



The Western Limit of the World: A Novel

David Masiel

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David Masiel's first novel, *2182 Kiloherz*, was one of the most greatly praised books of 2002. A riveting adventure of an unlikely hero's quest for personal redemption in frigid arctic waters, it earned its author comparisons to such giants of nautical fiction as Melville and Conrad. Now Masiel more than meets the promise of his debut with a harrowing odyssey of love and betrayal on the high seas—and in the shadowy corners of the human heart.

At fifty-nine, Harold Snow has seen his share of death. His baptism of fire came on his twenty-first birthday, on a navy ship in the Coral Sea, when a Japanese kamikaze pilot slammed into the deck. Years later, in the aftermath of a typhoon in the Bay of Bengal, he lay awake on a ship surrounded by thousands of drowned corpses and listened to the sharks feed.

Now, serving as boatswain aboard the *Tarshish*, a decrepit tanker whose papers are as suspect as its seaworthiness, a weary Snow feels death creeping closer than ever. It's there in the lethal cargo of volatile chemicals the ship carries in its leaky hold. It stares back from the brutal eyes of the first mate, Bracelin, with whom Snow has embarked on a desperate and highly illegal venture to steal a black-market fortune. It's in the dangerous welter of emotions he feels for Beth, the beautiful half-English, half-Liberian crewmate lusted after by every other male onboard. It clings to young George Masiel, grandson of Snow's oldest friend, a seminary dropout whose disastrous arrival earns him a reputation as a Jonah. And it's there in the memory of Van Sickle, a dead man who haunts Snow with visions of his own dark past.

Snow's risky plans begin to go awry when the *Tarshish* is refused entry to the Bay of San Francisco. Forced to return to the open Pacific, Snow and Bracelin embark on a scattershot voyage of shoestring improvisation that will take the disintegrating hulk—sailing under forged papers and a new name—from South America to Africa. Along the way they will encounter hurricanes, crooked customs officials, and tropical ports seething with vice and revolution.

This outer voyage is mirrored by a dark and twisted inner journey that will strip Snow down to his bare essence as a man. And as George and Beth flaunt their involvement, and Bracelin embraces cold-blooded murder, Snow will face a stark choice between life and death, damnation and redemption, at the western limit of the world.

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