FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

Wounded Moon
Gary Cook
Stoeger Publishing Company
978-0-88317-272-8
(September 30, 2004)

“When man’s after money, nature is always changed”, says Dr. David Johnson, the man responsible for unleashing an Alaskan Grizzly bear on the Appalachian Trail in this combination love letter, cautionary tale, and fable. “We’ve changed rivers, polluted oceans, cleared entire forests, all in the pursuit of money.” The motivation for Doc Johnson’s participation in this well-intended but ultimately disastrous government-sponsored fiasco is described as an “insane” amount of money, over which he feels overwhelming - and unconvincing - guilt before he actually performs the task of drugging the giant bear so that it can be illegally removed from Alaska.

After being transported to Georgia, the grizzly becomes infected, escapes its captors, and makes its way two hundred miles north to the Great Smokey Mountains where it begins a murderous rampage that leaves two children and several men dead, and another child missing.

But this novel is not simply another wild animal disaster story. He shows the animal’s suffering, and his characters insist that the bear is not to blame. “Do we hate tornadoes or floods or hurricanes that kill” Doc Johnson wants to know.

Instead, the author combines an ethereal romance between writer Micah Rogers and tracker Adam Shaw, called “The Finder” by the locals because of his ability to find those lost in the wilderness, with ambiguous spiritual mysticism personified by the missing fourteen-year-old girl, Anna Roby. Anna, and several other characters, seem less of this world than the next.

Cook is intimately familiar with, and justly enamored of, the Smokeys. Best known for writing about the land and those who value national heritage, including two books of short stories, *The Old Man* and *Oakseeds: Stories from the Land*, he has worked as a wildlife officer and wildlife biologist, and currently holds the office of Regional Manager of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. This background provides the authenticity necessary for Cook's engrossing, enigmatic tale of man against nature in the world of spirit, written in lyric prose.

The spiritual lessons in *Wounded Moon* may be confounding to readers unfamiliar with Native American culture. The high-tech poachers' criminal motivations and the mysterious hill folk known as the Melungeons were handled more effectively in the recent *Bare Bones* by Kathy Reichs. Cook clearly possesses both insider's knowledge and writing ability; his story could have been both more specific and more comprehensive.

While Cook's poetic style is sometimes overwrought, and the plot elements not clearly defined but vaguely referenced, the tale is haunting and will stick in the mind long after the covers are closed, leaving readers, like Micah Rogers, with more questions than answers.

Diane Vogt