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Bacchanal Bureau

Dancing with the Yumawalli by CC Alick

Book Review by See Nen Nen News

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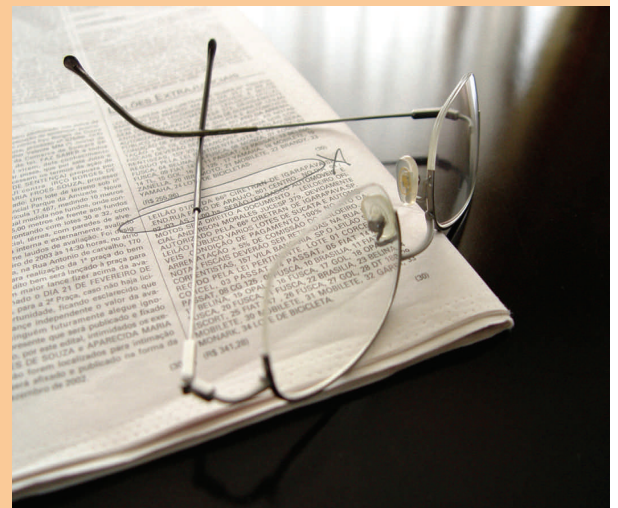
Dancing with the Yumawalli is a fictional tale woven into a Caribbean tapestry. It is the story of nineteen year old Godfrey Soulages at a time when he was surrounded by rumours and reality, spirits and mankind, all bent on arranging and rearranging his life's path; most taking from him what they needed and discarding the rest.

One of the things that struck us about this story is the author's choice of names for his imaginings and pivotal characters. The names for the most part, are steeped in Caribbean flavour. The unfortunate Karrol Lagrenade, the old man Papa Pouchete, the limbless artist nicknamed Fins and the omnipresent seer-woman who peoples so many Caribbean works - this one called Mama Viche. The names are important to the tale and those readers familiar with such storytelling, will recognize them all.

There are moments of brilliant metaphor. "*Shouldn't my brain follow the direction of my feet? I should be able to think forward.*" (P91). In fact metaphor and imagery dominate the book but unfortunately, does not always mesh effectively. Some passages delayed our progress in the story as we attempted to untangle what felt like mystical meanders, from the telling of the tale. Telling a story within a story is a difficult task and we got lost frequently in *Dancing with the Yumawalli*. Chapters 8 and 9 in particular were dense with confusing lore. A pity, since this is where we are supposed to find out the meaning and purpose of the Yumawalli. We emerge from those chapters, as if from elusive nightmares, unsure of what just happened and unable to get a firm grip of the point.

We do some travelling in *Dancing with the Yumawalli*. We start off in Grenada then sail to St. Vincent, Bequia, the Tobago Cays. It is in St. Vincent that we meet Godfrey's intriguing grandmother, Miss Vero. It might have strengthened the tale had we been able to spend more time with Miss Vero and savour the flavour of her story within the story. She was a colourful character but not properly developed. We left her reluctantly and wondered, as Godfrey did - was she real?

Other characters would have done well to be properly developed. Yvette seemed wise beyond her years and a steady influence in Godfrey's life but we saw too little of her. Fins had a story to tell, but was abruptly silenced. Xudine, the South American beauty and the stuff of young boys' dreams; Sydney her disfigured husband, Godfrey's father Ethan - all remained underdeveloped.



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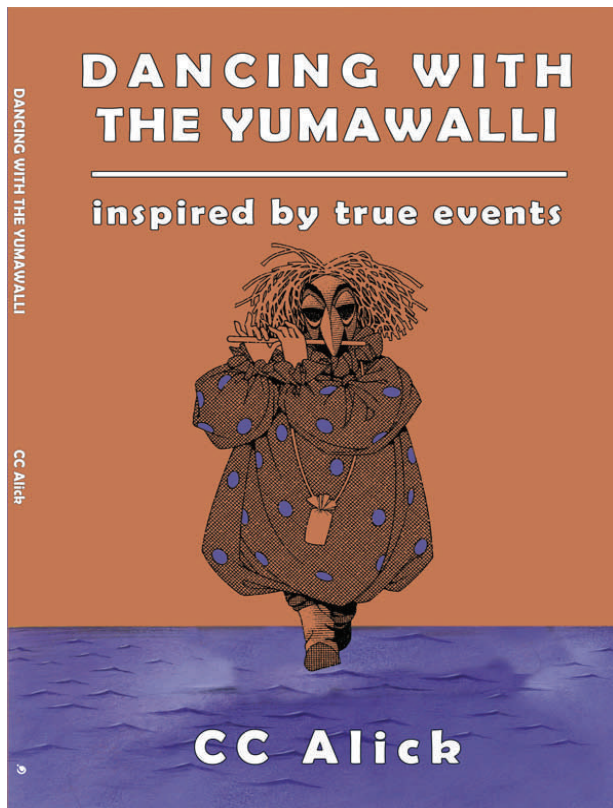
Nevertheless, there is unmistakable talent in the descriptive and ambient style the author employs. He is able to introduce his characters well despite abandoning them too quickly. CC Alick gives us the essence and moods and allows us to participate by using our own faculties to draw the scenes. The landscape is visually and beautifully apparent as we sail about the islands and hack our way through the Amazon.

The uniquely Caribbean *picong* styled criticism of other islanders appears here and there - if a bit more barbed than usual. Not everyone will be amused. The book references many well known places in Grenada and this will appeal to those familiar with the island. The reader can tell that the author has intimate knowledge of boats and sailing.

Another difficulty the author wrestles with, is the dialogue. *Dancing with the Yumawalli* is told in Godfrey's voice but the dialogue between the characters and Godfrey's inner thoughts weave noticeably in and out of the local dialect. Profound language clashes with the simple tongue of the folk in the tale. The conversation aboard the *Calypso* felt contrived and awkward. In addition, Greek, Amerindian, Caribbean and African mythology collide several times throughout the book and not all fared well.

The book's ending felt anti-climactic. The sinking of the *Black Dog* seemed unnecessary especially since nothing further came of it. Far too many stories within the story were left dangling. What was in the box Miss Vero gave him? Did he ever go back to St. Vincent? Did he go to Trinidad to meet his mother? Did he marry Yvette? Did Jack Trueblood ever return? What on earth was the purpose of Elaine's death? What was Jack being sued for? The questions left us irritated rather than intrigued. There was drama without successful denouement.

This is a bold but not entirely successful effort by author CC Alick. Yet it is an entertaining work and we look forward to another effort before too long. We suspect this writer has what it takes.



Dancing with the Yumawalli

CC Alick

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