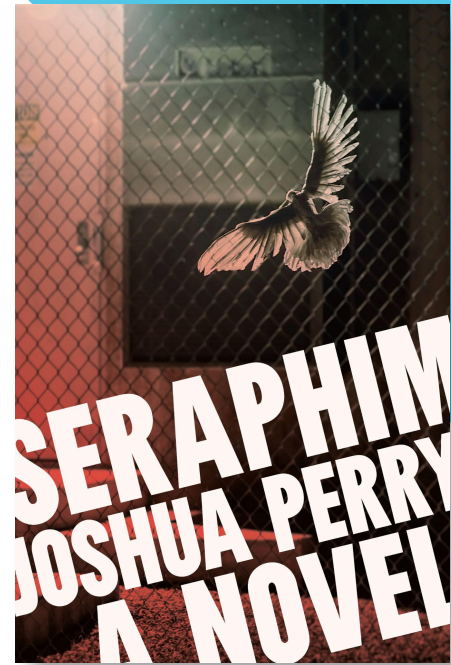


SERAPHIM

Joshua Perry

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“ This beautifully written mystery-meditation on a failed justice system is tragic and inspiring.” — **Booklist STARRED Review**

“ (A) promising debut... with often breathtaking prose... Crime fiction fans will be eager to see what Perry does next.” — **Publishers Weekly**

“ Debut novelist Perry, a former New Orleans public defender, has wonderfully distilled a world of hurt onto the page.”

— firstCLUE

“ *Seraphim* is a thrilling page-turner, as well as a deeply humane investigation into the many forms of justice. It will make you look at the world differently—as much as a book could hope to do.”
— **Jonathan Safran Foer, author, *Everything is Illuminated***

“ It is a ‘lived’ novel; the characters and voices, the intimate details observed, small defeats and even smaller victories feel so true to life that the reader can forget that the story, although well anchored in a world of experience, is fiction.”

— **Richard Price, author, *Clockers***

SYNOPSIS

From a former New Orleans public defender comes a gritty and thrilling interrogation of crime, violence, and the limits of justice in the chaotic times after Hurricane Katrina...

Ben and his partner, Boris, are public defenders obsessed with redeeming their case history of failures, and willing to do anything to protect their clients. As Ben tries to disrupt a corrupt and racist criminal justice system that believes an inexplicable crime has been solved, he confronts his own legacy of loss and faith. A riveting and propulsive story about loyalty and grief, *Seraphim* is an unflinching cross-examination of a broken legal system; a heartbreaking portrait of a beautiful, lost city, filled with children who kill and are killed; and a discomfiting reflection on privilege, prejudice, and power.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the relationship between Ben and Boris. In what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?
2. *Seraphim* is set in a post-Katrina New Orleans. Describe some of the changes the city has experienced since Katrina. How have they impacted Robert Johnson's life specifically?
3. Both Ben and Boris attempt to prove their client's innocence to a jury by any means necessary. Sometimes this means doing things that are not exactly legal. In your opinion, is this the right way work against the legal system? Does the end justify the means?
4. What ideologies do Ben and Mr. Eric Conover follow, and how do they differ?

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5. Robert Johnson and his father, Robert McTell, both find themselves in similar situations in the novel. Can you explain how their attitudes toward crime and awaiting trial differ? How are they similar? Why do you believe the author chose to place them in similar situations at the same time?
6. Ben states that he prefers representing the youth of New Orleans because “the stakes are lower.” What does he mean by this? Do you agree with him?
7. What role does dialogue have in *Seraphim*? How does it differ between Ben and Boris, and Ben and Robert? How does it differ between the courtroom, the jail, and outside of these settings?
8. In *Seraphim*, the author writes “We are always in the boat with our fathers, at the moment when the good clear water rises up to meet them; they are always there with us, on top of the bridge.” In the context of the book, what does this mean to you?
9. Describe the allusions to angels and the seraphim in the novel. What is the purpose of them? How do they help to serve the overall meaning and purpose of the book? Why do you think the author called this book *Seraphim*?
10. By the end of the novel, do Ben and Boris have more or less confidence in the justice system? How do they serve the overall meaning of the book? Why do you think Robert made the decision he did at the end of the book?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joshua Perry was a public defender in New Orleans for ten years, serving as head of the city’s youth public defender and as General Counsel to the Orleans Public Defenders. Since then, his civil rights cases have included representing immigrant children separated from their parents at the Mexican border and suing the FDA to preserve access to abortion medication. As the State of Connecticut’s Solicitor General, he leads a team representing the state in complex cases in federal and state appellate courts. He lives in New Haven, Connecticut with his wife and three daughters.

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