



Path to Revenge

Jim Dutton

Lettra Press (Dec 24, 2019)

Softcover \$9.99 (312pp)

978-1-951559-01-4

In this complex story about revenge and finding one's calling, the characters are the stars.

In Jim Dutton's character-driven crime thriller *Path to Revenge*, a case around a Mexican drug cartel seems like it's business as usual, until the cartel's leader is killed in cold blood.

After the alleged murder of Luis Hernandez-Lopez by Deputy Attorney General Nick Drummond, and with two other cartel heads in prison, Javier steps up and takes control of cartel operations. Luis's death affects Javier: they grew up like brothers, and most of Javier's dreams were patterned after Luis's own achievements.

Javier is sure that Nick is trying to cover up Luis's death, even when the latter claims that he shot Luis in self-defense. Javier goes after Nick, afterward aiming to eliminate everyone else who might incriminate him and the rest of the cartel. But while he's pursuing revenge, one of his operatives dies; a fellow operative seeks revenge against Javier, too.

In this complex story about revenge and finding one's calling, the focus alternates between Nick and Javier's lives. The opening chapter engages interest by revealing a controversy so huge and messy that it's hard to choose the more convincing side. As multiple characters are introduced at once, and as the story jumps from one setting to another, its focus shifts. As a result, the narrative flow is uneasy; the revenge plot becomes a blur.

Nick, who's presented as a good lawyer and agent, does not believe that the cartel case is black and white; much of his time is devoted to working his way through the gray areas. In action, though, his judgement is poor, especially when his loved ones are at risk. Nick's feelings for a fellow agent also get in the way; he ends up manipulating the investigation so she will not get involved or hurt.

Other characters also fluctuate in the course of the novel. Pepe, Nick's closest friend, is active early on, but is pushed offstage as additional characters are introduced. Javier, who is positioned as determined and extreme, is also so stubborn that he makes childish decisions and takes rash actions. Elin, Javier's love interest, holds attention; she can get through to Javier like nobody else. Still, her influence over Javier both gives her power and leads to her loss of it. Characters who display strength in the beginning are undone because of the other characters' choices; focal figures are forced into the background.

That the characters behave in inconsistent ways ends up undermining the story as a whole. In addition, disruptive typographical and grammatical errors, including repeated words, mismatched pronouns, and missing quotation marks, become more frequent as the narrative progresses.

Path to Revenge is an attention-grabbing thriller in which the characters are the stars.

RISAH SALAZAR (February 20, 2020)

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