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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

Clouds Over Mountains

Matt Joseph
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In retelling a wartime story of the attack on Pearl Harbour lawyer turned author Matt Joseph has accepted a major challenge for a debut novel. But it's one he meets—even surpasses with flying colours—creating a story of epic proportions but grounded in the specific lives of Japanese and American characters connected to the Japanese military the FBI and Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh. The novel centres on the solution to a murder at the U.S.S. *Arizona* Memorial in Hawaii and involves thwarted ambitions a new-found romance a suppressed wartime secret of mistaken identity a hidden family secret of parental identity and a last-gasp pilgrimage of reparation for the attack on Pearl. Overall it's a commendable effort that results in a striking story and a compelling read.

Joseph's book is full of artfully teased out surprises. It begins with an interrogation about the discovery of a body at the landing dock of the *Arizona* Memorial cuts to the finding of a package of eight booklets at the gravesite of Colonel Lindbergh then delves into the contents of the first booklet. In it the Japanese author writes of his early childhood his memories of the Colonel and his trip "to make amends and to pay respects."

Following this pattern of juxtaposition from one character or episode to another the story dramatically exposes the efforts of various FBI personnel to solve the *Arizona* murder while the narratives in the booklets reveal the author's history as a Japanese naval pilot and his participation in the attack on Pearl which as the Emperor's poem for 1942 *Clouds Over Mountains* ironically forecast would be "a new day beginning for Japan."

Simultaneously the stories of several FBI agents are revealed. Maggie Roberts the middle-aged acting Director of the agency is up for formal confirmation but writhes under a cloud of an alleged breach of ethics and the impending death of her mother. On a brief vacation to Hawaii she becomes romantically entangled with a stranger even as she is pressed into service for the *Arizona* investigation. And raging around her and her problems are the political back stabbings of the local and federal agents and their ambitions. Even when the mystery of the murder is solved and the reason for the Japanese author's pilgrimage exposed Maggie is left to wrestle with a shocking lifetime secret of her own and a healing process helped by her romantic stranger.

From major to minor characters—including a delightful cameo appearance by cab driver Jimmy Miyama—Joseph presents people to care about laugh and cry with detest and revile while remembering a tragedy of infamous proportions.

M. WAYNE CUNNINGHAM (August 8, 2007)

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