

Hunting Teddy Roosevelt

James A. Ross

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Hunting Teddy Roosevelt is a fun and smart historical thriller that features some of history's greatest characters.

James A. Ross's *Hunting Teddy Roosevelt* is a pitch-perfect historical novel featuring the most action-oriented president in US history.

Beginning in 1909 in Africa, the novel focuses on former president Teddy Roosevelt, who now has time to enjoy his passions, including big game hunting. While on a safari, Roosevelt stumbles into a maelstrom of geopolitics. First he finds Sudanese slave traders. Next, he witnesses several brutal incidents perpetrated by colonial officials of the Belgian Congo. Finally, in the most portentous moment of the book, Roosevelt uncovers imperial German war planning that begins in a no-name port in Morocco and ends with the world in flames.

Beyond its journey through the Edwardian age, the novel features a thrilling showdown between Roosevelt and industrialist J. P. Morgan. Morgan sends an assassin after Roosevelt in order to kill off trust-busting and Roosevelt's populist appeal, including what would later become New Nationalism. A little love is added in the form of Maggie, an old flame from Roosevelt's childhood who is tasked with following him by the newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst.

Multiple elements and disciplines converge. The novel draws upon true crime, ethnography, political science, and economics. Roosevelt is the guide through the vast landscapes of Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, and other East African nations, then under the British crown. These elements work well together. The assassination plot, along with Roosevelt's adventures in Africa, are beyond entertaining. The story moves with alacrity, and little time is wasted in getting to its center.

The characters feel alive and realistic. Roosevelt, Morgan, and assorted colonial officials speak like Edwardian gentlemen. There is more than a little hero worship involved: Roosevelt sometimes comes across as more of a superhero than a flesh and blood man. Maggie, who is based on Nellie Bly, adds much to the story insofar as she is a reminder of the suffrage movement and the push for equal rights for women.

The conclusion is a forgone one, but still exciting. This is a classic adventure with much in the way of violence, danger, and escape. It is also a wonderful way to convey real history through fiction. As the novel shows: the world was far from peaceful before the guns of August 1914. It spotlights some of the biggest conflicts: labor versus capital, Germany versus the Anglo-French alliance, and the colonial powers versus anticolonial nationalism.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (June 11, 2020)

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