

The Vicissitudes of Fortune

Bob Siqveland

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This cinematographic novel examines dreams for a better America against a callous political system.

Bob Siqveland's *The Vicissitudes of Fortune* is an epic tale of five racially and socially diverse young men thrust into the sweltering jungles of Vietnam to fight a new kind of war for a reason they do not understand. With their lives in each other's hands, they band together to become the war's most decorated squad, bound by one of the strongest and most enduring of human bonds: the brotherhood of soldiers who have borne the hell of war together.

Weaving fictional narrative with historical information, Siqveland traces the lives of these five soldiers—a Native American, a Jew, an African American, one of Japanese descent, and a middle-class white kid—placing them in the midst of the tumult of twentieth century America with its racism, greed, social inequity, and class distinctions.

The overarching story is that of squad leader Billy Stone, whose beloved younger sister is endangered by her husband's involvement in a massive Medicare scam. When the scam is revealed with tragic results, the bond between these courageous and honorable men is all that holds them and their families together.

Siqveland provides startling facts and behind-the-scenes information on some of the pivotal events and personages of the past century, vibrantly bringing to life everything from World War II and the Japanese internment camps, to the wars and broken treaties that marked US relations with Native American tribes, to Haight-Ashbury and the "Summer of Love." Justice, or the lack thereof, is another strong theme, and Siqveland's five protagonists all come to work in the legal system, the FBI, the CIA, tribal leadership, or law enforcement.

Siqveland writes with fire and passion, but his characters are also convincing in scenes of quiet reflection, love, and tenderness. Some descriptions are necessarily graphic and disturbing. At their beginnings, historical sections tend to be long, slowing the narrative flow.

As events draw to a climax, the pacing picks up; almost every chapter ends with a cliff-hanger, impelling forward movement. Descriptions are vivid and colorful, and emotions ranging from rage to the sweetness of love are handled with subtlety and skill.

Dialogue is authentic in feel and tone, and settings are colorfully drawn. Characters are fully developed, both believable and sympathetic. Along with their strength, courage, and high ethical standards, their flaws are also revealed, making it easy to relate to their struggles and care about them. A final scene proves disappointing, as two characters escape the consequences of their crime.

Cinematographic in scope, Bob Siqveland's *The Vicissitudes of Fortune* pits hopes and dreams for a better America and a safer, saner world against the egomaniacal quest for power and money that infects the political system at all levels. Conspiracies, cover-ups, and secrets abound, while against this dark backdrop, the character, dignity, and love of five young soldiers shine like a beacon that spans decades, giving hope for future generations.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May 1, 2017)

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