

The Blue Folio

Matt McMahon

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Near-future Washington intrigue, pitting corporate power against government, seems ripped from tomorrow's headlines.

In *The Blue Folio*, Matt McMahon crafts a near-future political struggle so compelling and realistic that it's easy to imagine it reflected on tomorrow's front page.

The year is 2059, and the president of the United States is on trial for high treason. After the adoption of the Second Constitution in 2037, America looked forward to a brighter future, free from corporate interference in government and power-focused public servants. Despite the efforts of Bill Waverly, council to the president, old ways are returning and whispers are beginning to undo progress made toward equality and transparency, even going so far as to threaten the president's life.

In desperation, Bill reluctantly calls on George Comstock, his former law professor and one of the architects of the Second Constitution. Together, they face a reemergence of the self-serving interests that the Second Constitution was meant to stifle. But this time, those corrupted by greed are backed by a shadowy organization that won't stop until their place of power is restored.

The Blue Folio delves into the intrigue and betrayal surrounding the president's treason trial and quickly paints a complex landscape of political maneuvering. Unfortunately, the shadowy threats, those who pull the strings behind the scenes, are late to make an appearance, which causes the first half of the book to feel suspended, waiting for something dramatic to happen. The author does a notable job of maintaining suspense, even through scenes thick with courtroom legal proceedings and political stratagems.

The best books set in the near future make developments in coming years seem like a natural extrapolation of current events. McMahon's novel skillfully paints a political future that feels both fantastic and achievable, with just the right balance between today's headlines and ideas of how the world will look tomorrow. The struggle between those fighting for an ideal and others with a mercenary pragmatism echoes the current gridlock in Congress and the ongoing struggle between the political poles.

McMahon's writing is clear and crisp, with cutting dialogue and rich narrative that offers just enough to hold interest. Bill's character feels familiar, with an expensive but ill-fitting suit, a belly a few sizes too large, and a persona carefully crafted to make him seem inconspicuous in political maneuvers. Other characters, like President Suarez, are deliberately complex and embody personal struggles between their private lives and the constructed public images they are expected to maintain.

Although the story is best suited to those with an interest in the processes of law and the lives of Washington insiders, its vivid political landscape, realistic characters, and engaging writing style will appeal to a wide range of readers.

SARAH STEWART (September 17, 2014)

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