

## Vision of the Spirit Man

**George Mendoza**

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*In the fantastical novel Visions of the Spirit Man, a man hopes to redeem himself from the mistakes of his past.*

George Mendoza's fabulistic novel *Vision of the Spirit Man* covers a man's fever-pitched quest to understand his past and move into his future.

In the book's beginning, Michael communicates with his deceased cousin, Mark, before witnessing a harrowing shoot-out in a diner. These events push Michael to begin a spiritual quest in a land that is both familiar and strange, and where he is known as the Spirit Man. Michael is unsure of how he got to this spirit land; for years, he had tried to enter without success. His first objective, then, is to figure out why he is in the spirit world.

Michael's questions are answered when he befriends a dwarf, Emmitt, who confirms what Michael suspects: the spirit world, Shook, called Michael to it for a reason. Emmitt leads Michael to someone who explains that, as the Spirit Man, he needs to save Shook from an unknown foe. That would-be villain seeks to harness the power of the Annihilator to turn lush, verdant, and peaceful Shook into a wasteland, though their reasons for wanting to do this are not shared.

After Emmitt is killed, Michael travels across Shook alone, battling winged gods, nature, and the Savors. He taps into the powers of the Spirit Man. At each step, Michael learns more about himself. He comes to believe that life is truly worth living. Furthermore, he learns that, to live, he must accept his past and forgive himself for his mistakes. At another level, he works to heal from losing Mark.

Moved forward most by its action scenes and detailed descriptions of Shook, this allegorical novel has the tone of a dream sequence. Often, it raises more questions than it provides answers for. Each person whom Michael comes across in Shook shares lush descriptions of their surrounding environments, but they are otherwise nondescript; few are developed on their own terms.

Even though Michael is aware that he is the Spirit Man, and indeed seems to have known this about himself for a long time, he is a vague, unconvincing hero. He acts surprised with each bit of information that he receives; he seems to know little about the land that he is supposed to save, and he often wonders how Shook works. Such inconsistencies build as the story progresses, making its events unbelievable and difficult to invest in.

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SHEA AISHA WINSETT (August 16, 2022)

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