

In the Land of the Blind

Robert Schulman

CreateSpace

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In the Land of the Blind is an intelligent novel focused on an idealistic psychoanalyst and his patients.

In Robert Schulman's contemporary novel *In the Land of the Blind*, a struggling analyst gives glimpses behind the scenes of psychoanalysis.

Steve spent over a decade training to become a psychoanalyst, but his certificate is withheld because he will not conform to arcane rules. After his wife leaves him and his nurturing supervisor has a fatal stroke, Steve leaves Cincinnati for a small town in Arizona, hoping to start a new life and to focus on his patients rather than hidebound practices.

Steve is sympathetic in his earnest desire to help people sort their issues out. His personal interest in his patients sometimes results in the practical help that they need, as when he steers a paranoid electronic whiz into a profitable home security business, but his detachment from his own life tempts him to fill the gap by forming too close bonds with patients. Steve's awareness of his flaws leads to a layered, believable hero. The strong secondary cast includes patients, Steve's wise and kind mentor, and the mentor's daughter, all of whom emerge in sharp detail. The paucity of Steve's personal life is underscored by vague characterizations of his wife and scant mention of friends.

Firm and detailed, the prose has a clear grasp of psychiatry and views from the analyst's side. One of its chief delights is the jaundiced eye cast on the extreme orthodoxy practiced at Steve's training institute. A patient who refuses to lie on the couch is listed as having failed analysis because Steve cannot make him lay down. The requirement that analysts in training undergo analysis themselves results in a neighborhood filled with analysts—everyone wants to be in close proximity.

Moving at an easy pace, the book maintains interest through Steve's glimpses into his patients' psyches. He acknowledges voyeuristic satisfaction in peeking into other people's lives. His move to Arizona marks a rejection of rigid, process-focused analysis. He still strives for professional growth, but still overbonds with his patients.

The book stumbles in the midst of Steve's struggle, crowding three dramatic events into its final chapter. The first is heavy on messaging and drama, impeding the book's elsewhere careful sense of reality. Steve is involved in each event, though none are result of his immediate actions or decisions, reducing him to a bystander and victim and shifting the focus of the book. His quest to become a better analyst is pushed offstage, never to reappear. The final and most life-changing event is sprung on the last full page, introducing a host of new plot threads and preventing a satisfying conclusion.

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SUSAN WAGGONER (October 31, 2019)

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