



Title: Blood Trail

Author: C.J. Box

Description:

Game wardens have found a man dead at a mountain camp—strung up, gutted, and flayed as if he were the elk he'd been hunting. Is the murder the work of a deranged anti-hunting activist or of a lone psychopath with a personal vendetta Wyoming game warden Joe Pickett is the man to track the murderer and stop him before someone declares open season on humans.

Reviews

Publishers Weekly:

Writing beautifully about the mountain West and its people, Box takes care to present both sides of the controversial issue of hunting. The narrative alternates between the searchers and the killer, whose identity will keep readers guessing up to the surprising climax.

Library Journal:

Award-winning mystery writer Box ratchets up the suspense in this tightly plotted example of his writing genius, his eighth thriller to feature Pickett. His sense of place and talent for character development are on a par with those of James Lee Burke. Highly recommended.

Kirkus Reviews:

Wyoming Game and Fish Warden Joe Pickett (*Free Fire*, 2007, etc.), once again at the governor's behest, stalks the wraithlike figure who's targeting elk hunters for death. More of a western than a mystery, like most of Joe's adventures, and all the better for the open physical clashes that periodically release the tension between the scheming adversaries.

Madison County Herald:

Bestselling author C.J. Box tops himself with every novel in the game warden Joe Pickett mystery series. But *Blood Trail* cuts a whole new path of death and suspense never trod upon before. Box incorporates Wyoming's Native American tribes and the anti-hunting controversy that threatens a way of life in the West. The killer walks in plain sight in a mist of misdirection as the naive yet relentless ranger Pickett gets ever-closer to the crosshairs of his own demise. Dogged by his boss, harassed by the governor, scrutinized by the FBI and local law, Joe Pickett faces his toughest trial ever in *Blood Trail*. Box's finale is harsh and unpredictable with a finish you won't see coming. The Joe Pickett series reads way too fast, making me dread the year-long wait for another potent visit to the beautiful and treacherous Rockies.

Cleveland Plain Dealer:

C.J. Box brings back Wyoming game warden Joe Pickett in *Blood Trail* and in doing so,

shows why he has pretty much sewn up the state as his own territory. Box knows what readers expect and delivers it with a flourish.

Nashville Scene:

Kinsey Millhone. Hamish Macbeth. Stephanie Plum. Dave Robicheaux. Bennie Rosato. Rumpole of the Bailey. All are fictional detectives whom fans savor, [but] what makes some detectives remain not only fresh, but refreshing, book after book

In Joe Pickett, outdoor enthusiast C.J. Box may have hit upon the right mix of character, locale and profession. In *Blood Trail*, the eighth novel of the series, the erstwhile game warden -- currently suspended and acting as a special assistant to the governor -- is on the track of a serial killer who is picking off game hunters in Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains, threatening not only lives, but a multimillion-dollar tourism industry as well.

Consider Box's description of Joe Pickett's office, which is, like that of any other game warden, his pickup truck: "The carpeting on the floorboards showed mud from the clay draws and arroyos near Lusk, the Little Snake River bottomland of Baggs, the desert of Rawlins, the Wind River foothills out of Pinedale. There was a gritty covering of dust on his dashboard and over his instruments. The console was packed with maps, notes, citation books. The skinny space behind his seat was crammed with jackets and coats for every weather possibility, as well as his personal shotgun... The large padlocked metal box in the bed of the vehicle held evidence kits, survival gear, necropsy kits, heavy winter clothing, tools, spare radios, a tent and a sleeping bag. Single cab pickups for game wardens with all this gear was proof that whoever it was in the department who purchased the vehicles had never been out in the field."

In *Blood Trail*, the spin doctoring is as furious as the action. An anti-hunting guru, media darling Klamath Moore, capitalizes on the gruesome murders of hunters to spread his political message. It is once again up to Pickett to head for the mountains and clean up the mess. As in Hemingway's best hunting and fishing narratives, the brutality of the natural world is best understood in contrast to the brutality of the so-called civilized world. In a passage that could have been written by Papa himself, for example, Box describes Pickett's philosophy on the handling of a fresh kill: "He valued those who shot well and took care of their game properly. This involved field dressing the downed animal quickly and cleanly, and cooling the meat by placing lengths of wood inside the body cavity to open it up to the crisp fall air. Back limbs were hung by the legs from a tree branch or game pole. The game carcass was then skinned to accelerate cooling, and washed down to clean it of hair and dirt. The head was often removed as well as the legs past their joints. It was respectful of the animal and the tradition of hunting to take care of the kill this way."

The action moves quickly through the Rockies toward a final confrontation, advancing the lives of familiar Box characters while introducing new ones.

"A thriller is like a shark," Box once explained. "It needs to always be moving forward. If it stops, it dies."

Joe Pickett seems poised to move forward for some time to come.