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Abstract Review of *Dominions of the Gadiantons* (1991), by Robert Marcum.

Robert Marcum, *Dominions of the Gadiantons*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991. 317 pp. \$9.95.

Reviewed by Steven G. Nelson

Before I even began reading this book, the question "Why was this written?" came to mind. The jacket cover seemed to suggest part of the motive: "This . . . thriller . . . blends action, intrigue, and wholesome romance in a fast-paced story that has all the excitement of a Tom Clancy novel while being appropriate for the LDS reader." Sort of a bowdlerized Bond, I surmised. The result was a bit worse.

The premise of taking a Lamanite, war-hero, former bishop, one-eyed stockbroker as a protagonist in a scheme to save the civilized world (and convert a beautiful woman in the process) would appear a bit extreme. While it indeed proves to be, first-time novelist Marcum still manages to hold the reader's interest in most places.

Supposing that an expurgated action-suspense novel were needed (Tom Clancy is, after all, rather tame), I wouldn't have minded one that gave its hero a Christian conscience and some morals. What we get here, though, is a strange mix of theology, thrills, and titillation. I guess I'm just not ready for literature that wants to combine the secular and spiritual quite so intimately. At one point the protagonist spends several cliché-ridden paragraphs discoursing to his gentile love interest on the need for suffering: "We accepted it as a necessary part of the experience by which we can return to live with him [God] and . . . even to be like him" (p. 85). A page or so later he is "feeling her softness through the terry cloth robe. [His] tenseness . . . replaced with a gentle desire . . . [with his] arms enveloping her" (p. 89).

Marcum is at his best when he deals with the world of high-tech intrigue. The elements of suspense are enough to draw the reader through the sentimentality and sacrament-meeting theology to the conclusion. But unlike the short stories of Don Marshall or Levi Peterson, this book fails to flesh out a unique Mormon identity, instead of allowing the characters to become mere caricatures, mouthing platitudes. I hope that, in Marcum's next novel, he will decide what he wants it to be and allow for more complex development of his characters. Will he be the Mormon Tom Clancy or just another Jack Weyland?