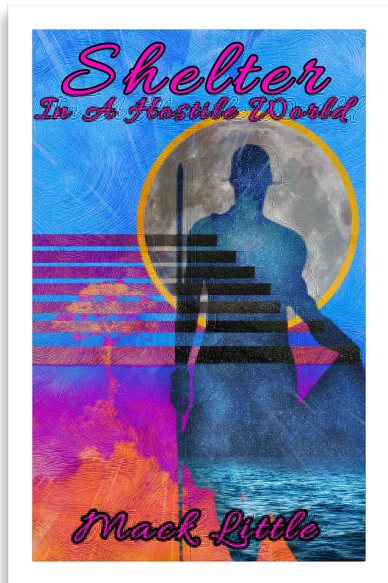




INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW

A CELEBRATION OF SMALL PRESS AND SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS



Shelter In a Hostile World

By Mack Little

Genre: Historical Fiction / Caribbean Fiction

Reviewed by Genevieve Hartman

Content warnings: violence, sexual violence, slavery

A steely-eyed historical novel following one man's difficult life in Igboland and Barbados

Shelter in a Hostile World by Mack Little tells the story of Badu, an Igbo man who was enslaved and taken to Barbados from his home in Igboland, which is part of modern-day Nigeria. Set in the 1600s, this book moves between Badu's young adulthood in the village of Obosi and his life, first as an enslaved man, then as a free man in Barbados.

The book opens in medias res, with Badu tying a witch to a tree as punishment for the atrocities she has facilitated. The children she has handed over to sex trafficking and death rise up to avenge themselves in the form of duppies, or ghosts. But Badu is haunted by a duppy, too—one that has followed him for over two decades and across the ocean, and is linked to his tragically lost first love, Ekemma, in Obosi.

Badu's life in Barbados with his wife Saoirse unfolds alongside the memories of the past, when a younger Badu longed to marry his beloved, but was foiled by an abhorrent, powerful man. In the present, following a revolt that Badu facilitates to rescue his daughter and the other children trafficked by the British, he must secure passage for his family to Jamaica. As he mourns his former life and fights for his future, Badu must decide what to hold on to in the midst of a vicious world that threatens his family, his honor, and his life.

Shelter in a Hostile World is both tender and exceedingly dark. Badu's life is wracked by violence, much of it stemming from forces outside of his control—mainly, more wealthy men obsessed with greed and power, ruining the lives of other people to

satiate their own vice. (Though she doesn't detail Badu's Middle Passage journey, Little does not shy away from descriptions of sexual violence and brutality against and murder of enslaved people. While these events are not gratuitous or glorified, readers may want to proceed with caution, as there are a number of potentially triggering scenes in the book.) Throughout the novel, Badu must decide whether to remain soft, to love despite the torture other people have inflicted on him, or to let life and loss harden him. Here is a heart-rending story about regaining one's own power in the face of unspeakable loss.

At its core, *Shelter in a Hostile World* is a carefully crafted book about resilience and tenacity. It is immersed in Caribbean and Igbo history and culture, and intent on relaying an honest portrayal of the evils of colonialism and the devastating impact of slavery. With a steady gaze, this book looks history in the face and reaches to the heart of pain, humanizes the people who have suffered most.