

The Pinebox Vendetta

Jeff Bond

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The Pinebox Vendetta is a genre-bending thriller about the world's worst kind of people.

Jeff Bond's *The Pinebox Vendetta* is a political thriller about a reignited family feud, a cold case murder, and the American elite.

The two families at the center of the story are the Gallaghers and Pruitts. Their political and personal rivalry dates back to the American Revolution, and its machinations impact the entire US: both families have produced politicians and presidents.

At the twenty-year reunion of Yale's class of 1996, Owen Gallagher is set to be the Democratic nominee for president. Also at the reunion is Rock Pruitt, a Ted Kennedy-like figure who nurses bitterness because of his implication in a old crime. Meanwhile, Samantha Lessing is working on an expose of the Gallagher-Pruitt rivalry; her appearance at the reunion helps to set off an explosion that threatens to destroy the two families.

The first half of this slow-burning thriller focuses on the personalities involved in the families' pinebox vendetta, including Jamie Gallagher, who has dangerous dealings with Somali pirates; Charlotte Gallagher, the inventor of SmartWidget; Owen; Rock; and, most important of all, Samantha. Samantha is not connected to the families, but is in a failed marriage and down on her luck. She's the novel's moral compass, though her desperation leads her to cut corners.

None of the characters can be classified as "good" people—most are manipulative and cynical, and the Gallaghers and Pruitts assume (not incorrectly) that political power belongs to them, for example. Their intrigues, betrayals, and conspiracies revolve around their families' lust for power. Their amoral activities are everywhere apparent; they are the story's focal point.

Terrific as a study in endemic corruption, the story stays engaging precisely because its monsters are so monstrous. As Samantha uncovers the true depths of the vendetta's depravity, every chapter contains at least one crime. Still, there's no unifying crime to tie the pieces of the story together. A collection of terrible actions and reactions accrues, all committed by the dueling families; as these actions gather, they prove endlessly fascinating. Though the story does not have a clear-cut ending, what Samantha ends up finding out is just how repulsive both families are.

The first entry of a series featuring the fascinating Gallaghers and Pruitts, *The Pinebox Vendetta* is a genre-bending thriller about the world's worst kind of people.

BENJAMIN WELTON (March 27, 2020)

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