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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ BIOGRAPHY

Alaskan Crude: It's Not About the Oil

Charlie L. Bower, III
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Following the exploits of a novice fisherman as he plies his trade in the waters of both Alaska and Florida, *Alaskan Crude* is an episodic account of the rough and tumble ways of an independent breed of men.

Part memoir, part industry insider tell-all, *Alaskan Crude* is not lacking in adventure. The book begins with author Charlie L.Bower stepping off a bus in Seattle, Washington. He's an inexperienced, bedraggled teenager on his way to a new life in Alaska. It ends, years later, with Bower pawning his meager possessions for a plane ticket back to his home in Sitka, Alaska, where he is the captain of his own boat, the ESTHER.

Bower fills the pages of *Alaskan Crude* with tales of commercial fishing trips in Alaska and Florida, introducing readers to the freewheeling, sometimes chaotic, and physically demanding lifestyle of a modern fisherman. By all accounts, it's not an easy way to make a living. Conditions can be perilous, employers can be both fickle and cruel, and, at least for Bower, the prospect of landing in the poor house is perpetually one step away.

Bower encounters a number of memorable characters as he learns his way around the fishing industry, but his two constant companions are beer and marijuana. To hear Bower tell the story, alcohol and drugs are as common in his world as coffee and cigarettes. Whether they are sitting at a bar, baiting lines, or navigating the high seas, Bower and his buddies do virtually nothing without a steady supply of beer and marijuana. Bower offers scant commentary on whether or not his use of drugs and alcohol proves detrimental to his life.

True to its title, *Alaskan Crude* is a relatively tawdry book. Bower does not hide behind polite euphemisms when describing the coarser aspects of his experiences. His language is blunt and not overly concerned with the rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation. For example, the same word can be spelled three different ways on a single page. And descriptions of sights, events, or people as being "cooler than shit" don't exactly conjure up lasting impressions.

Still, there is a bawdy innocence to this book that readers may find charming. However, one may wish that Bower could have looked back upon his adventures with a little more perspective. His tales are held captive to the moment at hand, disconnected from any unifying theme that might shape them into something more meaningful.

An unadulterated and humorous glimpse into the adventures of a young man, *Alaskan Crude* is fast paced and fun.

DIANE TAYLOR (June 7, 2011)

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