

Book signing

Historical novelist seeks Mescalero readers

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RUIDOSO NEWS

Historical novelist W. Michael Farmer studied a tall stack of books about the Mescalero Apache Nation before creating his fictional character Yellow Boy, but he didn't consult any living Apaches and scarcely has a clue whether he really got it right.

He talked about his doubts as he sat inside Books Etcetera on Sudderth Drive Wednesday, getting ready to sign copies of *Killer of Witches*, the second of the two volumes he's completed so far with Yellow Boy as a central figure.

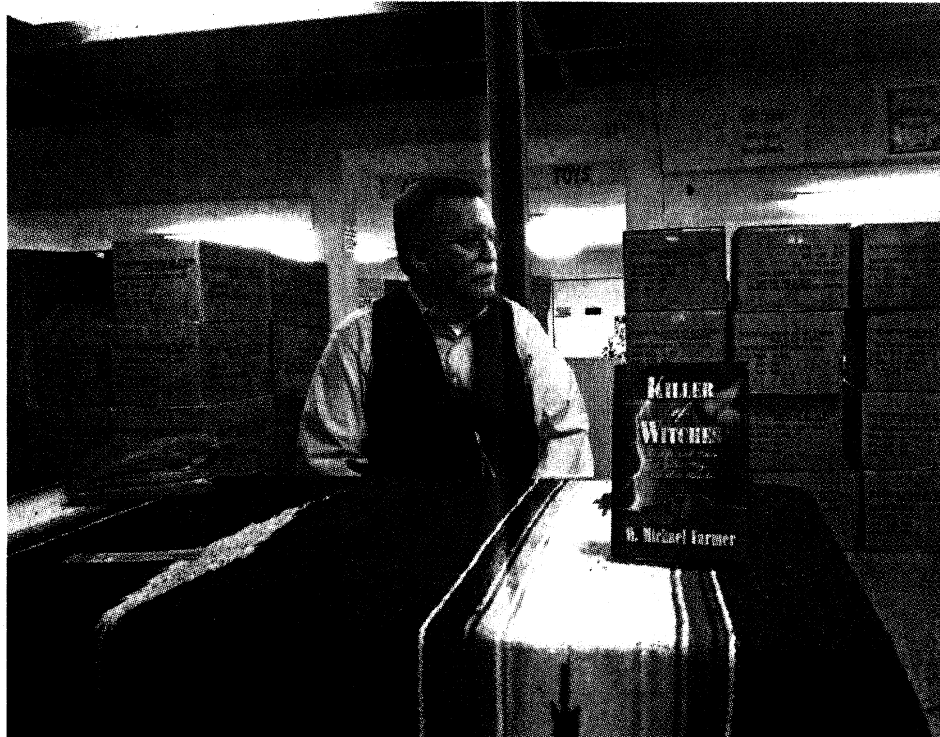
Yellow Boy narrates the story, and it's written in what purports to be the voice and personality of a young Apache child of the 19th Century who grows chapter by chapter into a warrior.

"I would love a member of the tribe to get ahold of the book and say you're full of crap and here's why," he said. Then he admitted he would love it a lot more if that Mescalero reader told him he'd managed to invent an authentic Apache.

As it happens, Farmer does have a fan in Mescalero, an influential one. She's Lillian Chavez, librarian of the Mescalero Community Library. She read the first Yellow Boy book, *Hombrecito's War*, and was delighted to learn he's come out with another one.

"The story did portray how we would have lived and how we would have seen different events that took place," she said. "How we thought, how we felt, he hit the nail on the head a couple of times."

Chavez said she gave the book to her



Killer of Witches author W. Michael Farmer was in town Wednesday for a book signing at Books Etcetera.

husband to read, and he liked it too. So that makes two Mescalero endorsements of Farmer's ability to make the creative leap into another culture, and a remote and private one at that.

Farmer's books are deeply rooted in actual past events, and real historical

figures appear, sometimes as major characters.

Hombrecito's War was based on the story of Albert Fountain, a prominent lawyer, newspaper publisher and politician in Las Cruces who was driving a wagon toward home with his young son

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**HISTORICAL NOVELIST
W. MICHAEL FARMER**

Henry in 1896 when the pair disappeared near White Sands. They were never seen again.

Farmer lived in Las Cruces himself for a while, working as a physicist for Science and Technology Corp. In his imagined account of the Fountain mystery, Henry manages to escape into the desert, where the adult Yellow Boy finds and befriends him.

Killer of Witches is Yellow Boy's back story. It begins in 1865 when he was five years old and living with several hundred other Mescalero Apaches in the Bosque Redondo as prisoners of the U.S. Army. Historical accounts say they vanished one night and were never found.

In the book, they scattered into the Guadalupe Mountains, where Yellow Boy grows to manhood and learns that he has special gifts. How he uses them to protect his people is the main plot line of the novel.

Farmer mentioned that he spoke with Chavez after he published *Hombrecito's War* and vaguely recalled that she told him she liked the book. He hasn't spoken to her since.

"He's in Ruidoso?" she exclaimed in surprise with a touch of pique. "Signing books? He should have called me. I'd have gone down there."