



The Eden Hunter

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In 1816, five years after being captured and sold into slavery, Kau, a pygmy tribesman, flees south into the Spanish Florida wilderness, determined to find a place where he can once again live in harmony with nature. Both haunted and driven by his memories of Africa, he embarks on an epic quest through the treacherous pinewoods, swamps, and river bottoms of the Southern frontier. He encounters renegades and thieves, traitors and mercenaries, and the dark prophetic magic of the forest before he finally finds himself within the walls of a remote fort on the Apalachicola River. There, he becomes the reluctant companion of several hundred runaway slaves once recruited by the British to fight in the War of 1812, then abandoned to fend for themselves against the American forces intent on destroying their remarkable stronghold.

Inspired by actual events, and at times both violent and beautiful, *The Eden Hunter* provides a fascinating glimpse at a forgotten, bloody chapter in our nation's history through the eyes of one truly remarkable hero.

The Eden Hunter Details

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Author : Skip Horack

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CGMcCarthy says

Great read from start to finish. Right out of the gate the author places us in a suspenseful flight to safety for the escaped slave, all the while evoking details of a very specific place and time. History fans will appreciate the care with which the author presents the complex social, racial, governmental structures that existed in the pre-Civil War south of the North American continent. Naturalists will appreciate the precision of the author's language when identifying plants, animals, birds, and geologic phenomena. The book transports you to a time and place with authority and respect, and delivers a riveting tale of an escaped slave's struggle to achieve even the slightest repose from the insane world that has entrapped him.

Stacey says

I'm quoting myself from my review of Horack's last book, *The Southern Cross*: "Skip's a friend, so I suppose I should admit to bias. But I know that I would love this collection even if I stumbled on it blind."

The same goes for *The Eden Hunter*. I would have loved this novel no matter who wrote it. The protagonist Kau, a pygmy tribesman captured and brought to the US in the early 1800s, is completely compelling. The plot, as Kau travels across states on his way to Florida, rolls along at the perfect pace--I never wanted to put the book down. Nothing about this book is showy and yet it is completely beautiful, too. I especially love Horack's language in describing setting. He always finds the exact right word: "He crossed pine flatlands that in low spots dropped off into thin finger forests of virgin oak and elm--beech, sycamore and chestnut--shady hollows where clear springs flowed . . ."

Jennifer says

I don't know if I liked this book. I am not sorry I read it. The writing was good - the author made me see what he was writing. The story is based on real events. Other than the references to the war of 1812 and some slave rebellions, I am not sure what was real and what was not. A compelling and violent story told through an African Pygmy who is captured by slavers and brought to America. Eventually he escapes and sets out to find a place to live that is like his home in Africa. He is fairly impartial regarding the Americans, the different Indian tribes, the British and the Negro settlement he finds in Florida. His impartiality, seeing the good and the bad in every group keeps the perspective balanced for most of the story.

Carla says

This book was difficult to rate, where I wish there were half stars! The story rated a 4 or 4.5, however the writing style and direction the story went with left much to be desired and rated a 3. The story, of Kau, and his journey from Africa to American. Kau faces tragedy and travails as he makes his way alone through vast virgin forests, mountain ranges, and river passages, not to mention human predators, slave catchers and highway men. One couldn't help but love Kau, a Pygmy with sharpened teeth, however the story didn't flow very well at times. There was just a lack of depth in expressing the feelings of Kau. Much was made of his

thoughts, particularly of how it related to his environment, but there was something missing that I had hoped would develop later in the book, that didn't.

Amy L. Campbell says

Note: received free copy from publisher's booth at ALA 2010.

This receives a waffle between two and three stars.

This starts off as a very strong novel and somehow manages to unravel somewhere between the last half and the last 2/3rds. I was convinced that this was going to be a commentary on the brutality of man and how slavery creates brutes on both sides. If that was the goal I don't feel like it was quite achieved. The narrative is good, but then the plot comes in and mucks about and seems to perambulate in a very confused fashion. Rather than progressing it seems like the plot decided to walk around in lazy circles with no real thought as to character development or storytelling. This is especially true as the character of General Garcon is introduced and Kau keeps returning to the camp over and over again even though the only thing he wants to do is get away and lead a simple life. It feels like Horack had this all planned and plotted out, fell in love with the character Garcon, and then decided to hang the rest of the plotted course and just spend as much time with a character who by all rights should no longer have been critical to the story.

I didn't hate this so much as I'm just completely indifferent to it. It's one of those books that at the end I just kind of said, "meh" and moved on to the next thing.

Chris Yun says

The novel starts with spare, swift, brutal exposition that prepared the reader for the pervasive violence of the time. As Kau travels towards west towards the river, the prose takes on ponderous, biblical constructions that begged comparison with *Blood Meridian*, and it holds up at times, but at others his laconism comes off as forced: "Beah...was having her fun with this story...embellishing the details, manipulating the facts. So it is with all storytellers everywhere, he figured."

The novel works best when the characters become more than ciphers--Morning Star, the abolitionist preacher, Elvy, who receive vivid passages about their appearance and a little history. Garcon, Xavier and even Beah, who take up much of the latter portion of the novel, have many stated desires that seem conjured from thin air. As such, I couldn't help but distrust their actions, and after the resolution of the fort, I felt very little.

Kayla Eason says

Beyond the well imagined plot—stocked by extensive historical research on the author's part, I'm sure—the main point I wish to highlight about Skip Horack's *The Eden Hunter* is the prose style. Undoubtedly, The novel grips, and the immediacy of danger and haunting tension is thoughtfully magnified by the writing choices. The terse, simple, and quickly paced sentence structure sets the tone perfectly. More so, I read the

prose as incredibly poetic, despite the unpoetic circumstances presented as we follow the book's protagonist, Kau, an escaped Pygmy slave, through the wilderness of early America. Horack states an image with minimal description, but just enough lyrical manipulation that the images jump. Alliteration is often employed, and the repetition of sounds creates a rhythm. For example, a particular expert reads: "He kept on until his stomach was full and then waded into the tannic moonlit lake. There he tore loose wide sheets of lotus and lily that later he slathered with honey and then folded into tight envelopes." (pg 87). Here, the consistent use of "t" sounds and hard syllables while describing a beautiful image is an example of how the author's style propels the entire narrative forward with energy—that immediacy of the present and plunging future which Kau feels and battles intrepidly in search of his past, his Eden. Kau must continue forward for he is thrown into such dangerous circumstances that there is little time to look back and mourn. His only choice is to hope that by advancing he will find again his sense of place away from fear and guilt. While reading I thought to myself that the author must have worked and reworked the prose, taking more and more away from his original sentences. The end product is a novel which reads, surprisingly, very smoothly. With its hurried tone, the prose reflects a hunt; but also through the honest and poignant details, the prose reflects the visceral, heartfelt experience of searching for a lost Eden, a place that can never be rediscovered. Horack tells us what the story looks like, but does not tell us how to feel. The author allows the reader to feel for themselves, an accomplishment in literature—to render the rhythm, or pulse, of a character's journey, to be honest in voice, and all the while quietly generate an experience within the reader. The Eden Hunter is not a novel I would have usually picked up, perhaps due to the fact that when reading I usually opt for more romantic periods in history, but I'm happy I had the opportunity to read this novel. I found it artistic with its blunt narrative and its rhythmic and flowing depiction of nature in contrast to a horrifying example of human history and the questioning of human nature. It is an intelligent, well written story.

Eloise says

A grief stricken pygmy is abducted and enslaved; a slave runs away at the cost of hurting his only friend; a runaway seeks an impossible new home in an embattled swamp — a new home which is impossible to find, impossible to save.

I love the Eden Hunter for all the deaths and rebirths it grants its characters. For its relentless, elegant amalgamation of place, person and thought. And for the torturous beauty of the world it depicts.

I love it because it is part fable, part history, part Western, part Hasidic parable, part wish fulfillment, part cultural critique. I love it because Horack doesn't spare any sides when he distributes blame - and justice. (Of some kind. Of possibly the only kind currently available.)

The best fiction from this decade that I know of.

Read, read, read.

Wendy says

The writing seems very plain and matter-of-fact, probably much like Kau thinks. It paints a pretty raw picture of life, quite likely very much like life actually was in that time in that place for those people. There is quite understated emotion from Kau, although the ending gently highlights his underlying emotional strength. I felt very satisfied by the ending. While I was reading it, I couldn't imagine how the author would

end the book, but it's perfect. I think it brought out Kau's true character and the character of his people of origin. I am left with that picture, which I appreciate. I lost track of the actual plot at times and I am not sure whether this book is more character-driven or plot-driven. I think I was more aware of character than plot, but only slightly. The ending makes me favor character-driven.

Amy Bailey says

I was very pleasantly surprised by this book. I found it on the new arrivals shelf of the local library and thought it seemed very interesting. It certainly was! It is the story of Kau, an African pygmy who is stolen from his homeland and sent to America to be a slave. The story follows his escape and journey through Florida after the War of 1812, a period in history that isn't often explored through fiction. This book is a stunning and real portrait of the cruel and tragic world that is the American frontier. It has a varied cast of characters, none of whom can truly be seen as either good or evil. This book is the perfect portrayal of the animalistic tendencies of humans when faced with the need to survive. I definitely recommend it, but the reader should be very aware that much of this book is heartbreaking and graphic. However, the novel also shows that there is always a good side to humanity and that the human spirit can prevail and find hope even in the darkest of all places.

ariofish says

I enjoyed the beginning of the book, and waited and waited for the story to go somewhere beyond the violence of man. Mostly I enjoyed picturing the animals that once roamed America.

Beverly says

As a reader of historical fiction I enjoyed this story.

The story is narrated from the pov of Kau, an African Pygmy, who was enslaved for 5 years before he has a chance to escape. The book starts in Africa before Kau was captured so you understand who he is based on his life experiences and his culture.

I thought that the book did a good job of capturing the essence of Kau and the his way of life and that his journey was about him finding a place in America where he could re-capture of bit of his old way of living. The pays attention and describes in detail the land/location/place so you feel like you are there in the times after the War of 1812 in the south as Americans, British, Spanish and Native Americans try to mold thhis area to their way of thinking.

Emily says

It would be interesting to contrast The Eden Hunter to Cold Mountain, another favorite book telling the long, sad tale of a walk through the wilderness. Like that first book about a Confederate soldier deciding to leave the war and head home, The Eden Hunter seems to take place wholly outside (the chicken coop notwithstanding).

Kau, the Pygmy stolen from Africa into slavery, has escaped from his owner, but not from his guilty

memories--his story reveals that he has hurt all those that cares about. The beginning of his escape, with his owner's son, is not a good introduction to a main character. As the story continues, Kau, walking with his guilt, is alert to danger but numb to any happier feeling. It seems that his only friend is the closely observed natural world of forest, marsh, river, sky.

Despite the weight of sadness that Kau carries, the story moves quickly from misadventure to disaster. He has left the protection of slavery to a shifting world where anyone (everyone) larger than himself will hold him captive for a while. His watchfulness and silence, tools of the forest dweller, are useful in each subsequent escape.

The writing is beautiful and rich in lasting images. I loved the picture of him sitting in a field waiting for another honeybee to come along to lead him to the hive. I appreciated Kau's rebirth, laying naked in the sun on the funeral platform of a dead Choctaw. And for such a lovely, sad book, I will remember the last joyous image of a tiny man dancing.

Sandy says

I read this historical novel because the book group at my local bookstore was discussing it and because the booksellers just thought it was wonderful.

Hmmm...it didn't work for me. The history is fascinating (1812 southern US) and I found some of the environment descriptions very evocative, but the story certainly didn't pull me along. In last night's discussion at book group, half the group LOVED the book and the other half really didn't enjoy it.

Philip Harris says

I was moved by this book. The storytelling was direct and straightforward, allowing me to flow through parts that might have ventured on boring, or dry, with ease and speed. I do not mean to sound like I didn't enjoy *The Eden Hunter*. I did. Immensely, I must admit. Kau as a character was well rendered. I could see him in my mind, his clawed teeth and small stature. And I believed in his struggle, his ethics and pride.

I loved what Mr. Horack did with italics in the prologue, giving Kau's life in Africa a fable element, a touch of magic and myth. There was a quality of Kau's journey that reminded me both of *Alice in Wonderland* and of *The Lord of the Rings*. Alice mainly because Kau encounters pockets of people and situations much like Alice does once she's down the rabbit hole. The circumstances in which Kau finds himself are sometimes threaded together with other "adventures" but ultimately they are singular experiences in which Kau learns or, more simply put, receives something from the experience. I say *The Lord of the Rings* because Kau is on a journey through rural land trying to achieve something that may very well be impossible. His encounters veer into fantasy, Tolkien-esque territory mainly when he meets Elvy, the woman of the valley, and also when he finally reaches Garcon's fort, where he is welcomed and treated well, just as the hobbits and company were in Rivendell. They are fighting a common enemy whom it is seemingly almost impossible to beat. The hobbits had more luck, sadly.

The touch of magical-realism throughout the book is appropriately curtailed by the violence, of which there is plenty. Regarding this, I wonder if Mr. Horack was ever stumped when it came to describing so many deaths. The first part of the book is littered with so many dying animals and people it's a wonder Kau doesn't trip on them on his journey toward a better life.

All in all, I definitely recommend The Eden Hunter. It's a fast read, and I think it's important for American readers to be reminded of our bloody history (and present.) I feel it's important to be reminded that one can easily lose their way in their own country, that America is filled with wild animals and uncharted territory where adventure, violence, and a little magic await. Also I love the theme of carrying your home with you, of reminding yourself of your history and past as a way to stay centered and focused on your destination.

While I believe that no resolution could truly be bestowed upon Kau, I thought the ending did right by our pygmy. I'm glad he got Samuel's hat; I'm glad he found Beah, a character I rooted for in terms of getting her man, and the image of Kau walking naked down a path, lovingly holding the hand of a now-deaf girl--a girl who tortured him--was heartwarming and hopeful. Definitely check this book out.
