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The Trap

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

The poetry of this short but significant book lies in its vivid descriptions of the far north of Canada ? ?...snow, when settled on a field or valley, creates an almost religious experience for those fortunate to be the first to break trails, leaving their long, unbroken signatures on the snow-clad landscape? and in the subtle and telling juxtaposition of Indian legends with the stuff of everyday existence. These tales provide a moral commentary on the action and imbue the narrative with the depth and richness of myth and tradition.

The book?s pathos is embedded in its metaphorical title ? this savagely beautiful landscape, rich in history, is also a trap, physically as powerful as the one which snares venerable elder Albert Least-Weasel and ends his life but with a keen mental and emotional edge, too. Albert?s grandson Johnny is studying hard in his spare time to be able to go to college, knowing that others who have gone before him have not fitted in to the outside world with its dulled, cushioned existence ? and yet on their return no longer feel themselves to be part of the community they have so recently left. ?The place was like a trap, its sharp teeth forged from the fire of two worlds colliding.?

Life is harsh and spare in this part of the world and Smelcer makes this abundantly clear through his descriptions of the difficulties of performing the most basic tasks in order to sustain existence. The land and weather are implacable and only a thorough knowledge of and respect for the tempers of both enable the Indians to subsist. Albert Least-Weasel, his reactions blunted by age, steps into his own trap and spends three nights in temperatures as low as 45 below stalked by wolves, surviving only because of his stoicism and wily ingenuity.

Smelcer deals a happy ending with one hand and draws it back with the other. Albert is found alive by his grandson Johnny but dies soon afterwards, having recognised that his time has come but with his dignity intact. ?He had made a good stand, fought as long as any man could have fought, missed nothing, forgotten nothing, used every resource and lesson...?

It is a special code, a challenging anachronism in a world which has long turned its face to material gain, a warning to all who ignore their instincts and move away from the truths of Nature.

Running Order:

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