



Joshua and the Shadow of Death

Gary McPherson

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Joshua and the Shadow of Death is a surprising thriller helmed by a complicated and challenging lead.

Gary McPherson's political and corporate thriller *Joshua and the Shadow of Death* includes a unique focus on mental health and rare genetic disorders.

Richard Brown, a successful military contractor, commits suicide in front of his adopted son, Harold. Brown's suicide note speaks of a shadowy conspiracy involving false friends. Drawing from this, Harold goes on an independent quest to solve the mystery surrounding his father's death. To do so, he has to reckon with his "berserker syndrome"—a rare disorder that sends him into blind rages without provocation. It is just one of the mental and physical conditions that he must overcome.

Brown's fake friends include corporate oligarchs and at least one deeply corrupt US senator. On Harold's side are Darla—a corporate spy, employee of Brown's, and one of his father's true friends—and Maria, the family's housekeeper and Harold's true love.

Harold's investigation often takes a back seat to discussions about the ins and outs of berserker syndrome and other mental ailments, including separation anxiety and PTSD. In detailing the day-to-day anguish of suffering from mental health problems, the novel exudes empathy and treats mental health sufferers as fully human, not "crazy."

Harold is the most interesting and well-drawn character. Darla is an enjoyable sidekick, and Maria is a stereotypical lovely and loyal Latina maid. Harry's enemies are melodramatic portraits of modern day evil: an amoral businessman and a greedy bureaucrat. Rarely do such characters transcend the limitations of their prescribed roles.

The novel's main story arc is entertaining mostly because Harold, the lone individual trying to take down a global conspiracy, is so likable. However, questions linger, specifically from the novel's first half: Harold's half-brother is initially portrayed as a major character, but disappears at the halfway point, while the whys of the conspiracy are never fully defined.

Unnecessary details, such as about funeral dresses and the science of brain chemistry, slow the pace. The dialogue is unadorned and realistic, and action scenes are well drawn. The story's conclusion sets up for a sequel and is satisfactory, with most loose ends connected and finalized, though Harry's return to normalcy feels odd given the extraordinary events he's weathered.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (October 19, 2018)

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