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The Book of Changes

Jack Remick
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One rebellious college student's study of the Middle Ages parallels his tumultuous journey into adulthood.

The Book of Changes, by Jack Remick, is a compelling coming-of-age novel with a keen sense of character and place. It's the third in Remick's California Quartet—*The Deification* and *Valley Boy* are the first two installments, and the quartet will finish with the forthcoming *Trio of Lost Souls*. Each book in the series traces a different young man's coming-of-age story in different locations in the state. Because each book has a different character, readers don't need to have read the previous books.

In this installment, Beast arrives at Berkeley to study the Middle Ages. At the same time, he faces a tumultuous time of painful trial-and-error learning that mirrors his historical era of interest. The novel presents a vivid look at the political and social unrest and upheaval that captivated Berkeley in the 1970s. Remick takes a deeply personal look at this broad environment by situating the story from Beast's point of view. This authorial choice gives the novel an intensity and emotional weight as Beast faces high stakes with decisions about drugs, sex, academics, and life and death.

The book is divided into two sections, "Revolution" and "Rebellion," that echo the protagonist's journey from innocence, through dark terrain, and into maturity. The contrasting closing passages of each section vividly portray the change in Beast's life. He goes from self-pity, grief, and anger—"If I lived long enough, I'd see them all dead. Death was a plague. Where I went, death followed. I punched the sofa.'—to self-control and a sense of the value of personal responsibility—''My apartment is just around the corner and I've got fifty grams of Moroccan hash so why don't you come up with me?' I thought about it. Just around the corner. Fifty grams of hash. I thought about it, but then I pulled away."

Remick's mastery of the narrative craft infuses a common story line—college kid faces challenges and grows up—with an intimate sense of character and setting. Remick even reveals Beast's character in the way Beast describes other characters: "She was built like a stevedore and she wore blue and gray plaid shirts."

The Book of Changes shines in the crowded genre of coming-of-age narratives.

MELISSA WUSKE (November 30, 2013)

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