

The Hunt

Andrew C. Watzek

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Nothing much scared Adam “Mac” McCulough, not even during his violent days as an Arizona Ranger in the turbulent aftermath of the Civil War. Nothing much scared him, that is, until his beloved wife, Abby, dies shortly after their fourth daughter is born.

Her death leaves Mac with children to raise and a ranch to run. Neighbors and town folk pitch in, but the help Mac truly needs comes when a tracker from his ranger days rides up to the McCulough Ranch and declares he is there to stay. Ezra “Hawk” Hawks, who is half-Anglo, half-White Mountain Apache, and the McCulough girls soon develop an unbreakable bond.

The plot of Andrew C. Watzek’s *The Hunt* hinges on an event that occurred years earlier, when Mac was a ranger. He had pursued four men who had robbed a family near Prescott, badly beating the man and brutally raping the mother and daughter. Despite the crime’s savagery, the four were sentenced to twenty years in prison.

The story unfolds chronologically, as Mac’s daughters learn to ride, rope, and shoot while confronting mountain lions, grizzlies, and two-footed danger. Sara, Becky, Julie, and Angela attend school, while Hawk slowly romances their teacher, Sally Enders, on the sly. It’s Sally, in fact, who helps the men explain all things feminine to the girls as they mature. Mac finds companionship, too, after stopping to assist Christine Davis, who he finds stranded on a road. He discovers she’s a “sportin’ woman.” He begins to court her, despite the fact that she is in the entertainment business at the Duck Inn Saloon in a nearby town. Fifteen years later, during one of Mac’s visits with Christine, he is discovered by the vicious quartet he had arrested for the Prescott crime and the novel roars to a dramatic and bloody climax.

Somewhat troubling is the tenor of Watzek’s dialogue. It often seems as if the speech of some of his characters is too modern for the setting. Turns of phrase, such as “my butt is freezin,” coming from a very young girl, seem out of place. The story’s level of violence is consistent with the time and place, and there is a modicum of sexual activity. While Mac and Hawk are standard western types, the author is to be credited for his imaginative characterization, with fans of the genre sure to be intrigued by young women playing the heroes.

Tightly edited for grammar and syntax, the book is an easy read. While the author relies too much on exposition, *The Hunt* has a cinematic quality appropriate for a good, old shoot ’em up story.

GARY PRESLEY (July 30, 2012)

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