

Buffalo Nickel, by C.W. Smith (Poseidon, \$19.95), is a delightful rarity: an old-fashioned "good read" which tells the life story of a likable and interesting character who truly grows and changes. He's a Kiowa Indian named Went on a Journey, who's renamed David Copperfield (at a mission school), grows rich when oil is discovered on his land, enjoys a brief Hollywood career, and somehow survives both his own foolhardiness and the torments wreaked on him by two women, one white, one Indian, who love him. The novel is a roomy, agreeably slow-paced picaresque whose serious themes (the abrading of Indian culture, the gradual disappearance of space and wilderness) emerge with haunting clarity from a prose that continuously suggests and dramatizes, never once breaking into sermon. *Buffalo Nickel* may well be the year's best novel.

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