



## The Pines

*Robert Dunbar*

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# **The Pines**

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Legends linger in the dark places of this world, legends as old as fear itself.

Deep within the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, a series of macabre murders draws ever nearer to the isolated farmhouse where a lonely woman struggles to raise her strange, disturbed son. Does some ancient evil prowl the woods? The boy seems to be in league with a presence that makes itself felt in every rustle of wind, in every gleam of moonlight. As a wave of terrifying violence threatens to engulf them, the young mother must join with a group of demon hunters -- outcasts all -- in a battle for her own survival ... and for the life and soul of her son.

## **The Pines Details**

Date : Published November 1st 2008 by Leisure Books (first published May 1st 1989)

ISBN : 9780843961652

Author : Robert Dunbar

Format : Paperback 333 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Gothic, Thriller, Fantasy, Supernatural

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## From Reader Review The Pines for online ebook

### mark monday says

Dunbar takes the slow route to get to his horror and i appreciate it! the writing is bleak, cold-eyed yet haunting, evocative - a kind of southern gothic set in the new jersey pine barrens. most characters are portrayed as human insects of three varieties - predatory, on a sad downward spiral, or both. when positive human emotions and interactions come to the forefront, it's almost as if a great battle has been won to allow those rays of humanity their brief moments... the smallest positive gestures become almost profound when set against a backdrop of such unrelenting darkness. the supernatural element is handled with a very careful touch. some great, scary set pieces, particularly the trailer attack and the climax. of course the real horrors in this novel are the living conditions portrayed and the basic (and nauseating) callowness of most of the characters. overall this is an excellent and well-written horror novel with none of the cheesiness of other Leisure titles and i'm surprised it's not better known. perhaps this is due to the slowly unwinding narrative; although i found it to be quite gripping, the reader interested in a visceral rollercoaster will no doubt grow impatient. for me, the slow unwinding is part of what sets this novel firmly in the literary horror tradition - the richness of the language and murkiness of what is exactly occurring makes the experience a pleasantly challenging one. Dunbar clearly knows how to write traditional, "modern" horror (as presented during the opening sequence and, most effectively, in the disturbing bits involving a a doomed camping trip)... and just as clearly he has set his sights higher.

*this review is a part of a longer article that includes an interview with the author, posted on Shelf Inflicted.*

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### Doug Beatty says

The Pines is a fantastic novel set in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey and involves a creature called the Leeds Devil. Mr. Dunbar does a great job setting the stage and the description of the pine barrens are very well done and very creepy. The inhabitants of the barrens are in their own world and it seems inbreeding has not done them any favors, and many of them are challenged in their own unique ways. But they know the stories of the Leeds Devil, and he is very very real.

We follow the travels of an ambulance company where we meet Doris and Athena, two of the main characters, and later meet Matty, Athena's challenged son. It seems that Athena fell for the charm of a man from the barrens and she moved with him into their family home. When her husband dies, Athena is left alone to cope with Matty, and only her friend Pamela is there to assist her in the task. But Matty seems to have some connection to the Devil. He knows he is out there and when he is drawing nearer...

I really enjoyed the novel. The story continues in the Shore, and I can't wait to see what Dunbar has for us next. He is a remarkable writer and really is able to get you under his spell. The tension builds and you look around you to make sure you are not in the house alone. Definitely creepy, it keeps you on the edge of your seat. I thought the characters were well written, very flawed but three dimensional, and characters that you can spend time with, hoping they will succeed. Of course some of the characters are just horrible, and you are not sad to see them go when that inevitably happens!

Definitely one to try!

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### **Quirkyreader says**

This story started off slow, but then I got hooked. I just wanted to get to the end. I am glad that my library had it as ebook form. The Leisure print edition had very minuscule print and I would have hurt my eyes and given myself a migraine. Reading shouldn't do that to a person.

This book mixed up cryptozoology, local myths, and psychic phenomena into one compelling read. Also throw in some gestalt theory and a loving mother who won't give up.

I give this one a five star rating.

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### **Rashmi Kris says**

Wow. WHAT a ride.

I lived briefly in New Jersey, and I could see the woods from my bedroom window. In the daytime I would see deer and rabbit. In the night, I always wondered what secrets the darkness (blackness, more like) held, and of course I thought of the Jersey devil on several occasions. Unfortunately (?), the creepiest thing I ever saw from that window was my neighbor trespassing rather gleefully.

This is by far the BEST horror novel I've ever read that's based on folklore. A masterpiece, with a fresh take on the Jersey devil. I was so involved in the book that I didn't even realize I was audibly gasping at certain parts, biting my nails (you should see my hands now), forgetting to turn the stove off, missing work deadlines (sigh),...

To my GR friends who are horror fans (and especially Steve B and Adonis - you've heard me gush about it enough already), - get the book. Now. You won't regret it.

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### **Cheral says**

This is more horror than expected, all scary and bloody. Not exactly what I thought it would be after "Monsters and Martyrs" and "Willy." Took me awhile to get in the mood, then I got really into it. That it turns out that I am reading the series backwards does not help but still fun to see the people from The Streets at a younger time. Matty is really a kid here. This old house in the woods will give you nightmares. Never realized that Jersey was so creepy!!!!!! But maybe I did.

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### **Robert Dunbar says**

Yikes! How many editions of this first novel of mine have there been? Thirteen? Seriously?

I repeat: yikes!

What a long, strange trip it's been. Links to reviews, interviews and excerpts can be found at <http://www.uninvitedbooks.com/page49....> but these are a few of my favorites.

“Dark, foreboding, menacing, eerie ... seductive.”

~ The Philadelphia Inquirer

“Not only a superb thriller but a masterpiece of fiction.”

~ Delaware Valley Magazine

“At last, the Jersey Devil has come out of hiding.”

~ Atlantic City Magazine

“Bloodcurdling and hauntingly believable.”

~ Wilmington News Journal

“Saturated with sinister presence.”

~ Burlington Tribune

“Full of chilling surprises. A book that really deserves all the attention it's been getting.”

~ Cemetery Dance

“Intelligent, frightening and plausible ... one of the most finely crafted horror novels of the past three decades ... among the classics of modern horror.” ~ Weird New Jersey

Please check out my blog about my adventures with this book:

[https://www.goodreads.com/author\\_blog...](https://www.goodreads.com/author_blog...)

My heartfelt thanks to everyone who's helped put this book on the map!

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## Nancy says

### Posted at Shelf Inflicted

I hate New Jersey. It all started when I was 11 years old and I made friends with the new girl, Tammy. She was blonde, beautiful, and one of the toughest girls I ever knew. I learned she came from New Jersey. In my mind, the Bronx had to be one of the worst places in the world. For a brief time, David Berkowitz lived with his mother six floors below me. My father got held up twice while selling insurance to people who had nothing to insure. My mother was too scared to take the bus to the construction company in the South Bronx where she worked as a bookkeeper, so my dad had to drive her. In school, I had to go to the bathroom in a group of three while carrying a wooden paddle with a number on it. My fifth grade science teacher carried a big knife for self-protection before guns were fashionable.

So, if I lived in one of the worst places in the world and Tammy moved there, she must have come from a really, really bad place. People moved away from the Bronx all the time. No one ever moved there, until

Tammy. When I finally got the courage to ask what terror had her fleeing New Jersey, she told me about the charred remains of a five-year-old girl that were found in the incinerator of the apartment building she lived in. OK, so I'm a brunette, but that incident quickly eradicated any fears I had about riding in the elevator with the Son of Sam and forever tarnished my image of New Jersey.

Reading *The Pines* certainly didn't make me feel better about the state of New Jersey. A single woman raising her young and mentally disturbed son; a creature inhabiting the woods and committing a series of savage killings; the eerie silence and creepiness of the pine barrens that made my skin crawl with dread; and the flawed, mysterious and unsavory characters that brought to mind Southern Comfort and that banjo-playing kid from *Deliverance*.

This is a very creepy and unsettling story that was slow-moving at times, but captivated me and had me looking up everything I could find on the Pine Barrens and its inhabitants, the legend of the New Jersey Devil, and the "feeble-minded" Kallikak family.

Highly recommended for fans of literary horror.

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## **K.Z. Snow says**

**4.6**, rounded up.

One of the "grabbiest" first chapters I've read in a long time -- beautifully crafted atmosphere, perfect pacing. I love being creeped out; so far, Dunbar's doing an excellent job of it.

DONE.

Any writer who can enrich a setting to the point where it becomes a compelling character in and of itself is aces in my book. Why? Because the kind of horror fiction I prefer is largely dependent on environment. So I was thrilled to see the melding of Shirley Jackson, H. P. Lovecraft, and James Dickey (specifically, *Deliverance*) in this novel. Now don't get me wrong: I don't mean to imply *The Pines* is derivative. It's anything but.

Dunbar could easily have gone the gore route with this tale. He didn't. Of course, there's some degree of mayhem -- hard to create a terrifying monster without that element -- but it isn't the kind of cheap, easy, repetitive bloodletting that turned me away from Stephen King (and makes me recoil from all hack-'n'-slash movies). No, this is *creepy* stuff, meticulously fine-tuned.

Sad to say, a few aspects of the novel kept me from reacting with unadulterated enthusiasm. POV was anything but consistent. Jumping from limited third to close third to omniscient and back again, it veered abruptly from one character to another throughout the entire plotline. Some threads were left dangling, too, and the resolution came with bothersome questions.

Still, it's a testament to the author's skill that I was never thrown out of the story. In fact, I gobbled it up in one day.

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## **Amanda Lyons says**

Have you ever wondered what was out in the woods late at night? Do you live near the pines and know the mournful sound of the wind slipping through those trees as well as the sound of your own breath? Have you ever been to the Pine Barrens or read about the Jersey Devil and all of its other haunts? Well then, you're going to enjoy this book!

In *The Pines* we're taken to the legendary New Jersey Pine Barrens and shown all of their iconic creepiness along with the harsh realities of a rural community dominated by crime, incest, murder and isolation. This is no ordinary rural community, here things grow stranger; mutations dominate the trees and land as much as they do the humans and livestock. Nothing is quite as it should be and the longer you stay the eerier it grows.

Athena lives there with her son Matthew. A member of a ragtag ambulance crew struggling to help a community of distrustful 'pineys', she keeps her personal life and her tragic past to herself. Living in the dilapidated family home of her deceased husband and enduring the resentment of the locals, her life is one dominated by fear and anxiety. As each day takes her closer and closer to the end of her rope she can feel something coming, something that will change life for her and Matthew as it has for the residents of the barrens over and over again since man came to dwell there. One by one people are disappearing again, the heat and intensity of that place building and building as the Devil returns to the pines.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading *The Pines*! The intensity, action and atmosphere of this novel are wonderfully well developed and the characters are very complex. I was reminded of many classic films and great horror novels which really knew how to draw out the story and develop the tone needed to pull off a good story. The work that Dunbar puts in here goes to great use. Having done a great deal of research on the Pine Barrens he's able to set the scene and mentality of its residents very well while slipping in bits of piney lore and real life accounts from its past. We come away from the novel feeling as if we really visited it and experienced life there. I also liked his take on the Jersey Devil and its origins (I won't go into this here as I don't want to ruin one of the really great parts of the novel) there are so many variations on the beast and what it has done over the years that it's hard to tie it down and give it any kind of a linear past. Dunbar pulls it off and manages to give you something to consider. I recommend this novel to any horror fan that's been looking for something really satisfying and consistent and of course anyone interested in the Jersey Devil or the Barrens.

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## **CasualDebris says**

(Really 3.5--silly silly ratings system. Please read my full-length review at [Casual Debris](#)

What is most effective in the novel as a whole is the idea of monsters and monstrosity. We are faced with a legion of candidates pining for the definition of "monster," from a folktale creature to rabid dogs, from "backwards" pineys who drink bathtub gin and neglect their malformed in-bred children to more "civilized" contenders who resent their own offspring. We have a once big city cop who drowns his guilt by blatantly drinking on duty, his partner who is openly unfaithful to his wife, a recently freed convict who threatens his sister-in-law and son for possession of their home, and a lead character who seems to resent her only child. With a cast comprising of characters such as these, and more, we wonder who is the true devil in New Jersey.

(Most devilish, however, are the unfortunate typos in the Leisure edition.)

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## Jason says

4 Stars

I really enjoyed this horror novel that was brought to life by the amazing setting of the pine forests in good ole New Jersey. This is as much an atmospheric novel as it is a character novel. The twisted pines, the stormy weather, and the swamps and mud all added to the creepiness of this killer thriller. The heroes are typical but I enjoyed them all.

Robert Dunbar's writing style makes the horror work and brings to life the words printed on the page(or e-screen). The images are detailed and vivid. The writing sets a fast pace.

"Here, rancid air hangs heavily in a void, its texture thick, liquid, clinging, in a night full of the hot smells of decay.

This humid oppression strangely amplifies the dripping, clicking noises: the moldy rasp of dead leaves stirred by tiny animals, the constant murmur of a brook threading the loamy ground, the oozing splash of something that moves heavily through water.

There is no moon, and clouds screen the light from the stars.

Gradually now, sunk in the still and viscous murk, the trees become vague shapes. Silent. Waiting. The ragged leaves of swamp elms hang motionless as insects in a web."

Athena, Pamela, Matthew, and Dooley are all standout heroes of our story. Pamela our main protagonist has some deep issues.

"Her son. For perhaps the thousandth time, she wondered about herself, about why she felt no tenderness when she gazed on this child. She would not pretend to herself. Her mind slid to her late husband: she'd let Wallace down in so many ways. The house. The boy. And the awful thing is I don't really feel sorry, can't even feel guilt anymore. Can't feel anything. Like hot water scalding dead flesh, her thoughts brought only an echo of pain. I'm paralyzed."

The imagery made things work as the story played out and we learn more about the Jersey Devil.

"Another cricket called to the first now, softer, subdued, fading. I'm an intelligent adult. Then a third began. It's irrational to be afraid of the dark. Heading back toward the porch, she tripped over something invisible, almost falling. I will not run. The yellowish light of the doorway seemed faraway. Never make it. The dark

began a hollow roaring in her ears; like a swimmer swept out to sea, she foundered, the lighted doorway providing her only lifeline.

As she climbed the porch steps, she could feel the darkness sucking at her. Heartbeat a little faster. She slammed the door and leaned against it. Respiration a bit more rapid—that's all. All around her, the house lay still."

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This was a good fast paced read with enough jumps and bumps too make it a lot of fun. The ending is satisfying and the payoff is good. I highly recommend it.

## **Dark Recesses says**

THE PINES

Robert Dunbar

Delirium Books (2006)

\$50.00

(Note: This is the author's unabridged edition of the original Leisure edition from 1989)

The end of the 80s saw the implosion of horror as a power in the market place, with the exception of the heavy hitters, like King, Rice, and Koontz. At one point in 1989 there were no less than 45 new horror titles in less than a month from various publishers and imprints hitting the sagging shelves. There were copycats of copycats, and the market was glutted with the bad to worse that horror fiction had to offer.

One book that made it under the closing flap of the 'death of horror' pronouncement from the all-knowing gurus of NYC Publisher's Row was Robert Dunbar's THE PINES (1989 Leisure). It's slow, tense buildup of how four people come together on a dark and windblown night to confront the terror known as The Jersey Devil. Sounds like a simple enough setup, right? Well, yes and no, because Dunbar did it with such power that it defied its own simplicity. And even during this final desperate onslaught of horror regurgitation, THE PINES caused many to sit up and take notice. The book was dark, bleak, and maybe one of the twenty best books to come out of that explosive period in horror fiction.

But it wasn't without its flaws.

Pages of scenes had been cut, and characters subtracted, for the sake of word count.

Now Dunbar, with the fine folks at Delirium Books, has done what he's always wanted to do with THE PINES: He's given us the book as it was originally intended in all its profundity. The missing pages have been added back in; storylines have been properly ripened for the book's final chapters.

Simply put, THE PINES is the demented lovechild of Faulkner and King.

With its tableau of honest characters, full of depth, flaws, and the need for redemption, an unswerving buildup of terror that defies logic, and Dunbar's deft descriptive powers that makes the New Jersey Pine Barrens come to life, this is the way great horror should be written. There is an underlying Southern Gothic sensibility to Dunbar's horror, one that speaks volumes about the nature of violence, and the casual way in which it ensnares good people and warps them. There are no missteps in THE PINES. The editing is managed with such masterly skill that the author is able to pull together divergent storylines into a heady brew, and by book's end one feels the sweat and terror dripping from the page. I was in awe at how much storytelling he was able to do in short bursts, and how he was able to make you feel the grit and despair of the people who call The Pine Barrens home, The Pineys.

For those who do not know, there's a reason why THE PINES comes off with such power. Robert Dunbar is

one of the world's leading authorities on the legend of The Jersey Devil. He's appeared in dozens of cable documentaries and done interviews for several magazines on the subject. His background in the field of amateur cryptozoology and Jersey mythos makes him uniquely suited to give the story a backbone of believability, and he holds nothing back in this unabridged version. So for those of you who have read the original version, take that and times ten with this Delirium Books edition.

Word is Dunbar has a sequel coming down the pike: THE SHORES, also from Delirium Books. And I hear it is even more horrifying than THE PINES.

And let me give a quick kudos to the cover artist, Mike Bohatch, for he has truly captured the black and uneasy sense of THE PINES story with his artwork. I would buy a framed print of that cover, folks. Very nice, indeed, Mike. Good job.

--Nickolas Cook.

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### **Arun Divakar says**

Horror fiction does not really need monsters. They take life in the most devious and dangerous place known to us : the human mind. The levels it stoops to and the terror it unleashes can make even the boldest denizen of netherworld pause for a second. On a humorous note, there was this cartoon that the New Yorker published following Donald Trump's proposed Muslim ban where the Devil sat on Trump's shoulder and said '*Whoa, Donald - you're scaring me, man.*'

As long as carbon based bipeds walk this planet, a shadow of such horrors will always walk with them. Robert Dunbar's novel explores such depths of horrors in our mind in the isolated pine barrens societies of New Jersey.

They are called 'pineys', an isolated society of men, women and children who live deep within the pine barrens. Poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, murder, incest and death are rampant among them. They scour the forest for a livelihood during daylight and drink themselves to a stupor at night which sometimes inevitably leads to violence both sexual and otherwise. They are wary of outsiders and anything that has a touch of modernity which includes - medicine, science and even electricity. The gene pool being limited also means that inbreeding results in bringing forth children who are deformed physically and mentally. Within this already dismal ditchwater of human affairs also runs another tributary, one that carries very murky contents. It is a legend which has been haunting eastern US for centuries now : the Jersey Devil. Robert Dunbar does an excellent job at meshing together lore and fiction in this novel. His protagonists are not monster hunters but unfortunate individuals who try to grope their way out of this miserable existence of theirs.

The horror is not fully revealed at one go but keeps coming and going throughout the chapters. They are also extremely graphic and sometimes made me cringe a bit. The other fantastic part of the novel is the setting in the pine barrens, there is almost always an air of foreboding and danger that lurks among the pines. There were occasions where the author used your characters and then abandoned them a few chapters later and also a few threads which he did not fully tie up. This was one factor which left me a tad dissatisfied.

Recommended if you like a graphic horror novel.

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## **Kevin Lucia says**

Wow. Haunting, intriguing - characters with painful lives, trying to make things right and failing...but still trying anyway. Boasts some of the best descriptive paragraphs and passages I've read in awhile.

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## **Lauren says**

The main character here isn't Athena, Matty, or even the Jersey Devil: it's the Pine Barrens.

Should they have a Board of Tourism, I assume that board will not be writing Robert Dunbar any thank you letters, since anyone who reads *The Pines* will do their best to stay as far away from the New Jersey Pine Barrens as humanly possible. When stories warn you not to go into the woods, it's Dunbar's pines they're talking about: dark, unsettling, and full of "monsters" both human and (possibly, arguably) inhuman. Wild dogs roam. Children are born without eyes (or even eye-sockets). And the Jersey Devil, leathery and animalistic, stalks through the trees.

The characters who aren't also setting are inarguably the *product* of their setting, and firmly grounded in it. One of my favorites was Pamela, a lonely and not especially bright woman living in a trailer so inaccessible that no car can take her to it, who cares fiercely for her disturbed nephew while effectively erasing her own institutionalized son from her memory, who longs for intimacy with her oft-imprisoned husband, and who at one point commits an act of almost-offhanded rape (the consent is dubious at least) out of lonesomeness and a desire for connection. She's a warning to the smarter but sometimes less-functional Athena ("crippled," black, and not a "piney" by birth) of what can happen to people who grow too rooted in this environment that breeds monstrousness, if not outright monsters. Because Pamela is sympathetic—at least frequently so—her brief slip into darkness is tragic and frightening, like the rest of her life, with too few avenues for connection and escape available.

It's the kind of trapped, hopeless life that allows people to dismiss the continuously mutilated bodies as being from attacks by wild dogs, and nothing else.

The heroism in the novel, therefore, is hard-won—it has to struggle against the miasma of the Pine Barrens and the more mulish pineys to even exist. Athena's always being told that she "thinks she's better than" her neighbors, and for much of the novel, she arguably isn't—smarter, yes, but just as trapped in the boundaries of her life. Her difficult, crawling arc is one of learning to be, at least, stronger than her neighbors, and more willing to accept things beyond the boundaries of the world.

If you're interested in an unsettling, atmospheric horror novel with an almost claustrophobic sense of dread and tremendously flawed, damaged characters—and if you're sick of the usual threats and, like me, are relatively unfamiliar with the Jersey Devil—then I highly recommend picking up *The Pines*.

But after you finish, you may want to take a long walk around outside, somewhere with no trees and plenty of sky, just to make sure you haven't slipped into the book's world.

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