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The Mushroom Hunters: On the Trail of an Underground America

Langdon Cook

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In the tradition of Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma,* Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief,* and Mark Kurlansky's *Cod*—a renowned culinary adventurer goes into the woods with the iconoclasts and outlaws who seek the world's most coveted ingredient . . . and one of nature's last truly wild foods: the uncultivated, uncontrollable mushroom.

Within the dark corners of America's forests grow culinary treasures. Chefs pay top dollar to showcase these elusive and beguiling ingredients on their menus. Whether dressing up a filet mignon with smoky morels or shaving luxurious white truffles over pasta, the most elegant restaurants across the country now feature an abundance of wild mushrooms.

The mushroom hunters, by contrast, are a rough lot. They live in the wilderness and move with the seasons. Motivated by Gold Rush desires, they haul improbable quantities of fungi from the woods for cash. Langdon Cook embeds himself in this shadowy subculture, reporting from both rural fringes and big-city eateries with the flair of a novelist, uncovering along the way what might be the last gasp of frontier-style capitalism.

Meet Doug, an ex-logger and crabber—now an itinerant mushroom picker trying to pay his bills and stay out of trouble; and Jeremy, a former cook turned wild food entrepreneur, crisscrossing the continent to build a business amid cutthroat competition; their friend Matt, an up-and-coming chef whose kitchen alchemy is turning heads; and the woman who inspires them all.

Rich with the science and lore of edible fungi—from seductive chanterelles to exotic porcini—*The Mushroom Hunters* is equal parts gonzo travelogue and culinary history lesson, a rollicking, character-driven tour through a world that is by turns secretive, dangerous, and tragically American.

Praise for *The Mushroom Hunters*

"A rollicking narrative . . . Cook [delivers] vivid and cinematic scenes on every page."***—The Wall Street Journal***

"*The Mushroom Hunters* lends fresh, sharp illumination to a little-known but vigorously contested patch of gastronomic turf. . . . [It's an] entertaining ramble through the woods with a group of ragtag characters."***—The Washington Post***

"Like Susan Orlean in *The Orchid Thief,* Seattle author [Langdon] Cook shines a light on a shady subculture operating at the seam between wilderness and commerce. Like author Michael Pollan, he knows that every bite of food these days has a complex, often unsavory backstory. Like the late Hunter Thompson, he not only goes along for the ride with the shifty characters he's writing about, but drives the getaway car. After reading *The Mushroom Hunters,* you'll never look at a portobello the same way. . . . [A] beguiling, surprising book."***—The Seattle Times***

"Not simply about mushrooms, this book examines human behavior, economics, food, society, and nature. In

the end, readers will have learned a great deal about U.S. economic and social structures—all while being entertained and enlightened by stories of gastronomy and mushrooms. Highly recommended."***—Library Journal***

"Intrepid and inspired."***—Publishers Weekly***

"Uncultivated mushrooms are one of our last truly wild foods; it often takes truly wild and rough mushroom hunters to bring them to our table. Cook travels and hunts with them in a riveting, crazy undertaking, told in often-poetic prose."***—Shelf Awareness***

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