



The Shepherd's Calculus

C. S Farrelly

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The novel thoroughly explores complex topics, including dated religious practices and systemic political corruption.

Character-driven and fast-paced, *The Shepherd's Calculus* by C. S. Farrelly is an explosive mystery thriller.

The unexpected death of his mentor shocks Peter Merrick, a respected journalist. In the aftermath, he discovers years of secrets and lies propagated by those that he looked up to. The deceased, Father James, may have been thoroughly corrupt, too. Grappling with this possibility, Peter begins an in-depth investigation centered on political misdeeds and the involvement of his local parish with a ring of sexual abuse cases.

Meanwhile, President Arthur Wyncott finds himself falling behind in reelection polls thanks to a vibrant up-and-comer whose ties to the Latino community give him a leg up with Catholic and immigrant voters. With millions of votes at stake, Wyncott is desperate for a severe countermeasure that will help him regain the election.

An alliance between the president's campaign and the financially pressed Church seems to offer a solution to everyone's problems, though it's a fix that will compromise the integrity of both colluding bodies—and that itself may be undermined, if justly wary investigators and suspicious aides have their way. Years of cover-ups, lies, and secrecy are revealed in this comprehensive look at the ways in which power can corrupt.

Though the story's topics are timely, the novel avoids easy tropes, relying instead on strong writing to pull everything together. The text feels fresh and rich—both dynamic in scope and fast-paced, with sharp dialogue that moves scenes along nicely.

Memorable characters make realistic decisions through the story's many twists and turns, developing in time with plot progressions. Interior motivations are revealed in a helpfully timed way. For example, Peter grows from a constant, determined journalist to a world-weary investigator as the truth comes out, showing the harrowing, exhaustive nature of his unrepentant search for truth.

The novel's biggest credit, however, is the exploration of complex topics such as dated religious practices, systemic political corruption, and the ways in which any institution with too much power and too little oversight can be easily exploited. Much like in the real world, no easy answers are provided, but Farrelly's well-researched prose provides much food for thought.

The Shepherd's Calculus is an astute story that explores the ways in which notions of right and wrong can be distorted.

AMANDA ADAMS (October 4, 2017)

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