

A Midsummer Madness

Guy Franks

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A Midsummer Madness is a compelling and heartfelt baseball dramedy that doubles as a tribute to Shakespeare.

Guy Franks's *A Midsummer Madness* adapts Shakespearean themes to tell an engaging ensemble story about love, life, and baseball.

Shakespeare "Shake" Glover manages the New Britain Kingsmen, a minor league baseball team in Connecticut that's set to take the 1986 championship. An eclectic team and management fill the roster, and as the team racks up win after win, drama arises both on and off the field.

The story deftly juggles subplots inspired by several of Shakespeare's plays, from *Hamlet* to *King Lear*, that are perfectly adjusted to the setting. Shake struggles with an aging manager who is losing his mind, a star outfielder veering close to breaching his contract, an overly paranoid and melancholy second baseman, and other larger-than-life characters. While secrets threaten to knock them out of the league, all of the major players move toward a heartwarming end.

Shake's story is one of pursuing literary and athletic excellence. That drive led him to his coaching job, in which he tends to quote Shakespeare. Shake's story connects and binds together all of the other stories in a tidy package, and his intense passion and tendency to draw like-minded people to him makes the otherwise unrealistic cast of characters believable. His personality adjusts as he reconnects with a past love and builds a family.

Supporting characters are also fleshed out and dynamic. Most are inspired by their Shakespearean namesakes, but they adopt unique characterizations over the course of the novel, as with the Hamlet-inspired Dane Hamilton, who broods and sulks but also secretly listens to world news, and panics over Chernobyl instead of warming up for the game.

While the book's homage to Shakespeare is ever-present, it is most obvious in the dialogue. Characters speak with wit, puns, and concise eloquence that never feels forced or out of place. When a character is obviously oblivious to literature, Shake or another well-established Shakespeare fan steps up to keep the theme steady. Play-like formatting highlights key sections of dialogue.

With its engaging style, strong humor, and chapter-ending couplets, the text feels polished. Elegant composition strengthens it, making it a compelling homage with an appropriately Shakespearean ending. An endearing epilogue capably wraps up loose ends.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (September 13, 2018)

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