

Hunting: You've Got to Be Kidding!

Kevin Aelred Dettler

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Hunting is a good-natured trophy hunter's memoir about crisscrossing North America in pursuit of an exclusive prize.

Kevin Aelred Dettler's memoir *Hunting* covers dozens of big-game hunting trips around North America.

Beginning with Dettler's initiation into big-game hunting over the course of a grueling sheep hunt in Alaska, *Hunting* recounts a decade-long pursuit of the North American 29 award—an exclusive prize that recognizes hunters who have killed and registered all twenty-nine big-game animals native to North America. In hunting these creatures—the brown bear and polar bear among them—Dettler traversed the continent. He assumed a happy-go-lucky attitude throughout his travels; it, in turn, infuses the book, which is filled with campfire-style exaggerated tales, wilderness images, and trophy shots.

Each chapter focuses on a specific animal, recounting the hunts Dettler went on in search of it. The quirks of big-game hunting are mentioned throughout. In Canada's rugged Willmore Wilderness Park, Dettler abandoned all of his possessions in order to carry the horns, hide, and meat of a massive ram back to base camp. Three years later, his clothes were returned in the mail. Another trip took place four days after 9/11; Dettler recalls rearranging his hunting rifles curbside at the Minneapolis–Saint Paul International Airport and boarding the plane without incident, marveling at the near-empty cabin. Multiple hunting trips are narrated in the present tense, resulting in some immediacy; there are exciting details of camping in negative-forty-degree Alaskan winters and sighting a one-and-a-quarter-ton bison.

Although most chapters include a remarkable story, the book's tone is too dry; its work becomes monotonous and repetitive, absent true suspense or drama. Even dangerous and difficult situations are written about without a sense of urgency. Erratic grammar also mars the flow of the prose. The book's running joke, "You've got to be kidding," is repeated in all capital letters countless times; it's a clunky and disjointed through line.

Taken as a whole, the book is too choppy and incohesive. Its chapters are episodic; they jerk from one hunting trip to the next without segue. At times, they also overlap, as where they rehash thoughts about integrating Dettler's farming experience into his hunting expeditions. And though the pursuit of the North American 29 is the thread that guides the book, it is underdescribed; context regarding its significance, or about the act of hunting in general, is missing.

A good-natured adventure memoir, *Hunting* is about crisscrossing North America, braving extreme climates to kill majestic animals.

WILLEM MARX (March 23, 2024)

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