



Birth of the Lion

Joseph W. Gadbois

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Sharky's life is filled with governmental dirty work, ambushes, and intrigue. All the elements are there for a delicious story.

Bruno Sharkington III, or Sharky, is selected to be a hired gun for the US government. Receiving assignments from the mysterious CONTROLLER, Sharky is a man who believes in undertakers over prisons. He has the skills and tenacity to make sure bad guys—whether they're gang members or corrupt officials—are on their way to meet their ancestors. At first blush, *Birth of the Lion*, by Joseph W. Gadbois, seems reminiscent of one of Tom Clancy's or Robert Ludlum's novels: Sharky's life is filled with governmental dirty work, ambushes, and intrigue.

Yet, this work feels more like an outline of an adventure novel than a fully fleshed out offering. Rather than allowing readers to experience Sharky's world through sights, sounds, and the other senses, the book telegraphs plot points. For instance, the first four pages detail how Sharky goes from street kid to special investigator. There's almost no description of the setting, no tone, and very little emotion. This kind of brevity is fine for flashbacks, but it doesn't work as the start of a novel.

It's also difficult to identify what the main plot line is here. One suspects it may have been pulled together from a collection of short stories that centered on Sharky to form this novel (this would also explain the occasional shifts in narrator point of view, the reintroduction of characters between chapters, and the overlap and sometimes contradiction of information). The book does present interesting scenarios for Sharky, but the number of adventures that the hit man goes on and the lack of an obvious overarching goal make the story feel too episodic.

More importantly, the book's main character is far too perfect and his success too predetermined: there are no stakes that Sharky will ever fail. This is evident in a scene where Sharky ambushes some gang members: "With profanity, they decided to shoot it out with me. Bad mistake on their part. I was trained in the one shot, one kill. In their case, I fired four times, hitting them each twice. A definite waste of ammo, but I wanted to make sure they would go down for the count."

The magic of characters like Clancy's Jack Ryan or Ludlum's Jason Bourne is that while they are extremely capable people, they are often within a hair's breadth of being captured, losing their loved ones, or being killed. And quite often, they do fail dramatically and have to make amends. Sharky would be a stronger protagonist if more of these elements were included to add depth to his character.

In the end, *Birth of a Lion* is more like getting cake batter when you're expecting a cake. All of the pieces of a delicious story are present, but the novel is just too undercooked with its tell-not-show plot, overabundance of action, and too-perfect character to be fully enjoyable. Still, if these elements could be fleshed out, there's a glimmer of potential in this book.

KATERIE PRIOR (November 19, 2013)

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