Cold Wind (A Joe Pickett Novel) by C. J. Box

Pretty Good, But Not Box's Best

The extraordinary new Joe Pickett novel from the Edgar Award-winning author.

Nowhere to Run was wonderful (The Denver Post), terrific (Chicago Tribune), and outstanding (Publishers Weekly). The new novel from C. J. Box is all that, and more.

When Earl Alden is found dead, dangling from a wind turbine, its his wife, Missy, who is arrested. Unfortunately for Joe Pickett, Missy is his mother-in-law, a woman he dislikes heartily, and now he doesn’t know what to do—especially when the early signs point to her being guilty as sin.

But then things happen to make Joe wonder: Is Earls death what it appears to be? Is Missy being set up? He has the county DA and sheriff on one side, his wife on the other, his estranged friend Nate on a lethal mission of his own, and some powerful interests breathing down his neck. Whichever way this goes . . . it’s not going to be good.

My Personal Review:
I have been a C.J. Box fan for years. In particular, I have always enjoyed the Joe Pickett novels, particularly the way Box interweaves Wyoming political issues into his storytelling.

The political issue tackled in Cold Wind is wind energy. Wind farm development is a controversial subject in the Cowboy State, carrying with it disputes over landowners rights, the desirability (or lack thereof) of seeing
clusters of 40 or 50, 250-foot-tall turbines towering over the wide open spaces, and who is being enriched at whose expense. Its pretty clear where Boxs sentiments lie, and as a Wyomingite I would have to say its fair to say many Wyomingites agree with him.

The setup is thus: game warden Joe Pickett is out one morning on a routine patrol near the ranch owned by his hated mother-in-law, Missy Alden, and her latest husband, when he sees something dangling from a wind turbine on the Aldens land. As he investigates, he discovers to his horror that it is the body of Earl Alden, his father-in-law. Making matters worse, Missy is promptly arrested for Earls murder, and Joe finds himself in the uncomfortable position of trying to prove her innocence. In the course of Joes investigation, he discovers a number of people who would like to see Earl Alden dead - who could the real murderer be?

The main plot was for the most part enjoyable to read. Joe, as usual, finds himself bucking the system while at the same time trying to remain true to his values. Box does his usual fine job of maintaining suspense. There were some things I found annoying, however, mostly with Boxs handling of Wyoming criminal procedure. For example, Box has a lay Justice of the Peace (and feed store owner) preside over Missys initial appearance and her preliminary hearing. Wyoming, however, did away completely with JP courts about 10 years ago; Missys initial and prelim would more appropriately have been in front of a Circuit Court judge who is a licensed attorney. Verisimilitude would have taken away Boxs ability to weave the local feed store aspect into the story, but would have rung more true. Also, the case would have been styled State of Wyoming v. Alden, not Twelve Sleep County v. Alden.. These technical annoyances detracted from the overall quality of the book for me.

There is a subplot involving an assassination attempt on Joes shadowy friend, Nate Romanowski. I found this subplot rather clunky; it did not seem to fit well at all with the main plot. It did add excitement to the story, and the epilogue does set the scene for a future installment; it just seemed more appropriate for a stand-alone novel.

Overall, I had the sense that Box was trying too hard to put out a story that addressed wind power while it is still a hot topic and simultaneously come up with something fast-moving involving Nate. Although a fun read, Cold Wind ultimately falls short. All in all, a pleasant weekend diversion, but not up to the caliber of Boxs usual work.

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