

Foreword Review

Spirit of the Raven

Bob Cherry

Picaro Press (February 1999)

\$19.95 (288pp)

978-0-9665430-0-1

A snow-covered lake deep in the Alaskan bush rests dormant in the arctic twilight. For Hjalmar the Finn, another long day of trapping ends with a gruesome discovery. Frozen beneath the whiteness is his friend and partner, the Swede. An axe head is buried deep between the man's shoulder blades, its long wooden handle reaching skyward like a marker of death. This first scene creates an ominous beginning to *Spirit of the Raven*, and draws the reader deep into the complexities and hardships of life on the Last Frontier. Hjalmar takes the body back to his village not so much for burial, but as proof that he was not involved in the murder. This is necessary because murder—or the accusation there of—was becoming common in his remote Alaskan village.

Not simply a murder mystery, *Spirit of the Raven* is rich with several twisting plots: a native mother struggles with an important decision about her daughter's unborn child. There's a priest with a troubled past and far too many secrets, who tries his best to help others while confronting his worst fears. Some alcoholic friends, a dishonest storeowner and a deputy sheriff that one loves to hate round out the major cast of characters, except one. Keetuk, an almost mystical native, runs through the story and in and out of the character's lives. It is both their fear and admiration for this elusive man that binds them together. In a way, it is Keetuk who is the spirit of this novel.

Bob Cherry wrote *Spirit of the Raven* after living nearly thirty years in Alaska. His intriguing narrative and wonderful descriptions pull the reader far into this mystery. Cherry writes with a calloused-hand confidence of the Alaskan bush and the many colorful personalities that make it their home. Far from the polished glitz of pop-wilderness, or high-on-photos-low-on-literary-content books, *Spirit of the Raven* is a novel with a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. The reader will gain an insight to the hardships of Alaska and the beauty of the Great Land. For those who enjoy a good mystery, are interested in Alaskan native culture, or simply like a good novel, *Spirit of the Raven* is an excellent choice.

ALAN L. WHITE (March / April 1999)

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