



**Title:** Open Season

**Author:** C.J. Box

**Description:**

Joe Pickett is a Wyoming game warden who, with the shot of a rifle, is thrust into a race to save not only an endangered species, but to unravel a mystery that threatens the life and the family he loves.

**Reviews**

***Publishers Weekly* (starred review)**

Enthusiastic blurbs even from luminaries such as Tony Hillerman, Les Standiford and Loren Estleman can sometimes leave readers feeling as if they must have read a different book altogether. Not this time. Box's superb debut, the first in a series introducing Wyoming game warden Joe Pickett, should immediately make him a contender for best first novel or even best novel awards. Young Joe is struggling to fill the shoes of his mentor, legendary Vern Dunnegan, as warden of Twelve Sleep County, and trying to support his wife and growing family on the meager salary he makes. The hours are long, the work hard but satisfying, and Joe's honesty and integrity would pay off if he could avoid "bonehead moves" like ticketing the governor of the state for fishing without a license, for instance, or allowing a poacher to grab Joe's firearm from him. When that very same poacher turns up dead and bloodied in Joe's woodpile with only a cooler containing unidentified animal scat, his life, livelihood and family will never be the same. Upping the excitement are a couple of murders, local political and bureaucratic intrigue, a high-stakes pipeline scheme and an endangered species that Joe's eldest daughter "discovers." No one has done a better job of portraying the odd combination of hardy and foolhardy folk that make their homes in Wyoming's wilderness areas, or of describing the dichotomy between those who want to develop the area and those who want to preserve it. Without resorting to simplistic blacks and whites, Box fuses ecological themes, vibrant descriptions of Wyoming's wonders and peculiarities, and fully fleshed characters into a debut of riveting tensions. Meet Joe Pickett: he's going to be a mystery star.

**Otto Penzler:**

Mystery debuts are both exciting and problematic. Exciting, because one may always be about to discover the next Hammett or Chandler (or so the copywriters and publicists would have us believe), and problematic because originality in such a well-grooved genre is becoming more and more at a premium.

In advance reviews, *Open Season* has been pronounced "something special," (*Booklist*), and it lives up to the billing. It is not C.J. Box's skill at plotting (the story of greedy business interests and local corruption is fine, but familiar), but rather the

character of hero Joe Pickett, a Wyoming game warden, that makes this a series kickoff to remember. Like all the best mystery protagonists, Pickett is stubbornly ready to risk everything when his own personal sense of morality is at stake. But Joe is also a guy who sometimes gets things wrong, and this characteristic of messing up adds a dimension of humanity to the book.

C.J. Box makes the town of Twelve Sleep, Wyoming (where Joe and his pregnant wife and his daughters have come to live in a tiny house that could be a lot nicer if Joe only had a job that paid better), come alive to the extent that one can almost smell the crisp mountain air and pine needles. The locals display an impressive array of grudge holding and "don't mess with us" attitudes, but Joe is unwilling to forget he's sworn to uphold and enforce a full battery of laws that many of these neighbors have no intention of obeying.

When a well-known poacher, with whom he has humiliatingly tangled, suddenly turns up dead in his own backyard, Joe finds himself at the top of a downward path that, first, will lead to more bodies and then will put his entire family into peril. *Open Season* doesn't pull its punches, and Box does allow bad things to happen to good people. Read it and find out how skillfully he handles both his hero's complexities and also the ambiguities inherent in a life dedicated to law enforcement.

**Margaret Maron:**

C. J. Box has hit the bull's eye his first time up.

**Lee Child:**

A fabulous debut a great crime novel and a great modern-day Western rolled into one. All the elements are here a tremendous sense of Wyoming's scenic grandeur, vivid characters, and a high-stakes plot that moves like a rifle bullet. C.J. Box is a keeper.