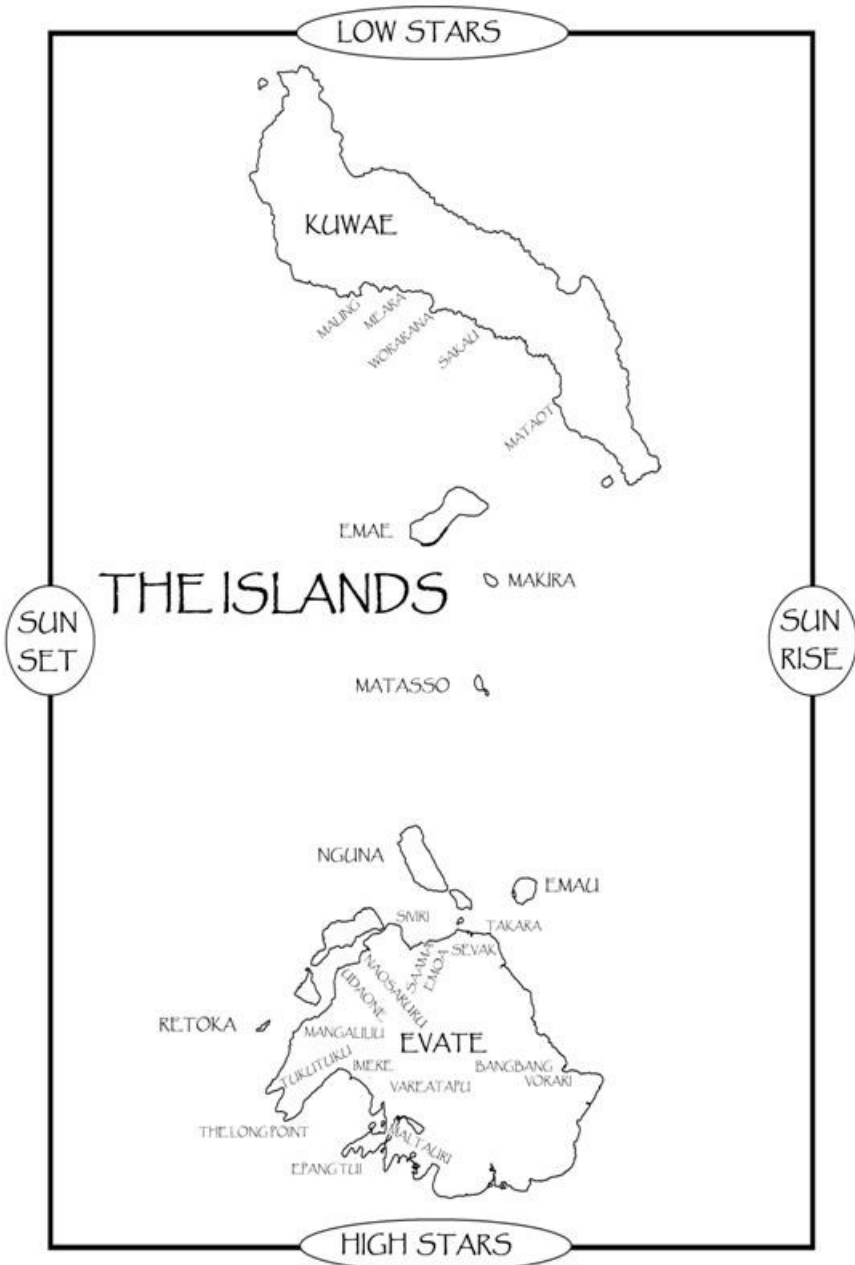
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In the modern convention, these islands lie at 17 degrees South Latitude and 168 degrees East Longitude.

## GLOSSARY

<b>ariki</b>	(In Polynesia) high chief
<b>bilel</b>	<i>Hibiscus tiliaceus</i> . A tree of many uses, including rope fibres and curved house rafters
<b>cycad</b>	<i>Cycas rumphii</i> . A palm-like tree with thick, stiff fronds
<b>Evate</b>	the central island of modern Vanuatu, now called Efate or (in French) Vaté.
<b>fire mountain</b>	volcano
<b>great winds</b>	south-east trade winds, blowing in the latter months of the modern calendar
<b>Ipare</b>	An island in the south of modern Vanuatu, now known as Tanna
<b>kava</b>	<i>Piper methysticum</i> . A shrub from which a mild narcotic beverage is prepared.
<b>munwei</b>	clairvoyant, seer.
<b>mwalala</b>	secluded open area reserved for men's activities
<b>namambe</b>	<i>Indocarpus edulis</i> , 'Tahitian chestnut'
<b>napauna wota</b>	literally, 'chief's head', this term means a chief's council, his senior sub-chiefs as advisers, his reserve of wisdom
<b>navell</b>	<i>Barringtonia edulis</i> . Bush nut, a tree growing tall and narrow
<b>plantain</b>	large-fruited banana often picked unripe and cooked
<b>red wind</b>	cyclone, hurricane
<b>silonaka</b>	large carved wooden plate used in ceremonies
<b>sumu, sumusumol</b>	outer garment of woven waist-mat and suspended mats in front and behind
<b>tambuess</b>	The purple swamp hen, <i>Porphyro porphyro</i> .
<b>tapa</b>	cloth made from beaten tree bark, 'bark cloth'
<b>tapoa</b>	<i>Terminalia catappa</i> . Long-lived hardwood tree bearing edible nuts
<b>tapu</b>	taboo; forbidden or sacred
<b>varea</b>	a chief's 'space'; his chiefly house, community and realm
<b>Viti</b>	Fiji; the Fiji islands
<b>wimba</b>	White-throated pigeon, <i>Columba vitiensis</i> .
<b>wota (sing. and plur.)</b>	chief
<b>wotalam (sing. and plur.)</b>	high chief
<b>yam</b>	a root crop and also a year because the yam is harvested annually

## PROLOGUE

Deep in the past, dark-skinned, nimble people began to spread from the great continent that would one day be called Asia. There were more and more to share the forests and waters. More and more slipped away to islands.

There were many islands. As the people grew in numbers on one, the easiest thing was to move to the next, where the forests were alive and the waters abundant, and in simple craft some moved on, towards the rising sun. Many generations passed without any memory that this had happened before, only the knowledge that the fish and game and nuts and fruits had now to be shared, or new places found.

Thousands of seasons passed. Countless dark infants were born, grew, aged and died. There were always growing numbers, spreading into the mountains of the great islands and along the coasts, until there were no more islands to be seen. The dark ones lived on their islands and the islands were theirs. They hunted and fished and gathered the fruits of the forests and in places, they selected plants and grew them for their food. They did not know that there were more islands lying further, untrod by human feet.

Far back on the continent, great things had happened. Tawny-skinned people with wavy hair grew their crops and kept their fowls and animals, and as their numbers grew they ordered their lives under leaders who governed them. They learned crafts, baking earth into pottery and weaving fibres into coarse fabrics. Trade arose and along the coasts they learned the art of building great double-hulled canoes to carry goods, propelled by woven sails. For the coasting seamen, horizons beckoned.

There came other people, from the inland, people with paler skin and coarse straight hair. Their eyes were different too, and their numbers great. They pressed on the coastal people and fought for land. Some of the robust coastal people wearied of the troubles and in their great canoes began to move off from the edge of the continent onto the islands. A few sailed to the setting sun, but most followed the path of the dark people of more than a thousand generations before.

Island after island rose on the horizon, all occupied by the dark-skinned ones with tight-coiled hair. Forests came down to the sea. In likely places, the seamen would settle and clear the forest with fire and adze. They planted their crops, the coconut and breadfruit, the taro and sugar-cane. They kept their pigs and fowls and grew the trees that gave them fruits and nuts and medicines, oil to light their houses and sap to caulk their great canoes.

Their colonies grew, on little offshore islets or at river mouths where the flow of fresh water kept the passage clear of coral reefs and the great canoes could ride at safe anchor. Their crops filled the valleys and their vessels plied the growing chain of settlements, trading. The dark people grew accustomed to them and hesitantly at first, the two peoples began to mingle.

Over a hundred generations ago, the time came. The settlements reached the last of the islands that the dark people had found and lived on for centuries upon centuries, but the tawny seamen could not stop. The sun rose over an ocean that beckoned and flights of birds drew them on. New islands they found, where no canoe had ever sailed before. The line extended and extended, the populations swelled and mixed and as if drawn on by the tawny ones, dark skins spread to where they had not been before. But always the tawny-skinned traders with the sea in their blood thrilled to the discoveries of dark smudges on the horizon rising steadily to become forested hills with feet of reef and strand. On they went.

The islands led them away from the path travelled by the sun. They began to find the days cooler for half of each turn of the seasons and to see new stars in the sky. Because it was colder on the peaks of the islands and because the stars appeared as they would if a man were mounting a hill and seeing the stars appear over the brow, the seamen said they were climbing up the stars. Back and forth they sailed and their knowledge grew. They read the signs of sky and sea, of colour and movement, and most of all they learned the stars.

Far behind them, on the great continent, were happenings these people could never know. Empires arose, one supplanting another, and men fought battles with weapons of metals and using animals these seamen knew nothing of. Religions dawned and armies marched, but the seamen of the great ocean sailed on, further and further away from them all, into the rising sun. And as they forged on, a gradual change came over the long chain behind them. Though blood had mixed, the people there were dark. They blended the skills of growing crops and hunting, of pottery and weaving and they had no need of the great canoes. They sailed and traded, but not so far; the arts of sailing and canoe building began to fade and their roots went deep into the land.

The tawny seamen, sailing on, had crossed wide stretches of sea and were alone now on their own new islands of volcano and coral reef. There were birds in plenty, some of them fat and flightless and easy prey, but not an animal save bats and those that came with people. But the sea was ever there, with fish for the taking. The islands that lay behind became a distant dream.

Centuries passed and their numbers grew. Hundreds became thousands, then tens of thousands. More land was needed and though the hazards were

great, voyaging went on. The ocean was vast, and in the long days and nights at sea, sharpened by hunger and thirst, they learned the paths of the stars and the patterns of the waves as never before. They learned to look for the flights of birds, the shimmer of light on the horizon and the loom of land reflected on the undersides of clouds that could point the way to distant land. Generations passed and still more land was needed. The seamen ranged up and down the stars and far into the rising sun. Many islands they found, large ones and small, flung across the vastness of the seas, until at last they could find no more.

But sailing was in the people's spirit and the seas were their paths. The islands were joined by hundreds of paths, used for trade and for war. The great chiefs were the quintessence of the lands; the gods of land and sea spoke to them. On one big island the knowledge came that there was yet another land. At length, a fleet was raised to find it, to follow the flight of the bird that came each season to nest and left again, flying up and across the stars, and across the great winds. The seamen did not know then that the bird would at last lead their descendants to their last and greatest land, Aotearoa that, long after, would gain another name, New Zealand.

Far back along the chain of islands, the dark people dwelt still and neither they nor the seamen any more remembered the passage of seventy and more generations. Nor did they know that a drop of blood from the tawny ones still ran in the veins of the dark islanders with the crisp coiled hair. The seamen knew only that they had come from a land far away towards the setting sun, a land they called Pulotu.

In the passage of all that time, the two peoples had changed in different ways. The restless seamen, plying the tracks of the seas, kept the habits that gave them strength. They revered their chiefs and kept alive some memory of the generations. Their language linked their wide-flung islands. But the dark-skinned people were firmly on their land and close to its spirits. Each place they found to be distinct, their affinity with places deepened, the links between places weakened, people divided, languages changed and the memories of long before became unimportant and lost.

The two peoples did not know it, but some of them were destined to meet again.

*circa* A.D. 750

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## CHAPTER 1

It was still a gale, though the storm had passed. The steering oars were still lashed and the dragging-lines still trailed astern, but the waves no longer crashed over the decking. *Tasirikau's* twin sterns now rose to each grey peak, tipped and slid down the back of each racing wave.

Fastened to a sternpost, Kofia shifted in sodden mats and raised his eyes. The decking was swept clear, the deckhouse gone. The mast still stood, held by stays, but that was all, except for Maunga, bundled and stiff like him at the other sternpost. Under the heavy cloud all was grey - the sea, the rain, the slippery deck. The people crowded below would at least be warm, he thought. He banged on the small hatch and waited.

The person had trouble with the hatch, wet and swollen in its frame. Easing the cords holding him to the post, he was able to lean forward as it came open a little and he yelled over the wind, 'They can open hatches for air. And give me some cord.' Some fingers fluttered a reply.

Kofia saw two hatches opened a little and soon after, a hand passed out a small roll of cord. He took it, let it unroll and flail, to signal to Maunga who must have dozed. It was a while before the mats moved and each looked across at bloodshot eyes. Kofia gestured to the hatches, saw Maunga knock at his hatch, and settled back to doze for half a morning.

He woke again in the middle of the day. Three storm hatches were open on each hull. Perhaps the noise of the wind was a little less and perhaps there was less rain driving into his back. He was hungry. This time the hand responded quickly to his call and held up a dried fish. He wolfed it, crunching and grinding the bones.

By late afternoon the rain had stopped and the wind was easing. This was the third day of storm and there was another uncomfortable night to come, but no danger. It was for Tavake to say. Kofia rapped at the hatch and yelled, 'Call Tavake.' Then he loosened his bonds and rose on cramped legs, holding the sternpost. Now there were only occasional sheets of spray whipped off the crests. By the time Tavake's head appeared, he had a line attached to the cord. Deftly, Tavake caught the cord and quickly had the storm-line rigged from sternpost to mast. Wise old mariner that he was, he came aft carefully, deliberate steps set wide.

'Are you allright?'

Kofia looked into the sharp black eyes and nodded, then looked across to his right, where Maunga was on his feet and working. He watched the other storm-line being rigged as Tavake stood scanning sea and sky, his legs flexing to the movement. Soon, seamen were out on deck, their movements cautious as they set stormlines to the bows. Tavake bawled, 'Deckropes!' and they waved back.

With the sennit cross-reeved to the decking, movement was safer and a few stiffened figures appeared, looking bleary. The ariki's head and shoulders appeared briefly at the centre hatch and then withdrew.

Tavake spoke suddenly. 'We will run like this through the night. By morning the wind will be down, I think. But we do not know these waters. Your watch is over. You can go below.'

As he had said, in the morning the wind was a brisk cool breeze. In the night, Tavake had caught a glimpse of stars and thought perhaps the storm had blown *Tasirikan* down almost to the level of Rarotonga, but it was only a glimpse. And certainly they had been driven far towards the setting sun. These waters were far from anywhere known. Tavake considered. It would take the rest of the day for the waves to moderate and another day for the effect of the storm to wear off and the waves to begin to reveal their true nature. The other canoes might be anywhere and they were probably alone. He would send a man aloft, but without much hope of seeing canoes. So, the great endeavour, the voyage in search of the new land, had to be abandoned. He had a choice of finding islands or sailing home, working up-wind at the level of the home island of Rarotonga. Strained by the storm, the heavy-laden canoe would need work on it for that. He needed an island then, but were there any? Tongans spoke of the island of Viti lying down-sun, but by now his position must be further down. In a canoe so heavily loaded, he could not turn into the wind for another day at least. Well, he thought, I could at least restore the rigging today, even in this swell. It would give men things to do. He called seamen to him, gave his orders and watched their careful movements on the heaving vessel.

'Canoe! Canoe!' Up the mast, clinging with one arm, the lookout stabbed the other ahead and to the left. Seamen rigging the shrouds shouted questions as Tavake listened, impassive. It was no more than a distant dot and there were no answers but this was a heartening thing. Now they were not alone.

There was new life in the seamen now. By midday the mast was fully braced and they had gained on the other canoe until it was almost abeam. Tavake made up his mind. 'Take in the dragging lines,' he ordered and, to other seamen, 'Bring up the storm mat and set it.' To the crowd now on deck he called, 'Everyone but seamen go below.' As women began returning to the foetid air in the hulls he added, out of deference to the ariki

standing near him, 'I will try to close on that canoe before nightfall. Movement may be very rough as we cross the waves.'

*Tasirika* took the slight slant across the waves easily, and it was well before dusk when they were near enough to the canoe to signal. Tavake ran up the mast the long cord and single bunch of feathers of "sail close" and by dark *Tasirika* was matching the canoe's course and speed, three hundred paces away.

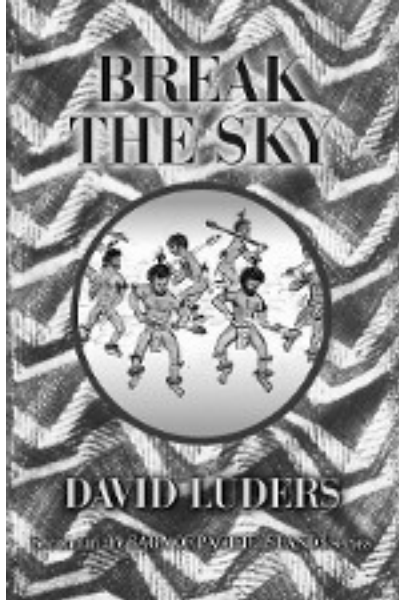
Morning dawned grey again. The wan light showed the other vessel over to the left and behind, and two new things. Quite close ahead was another canoe running under a storm mat and on the horizon, ahead and to the left, was a dark point. This third canoe was smaller and the men on it wild with joy to find two others joining them from astern. Its mast had splintered, the canoe rode low in the water and the seamen were bailing. Perhaps too they were glad to see the ariki's long pennant of tufted feathers now streamed from *Tasirika's* masthead.

Nearly everyone was on deck as they closed with the other vessels. By then, men were lashing together a new deckhouse frame, using emptied water-bamboos, for the ariki wanted his shelter. Sero and Torua, the only youths aboard, had perched themselves on the prows, delighted with the dip and toss, the hiss of spray, the clean air, after cramped and foetid days below decks. At each crest they strained to see whose were the other canoes...

**END OF SAMPLE**

## OTHER BOOKS IN THE SAGA OF PACIFIC ISLANDS SERIES

BREAK THE SKY  
(circa A D 1250)

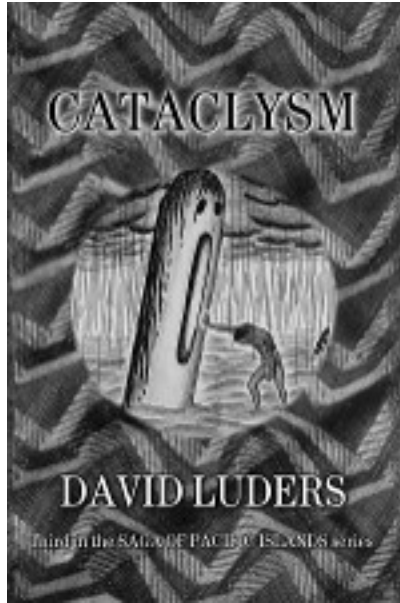


It is 750 years ago. Coming across a tranquil island world, Tongan seafarers discover its hallowed narcotic drink made from a sacred plant and forbidden to all but local chiefs. Proposing to take it home to their ruler, they set off fierce disputes. At the same time, the budding romance of a high chief's 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.

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.**