



Shark Dialogues

By Kiana Davenport

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Shark Dialogues By Kiana Davenport Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Four women are called together by their domineering grandmother, who recounts the epic history of their Hawaiian family.

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From Library Journal

This expansive and engrossing multigenerational saga details the history of Hawaii through the experiences of one family. It begins in the 19th century with the dramatic meeting of a young Yankee sailor and a beautiful Tahitian princess. Their descendants, who live in contemporary Hawaii, are four cousins named Vanya, Ming, Rachel, and Jess who have been brought up by Pono, a kahuna, or seer, who has never talked about her mysterious past to her four granddaughters. Davenport deftly includes much information in the narrative--about politics, leprosy, and the racial melting pot that is Hawaiian society--with a minimum of didacticism. She incorporates folklore, history, and myth in a vivid, lush prose style that only occasionally becomes overwrought. This first novel is much better written than James Michener's *Hawaii* (1959) and brings Hawaiian history up to the present day. Entertaining and educational, it is an excellent purchase for public libraries of any size. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 1/94.

- Nancy Pearl, *Washington Ctr. for the Book, Seattle*

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From Kirkus Reviews

A giant, image-fevered, luxuriantly wordy saga of a Hawaiian family, focused on the powerful person of a ``life-giver, life-taker'' who encapsulates in her 80-year history the harsh realities and saving myths of Hawaii's native peoples. Throughout, there burns a carefully trimmed flamelet of rage at what Davenport (Wild Spenders, 1984, written as Diana Davenport) sees as the progressive pollution of the islands and the decimation of the people by the greedy commercial interests of, mainly, the US. In 1834, a one-eyed cannibal (he ate his captain in a lifeboat) from New York married a Tahitian princess, who gave him a dowry of black pearls. Eventually, after years in which the foreign land-grabbers move in and a queen is deposed, the pearls come to beleaguered Pono, the dream-teller, a gold-skinned beauty. And at 16, Pono awakens from a shark-dream to watch Duke, ``huge, dark," a pure Polynesian, riding the surf ``like a god." She and Duke have four daughters, although Duke, a leper, must remain in the colony. After years of grinding work and humiliation, years in which daughters were expendable, Pono, at her coffee plantation, summons her granddaughters, who are still fearful of this awesome woman and her cane of human veterbrae (once attached to a foe). The granddaughters arrive: a veterinarian from Manhattan; a lawyer from Australia; the slave/wife of a Japanese Mafia bigwig; one dying of lupus. Also at Pono's home are her ancient, chattering, beloved friend Run Run and her grandson. A mix of races, the women wait for family knowledge. In spite of a death, a run-in with terrorists, and the love-death of Duke and Pono, the scattered family remains whole, with the vision of Pono ``sizzling through the paralysis of mediocre lives." As in many such myth-drenched tales of precariously surviving peoples, the characters tend to be inflated into a windy symbolism. Pono, however, is memorable, the scenery intoxicating, the indictments sobering, and although the dialogue blooms into the pretentious (``Sometimes, child, we die in metaphor"), Davenport has the goods--mainly a powerful narrative surge--to get away with it. With a welcome Hawaiian glossary. -- Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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