Antler Dust by Mark Stevens

With laudibly unsentimental prose and sure command of character, Antler Dust takes us on a dark hunting trip through the snowy Rockies. Pitting a tough but vulnerable heroine against a killer out to bag more than elk, Mark Stevens gives new meaning to the term trophy kill.

I wrote the review below and stand by every word ... Allyn Harvey

Aspen Times Bookshelf

By Allyn Harvey

March 10, 2007

A female hunting guide, a reformed hunter, an earnest ranger and a greedy outfitter are at the center of Antler Dust, Mark Stevens debut novel.

The story, set in Glenwood Springs and the nearby Flattop Mountains, revolves around two deaths that occur within a few minutes of each other on a snowy day at the outset of elk hunting season. The protagonist, guide Alison Coil, hears a shot and sees someone struggling to drag a particularly heavy load - a human body, it turns out - at the top of a nearby ridge.

What she finds later at the scene - the abandoned carcass of a trophy-sized elk - only adds to the mystery.

Meanwhile, Dean Applegate, a hunter in a group outfitted by George Grumley, accidentally shoots a protester with the environmental group FATE, or Fighting Animal Torture Everywhere. The supposedly reformed Applegate spends the rest of the novel in a state of denial, spinning tales...
to keep the beautiful leader of FATE happy, the press writing stories and the Garfield County sheriff and his deputies at bay.

But a much more brutal killer lurks, one who, in a particularly stark moment, recounts to the reader and himself both his crime and his victim, wishing he could kill him all over again.

Stevens, a Colorado resident and former Denver Post reporter and news producer for the McNeil-Lehrer News Hour, has crafted a page-turner with all the makings of a great mystery: two deaths and a variety of characters who aren’t really what they appear to be.

Stevens knowledge of the region is evident in the setting he creates - a perfectly believable locale in the central Rockies. His experience as a reporter is reflected in his portrayal of the bumbling sheriff and his lazy deputies. The story moves along through peaks and valleys of plot and circumstance, the same as any news story that draws local, state and national media attention - all of which cover the protesters death in force.

The book is well-written from start to finish. Stevens skill as a writer occasionally shines with the occasional gold coin, where prose and plot sing in perfect harmony.

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