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FRENCH CREEK PRESS REVIEWS FOR  
*THE LEGEND OF COSMO & THE ARCHANGEL*

Full-Service Publishing House Shepherds Authors through Printing Cycle

JERUSALEM – Reviews by Publishers Weekly, The Berkshire Eagle, and Jake Greenberg, Literary Critic

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**Manuscript review by Publishers Weekly, an independent organization**

A high school pact extends over decades in this epic novel of spiritual quest, self-discovery, and evolving friendships. As high school students in Pittsfield, Mass., Cosmo was their small group's "charm" while Nick was its "conscience." In an LSD-induced haze at Woodstock, the friends pledge a covenant of loyalty. But when Nick betrays another member of their group, both Nick and Cosmo embark on odysseys to find themselves. In Nick's case, it's an attempt to resurrect his standing as the "Archangel," the golden boy who would sacrifice himself for his friends. Cosmo's quest pursues booze, drugs, revenge, fame, and, eventually, a different sort of spiritual enlightenment. Throughout their wanderings, which stretch across continents, their youthful indiscretions and expectations haunt their abilities to move forward. Although the narrative's sympathies are primarily with Cosmo, Nick's story is the more compelling, as his religious strivings mirror his psychological struggles. The novel's storytelling, which alternates between the two protagonists, is strong.

**The Berkshire Eagle, by Jody Kordana**

To call something, or someone, a legend is a monumental commitment. The word alone indicates larger-than-life achievement and presence even when absent.

When the pronouncement of a legend is the result of idealistic, unspoiled youth yet to experience the confines of adult responsibility, one may cynically pause at the onset of a novel claiming to embody a tale extraordinary enough to warrant such a grandiose title. But Pittsfield native Joseph Kaufman smoothly pulls that pause back into motion in “The Legend of Cosmo & the Archangel.”

It begins with a group of Pittsfield teenagers in the late 1960s forming a tight bond. Consisting of four boys and one girl, they find among each other a sense of emotional balance. It is initially clear that Cosmo is the original ringleader, but transfer student Nick is quickly accepted into the circle.

The full spectrum of Nick’s potential legendary status is exposed one Independence Day (fittingly) at a local quarry. There he proves to himself, friends and enemies alike that he possesses the early building blocks of becoming an exceptional human being. Of course teenagers are prone to awed reactions, but as the reader we get the sense that something more than an innocent exclamation of wonder is going on.

At the very cusp of adulthood, they make a final friendship pact before branching out into life. As would be expected, early tests of reserve quickly overpower the sentiment. An accumulation of stumbles and misunderstandings culminates in a tragedy so devastating that a heavy disillusionment settles over the group.

Spiritually shattered, Nick sets off alone in search of meaning. Cosmo, already on the brink of a breakdown after escaping the iron grip of a Viet Nam tour of duty, withers further into emotional instability. Joey lets the desire for vengeance infiltrate his brilliant mind and guide his every move. And Dave loses himself in superficial accomplishments sprinkled with a compulsion to quote movie dialogue (relevant dialogue, yes, but not clearly necessary.) In turn we essentially lose him as the story progresses. That isn’t particularly distressing, as Dave is the least interesting member of the clique.

At this point, full focus is shifted to the two separated drifters Cosmo and Nick. There is a clear distinctiveness to each one’s story that holds its own. Despite their geographical differences in their wanderings and the uniqueness to their initial loss of way, Kaufman’s strong attention to original detail in the early portion of the story lends to the overall understanding that they are of one journey.

Nick is besieged by setbacks and betrayals. This is climaxed with his involvement in a violent act in the Middle East that, while initially appalling, serves as a reset point in his psyche. Thanks to Kaufman’s colorful narration, we ride along like silent passengers in the car in which Nick receives the chance for redemption as it winds, aimlessly like him, through the streets of Jerusalem. It is a slow, agonizing progression as Nick painstakingly scours the depths of his soul for spiritual seedlings and is introduced to an opportunity for amendment that is brilliantly unique. His unlikely salvation is both unexpected yet plausible in the sense that it is woven quite well into the scope of the story.

By this point, Cosmo’s life quest initially appears to be simply a search for Nick per Joey’s insistence. But as Cosmo also scales the peaks and tumbles into the valleys of a wayward life, we see more personal motivations emerging and suspect the deliberate selfsabotaging of his own search attempts. One gets the impression that he needs Nick to remain out there, safe yet undiscovered, as Cosmo’s one and only sense of both physical and spiritual purpose. It is here that we are drawn into the power of

legend, for what leads any person forward better than the promise of something, or someone, greater than oneself leading the way?

Kaufman's literary styling is remarkable. Good storytelling invokes powerful imagery but generally stops short of generating an enveloping sense of the fictional surroundings. Here, however, there is three-dimensional realism that is not only confined to dynamic characters.

Feeling to actually be within settings unlikely to be visited by many readers makes reading the novel an almost living experience rather than limited imaginary escapism. Such depth is vital to a tale of travels that are at a glance a bit outlandish. But by continually tying in a strong physicality with a breadth of tangible detail to the characters' environments and labors, Kaufman has crafted a palpable atmosphere.

Kaufman has a contagious enthusiasm in his writing, which is done so masterfully that the occasional summary statements he makes to punctuate his writing feel almost unnecessary. Deliberately helping the reader along is more valuable in the absence of thorough narrative. But there is no such absence here. If ever a tale can stand on its own, it is the legend Kaufman sets before us without needing to reiterate what we've already absorbed.

Cosmo and Nick are not average men living average lives, nor should we expect them to be. They are free of structured societal bonds as they roam the world seeking self-actualization. Vicariously following them live out a common fantasy, we are also safely exposed to the unglamorous fallout of them dodging the responsibility of facing their insecurities and failings.

"The Legend of Cosmo & the Archangel" has a strong appeal. It can help temper the impractical urges of one tempted to set off on an ill-planned whirlwind odyssey. It can appease the disappointment upon reflecting on a path not taken while reinforcing the value of past decisions. There is an understanding of choices made, and how the effects of transgressions can ripple throughout life for years to come.

**Jake Greenberg, literary critic**

I am extremely impressed with your novel, such a great ride, beautiful writing, very cinematic. You hooked me in, gave me pathos, real wisdom, transcendence!, and took me on a roiling (publisher speak) around the world adventure. This is a book about discovering destiny and transcending self in order to become what we really are. What greater aesthetic pleasure could one want from a book?

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