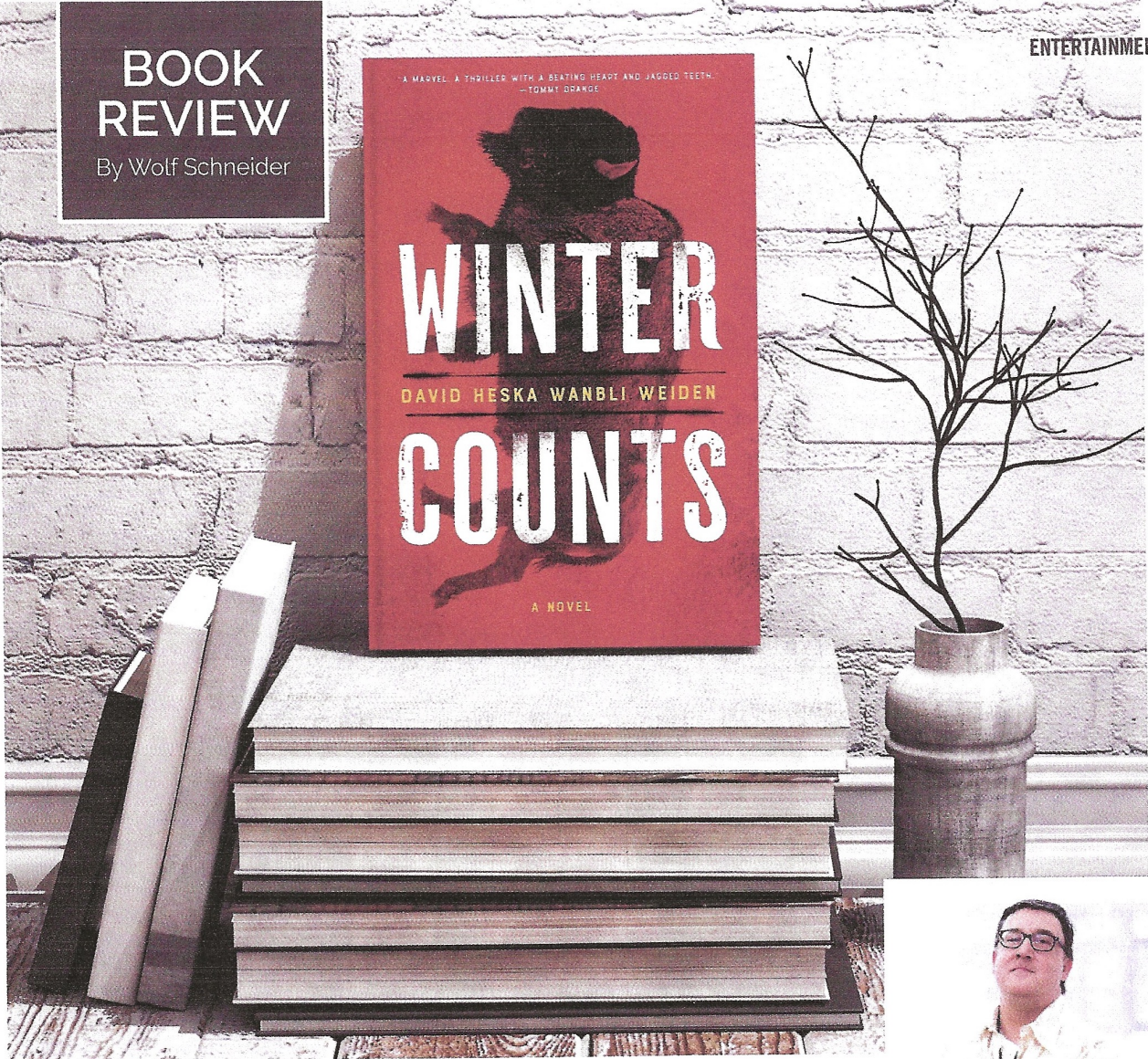


**BOOK
REVIEW**
By Wolf Schneider



WINTER COUNTS

NATIVE AMERICAN CRIME NOVEL TAPS INTO THE MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH



David Heska Wanbli Weiden
Photo courtesy of the author

CELL SERVICE IS HIT-OR-MISS. Temperatures dip to twenty below. The Stones' "Gimme Shelter" blasts at the local bar. In the parking lot, expensive rides tuck in at the far end so they don't get dinged. This is home turf for Virgil Wounded Horse, a thug for hire who dispatches justice for his people when the American legal system fails them. They're modern-day Lakotas living on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota.

Virgil is known as the local enforcer. He's more interested in what's fair than in charging hefty fees that might allow him to upgrade his old Ford Pinto or the shack he calls home. Still, the money's good when Virgil gets hired to investigate the source of the heroin that's infiltrating the rez. It's a quest that sends Virgil into a sweat lodge, then teaming up with his strong-minded ex-girlfriend Marie to drive down to Denver. There, they get introduced to sopapillas and coffee that tastes like caramel and

costs as much by the cup as a pound of Folger's at home, while finding links to the dealers bringing hard drugs to the rez. It all gets more entangled as the drug-dealing network expands, Marie considers moving to New Mexico, and Virgil's teenage nephew, whom Virgil is raising alone, gets in trouble. Virgil enlists a lawyer in nearby Rapid City, noting, "The lawyer's office was in the small downtown area of Rapid City, where there were life-size statues of every US president, and also two sculptures of anonymous Native Americans."

Winter Counts is the debut novel by David Heska Wanbli Weiden, an enrolled citizen of the Sicangu Lakota Nation, who received his MFA from Santa Fe's Institute of American Indian Arts. It's literary crime fiction at its finest, laced with wry wit, cultural commentary, and a propulsive plot. There's nothing else quite like this incisive page-turner. ■

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