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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ HISTORICAL

The Golden Fox

Frank R. Kowalski
Trafford Publishing (Apr 3, 2012)
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The Golden Fox by Frank R. Kowalski is a sprawling frontier epic set in the American Northwest beginning in the 1860s. It explores the elements that divide and unite humanity across cultural lines.

The story opens with John Stafford at home in the night, watching an unconscious Native American woman by firelight. The novel then recounts John's earlier venture by canoe into the forest with his dog, Arnold. There he stumbles upon the woman nearly dead in the bottom of another canoe. The rescue is as unlikely as the narration is subdued, lending a calm, eerie quality that pulls readers into the story. Back in the cabin, the woman awakens and, surprisingly, addresses John in flawless English. John is intrigued by his guest, whose name is Little Dove.

This introduction is, of course, crucial to the plot; but even more, its suspense is critical to pulling readers into a very lengthy book. Without a strong start, few readers would make the trek, but Kowalski's tense opener provides the initial necessary push.

As the book continues, the author shifts from relaxed narration to action-packed scenes—and back again. The varying pace generally keeps readers moving, but occasional periods of bloated narration can be wearying.

Little Dove and John challenge the constraints of their respective cultures and begin a classic romance. Bad blood between white settlers and Native Americans provides more than enough conflict for their relationship, but Kowalski also gives Little Dove another suitor in whom she has no interest. Little Dove and John's intelligence and ingenuity are the keys to solving their problems, and an appointment by President Lincoln helps John protect Little Dove and her people.

Unfortunately, Kowalski's use of adverbs and adjectives is overwhelming, as in the following example: "Finally, John leisurely pushed the chair back from the table, gave Arnold a lively massage behind the ears, slowly rose, and unhurriedly shuffled across the room to the window and tensely peered out at the somber, grey dawn, as the first streaks of light began to usher in a new day." The text also contains numerous grammatical, punctuation, and capitalization errors.

While *The Golden Fox* is an interesting story that will spark interest in fans of historical fiction, Kolwalski's telling of it fails to live up to its initial promise.

MELISSA WUSKE (September 26, 2012)

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