

The Hunters

John Bolger

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A murder in the Wisconsin north woods is the focus of *The Hunters*, but it is not a murder mystery. From the start, author John Bolger reveals that Paul is planning to kill Craig in his deer blind, making the murder appear to be a freak hunting accident. The novel tells the story of the events leading up to this murder, the motivation behind it, and its impact throughout the following year. Bolger also explores the strength and fragility of relationships.

Paul and his sister Kristen are friends with brothers Brien and Tom Grace and their cousins Drew and Adam Fisher. A tragic series of events sends Kristen into a downward spiral and propels Paul to seek revenge through the murder of another friend, Craig. Drew's pro bono attorney work casts a shadow of doubt on many of the assumptions the friends made about each other.

Bolger develops his main characters well and crafts meaningful, realistic relationships between the men, their family members, and the beautiful and brilliant Kristen. As the year following the murder unfolds, the events that led up to it are also revealed: characters recall their time at deer camp, Adam's death and Kristen's reaction to it, and even earlier events in their lives as young men. Too often, the story gets confusing as the author jumps between the present and the past. While this can be an effective way to tell a story, Bolger overuses the technique, making it difficult to get a fix on when certain events took place.

Bolger also includes material that contributes little to the story. There are several graphs and hypothetical statements inserted into the pages where the author writes about Brien. It can be assumed these references deal with Brien's dissertation and his work as a psychologist, but this is not clear and does not help readers more deeply understand the character. Additionally, Bolger describes the route of one of Paul's trips in a way that would be confusing to those not familiar with the lettering system of Wisconsin county roads; he also lists all of the trees identified during a walk in the woods. The description of taking down a deer injured but not killed during a hunt demonstrates Bolger's hunting knowledge but isn't necessary to the story.

The Hunters is Bolger's first novel and shows his potential as a writer. It is a good story that will appeal to those who enjoy psychological thrillers and mysteries. Its setting in Wisconsin gives it regional appeal.

MARY CRAWFORD (March 7, 2013)

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