ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

Sun Dog Days
Slim Randles
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"Old Cowboys never die. They just ride off into the sunset." That adage could be the theme of this funny, yet thoughtful book about dreams and destinies and how the two aren't always the same.

Buck, who used to be a cowboy, has settled down with a wife and kids and a job in the city. He thinks he's happy. In fact, he says he is happy with an incredible woman to wake up to every morning and someone to call him "Pop." Then his old friend, Smokey, shows up and asks him to go on one last run at the wild horses.

It's taken Buck twenty years and more than one attempt at domesticity to try to get it right, so he is not eager to risk losing Jan and the kids for some adventure, but Smokey ups the ante. He's been diagnosed with cancer and really wants to do this one last thing before he dies. What can a friend say to that?

The two friends go to the desolate desert country of the Sierra Nevada's Coso Range in California where they first met as young cowboys. They borrow roping horses from another friend and go out to find the mustangs. While the story centers on this last adventure, it is as much about relationships and choices and finding balance between dreams and reality.

The author has written six previous books, including *Ol Max Evans: The First Thousand Years*, as well as a column for *New Mexico Magazine*. He incorporates much of the humor of his syndicated column *Home Country* into this novel, along with some narrative that borders on poetry. "But people haven't been there," he writes, "haven't seen the frosty breath of wild horses rise like fog on a sagebrush flat on the desert mountain ranges."

While the humor is a bit childish in places and there are a few tired phrases that might be too predictable, the rest of the narrative is strong and well crafted. In places it is so unique, it will leave lasting impressions. Describing the sounds of the desert, for instance, Randles uses musical metaphors: "Debussy in the desert. Ravel in the ravines. It was a haunting song born of the earth and the mountain and the wild things."

Treasures like this describe the deep connection of man to nature so well that the reader

is tempted to ride into the desert with these two old cowboys.