ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

HISTORICAL

The Yellow Doll: Deadwood, Hickok, and Opium
David A. Soma
Trafford Publishing
978-1-4269-6839-6
Three Stars (out of Five)

David Soma's knowledge and love of history, as well as his penchant for the theater, are evident in his novel, *The Yellow Doll*. Soma teaches and entertains, yet does not bog down the reader with useless trivia. Every piece of historical data is skillfully interwoven with theatrical elements and great characterization, all of which are crucial to the flow of the narrative and lend authenticity to the story.

In 1875, the United States government declared it unlawful to be a miner or any other "unauthorized citizen" on the Black Hills Indian Reservation. During this time, America saw the biggest gold strike in history come out of the same Dakota territories. The strike incited a gold rush of unbelievable proportions, and, disregarding the government's proclamation, everyone from miners to merchants headed west to seek their fortunes. These opportunity seekers founded the mining camp that grew into the illustrious town of Deadwood.

The novel begins by introducing the reader to Niles Dewy, seemingly a gentleman of good ilk. Dewy is a photographer in an era when the craft is new and rare. The mysterious manipulations of complex machinery, concoctions, and chemicals are more like magic that might steal a man's soul than a recognizable science. Dewy and his partner, the "Chinaman" Rubee, have plans to go to Deadwood to make some money.

Every character in Soma's novel has a hidden agenda. Dewy carries the arsenal of a gunfighter and, by choice, does not sell his photographs. Rubee's quiet stoicism hides a passion that smolders and intoxicates like the dragon's tail of smoke found in the opium dens of Deadwood. Both Sarah Culbert, Dewy's lover, and George, the African-American train porter who invites himself along on their journey, keep secrets, too.

The author's sense of pace is cinematic. The nuances of each character unfold as the plot progresses just enough to always keep the reader guessing and interested. The dialogue pops out of the novel like cracks of a whip, capturing a sense of time and place that puts the reader in the middle of Deadwood circa 1876.

In the book's epilogue, Soma explains how he built his vibrant characters by using historical letters and journals from real people. This demonstrates the author's reverence for history, his scrupulous attention to detail, and his powerful imagination. These make-believe characters interact with larger-than-life celebrities of the Old West, like Wild Bill Hickok and the teetotaler Buffalo Bill Cody, enhancing the historical aspect of the plot and adding to the overall appeal of the novel.

Although much of the prose shines like the gold Soma's characters seek, some of

it is tarnished with typos, awkward sentences, and usage errors that could have been avoided

with careful proofreading. Greater attention to these details would help make *The Yellow Doll* a stronger and more polished book.

Lee Gooden