



Shelter

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BfK Rating:

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Harlan Coben makes his foray into the world of young adult fiction with the first of a projected series of books featuring Mickey Bolitar. Mickey has survived the car crash which killed his father and sent his mother into the twilight world of hard drugs which she used to ease her grief and which have trapped her in the world of institutionalised rehab. Now, Mickey is starting at a new high school where his good looks, prowess as a basketball player and insistence on righting student wrongs have already found him a girlfriend, Ashley who has now mysteriously disappeared.

The narrative is loaded from the start but Coben is a well-established writer in this genre, using his experience to pace events carefully and introduce themes and characters which recur, so that they knit more tightly together as the story unfolds. Mickey's unlikely friendship with two of the school's outsiders, Spoon and Ema, is a case in point. This relationship develops with credibility as the strengths of each character are teased out and used to support the storyline, which begins as a search for Ashley but ends with a series of discoveries which reveal a hitherto unsuspected underbelly to the components of Mickey's life.

There's plenty of action here some understated, sly, secretly plotted and some roistering and rumbustious and all deep within a world of gangsters, organised crime and criminal deception. Coben writes skilfully, though sometimes his use of imagery is overdone, with the result that the writing occasionally feels mechanical. The book's ending satisfyingly paves the way for the next book in the series ? one can't help but feel that Mickey Bolivar is a survivor, in every sense of the word.

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