



The Missing Element

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After decades of clandestine government operations, James "Beck" Becker and his wife Elizabeth return to Beck's childhood home town to enjoy a settled retirement in the small Mississippi river community of Red Wing, Minnesota. But "settled" is a relative term and no matter where Beck goes, intrigue follows. When Minneapolis computer genius, Katherine Whitson, disappears under peculiar circumstances, her husband exploits a sympathetic Red Wing acquaintance to enlist Beck's aid in finding her. As Beck searches for Katherine, the tangled trail leads from her luxury Minneapolis warehouse district condo, through her husband's extra-marital escapades, past the entrenched hierarchy of elite computer professionals, and into the mind-bending world inside computer microprocessors. Katherine's kidnapping is clearly more complicated than a typical abduction. As it turns out, the Beckers must use all of their considerable experience -- his as a military intelligence operative; hers as a CIA code-cracker -- to save Katherine and bring her abductors to justice.

The Missing Element Details

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From Reader Review The Missing Element for online ebook

Cindy says

I didn't like this book as much as the first book.

This is about a former CIA operative, James Becker, who has retired to Red Wing, MN. Though his former life is not known to most of the towns people, a few have their suspicions. The local sheriff contacts "Beck" to help locate the wife of friend. Though there is a note indicating she left her husband there are indicators that she was kidnapped.

Angela Myers says

Engaging plot, good characters. Fun read. Actually it was kind of nice to read a book in which the protagonist is not fighting demons from his past that threaten to destroy him and all those he loves. He even loves and respects his wife--and she, him. Wow.

Christy says

This is the 2nd book about Beck. I liked that it was a stand alone book. I've read the first one but didn't feel like I'd missed any information in the 2nd one if I hadn't. While I had it figured out as to who the bad guy was and why there was a problem pretty early on, I liked the other action elements - both encounters in the parking deck, George's situation, Beth's intruder, Bull's hospital visit. As this was a Kindle version, there were obviously some editing flaws but nothing that distracted from the story. My biggest gripe is that "God" was never capitalized (well, I believe it was once). In all, I have really enjoyed the tales of James Becker and I'm about to start the third book.

Christine Blachford says

I really enjoyed the first book in the Elements series, following Becker on an adventure to do with a power plant and some rogue adversaries. I hoped this would be more of the same, but I'm not sure the action quite lived up to the hype of the first.

It was a good story, but missing some elements (in an unfortunate coincidence with the title), which were then fleshed out with areas of too much detail. Where the kidnapping and underlying plot are great modern situations, there didn't seem to be quite enough peril, enough haste, much of anything standing in the way of the good guys getting to the answer. There was little doubt over who did it and he quite literally led them to the answers.

Instead of obstacles in the path of the characters, we spent quite a long time living the minute details of Beth and Beck's marriage. Interesting enough for a couple of chapters but not really adding anything to their characters to sustain it for the length of the story. Overall, some great building blocks here but not quite finished off to perfection.

Sharon Michael says

Entertaining mystery with a well crafted plot and well developed characters. It is not an original setup, husband/wife team as dual investigators with the interesting sidestep that they are both retired government agents, with the wife providing high level computer skills and the husband an on the ground agent. Both have skills, with reasonable abilities for their supposed ages, both are obviously very intelligent and there is added development with the police officer friend and the Native American buddy.

The high tech plot was way out of my area of expertise so I cannot comment on the technical issues in the plot, but it read smoothly and reasonably to a non-high-tech person. I had a little difficulty at times with the somewhat intrusive romantic dialogue between the couple, a little too much of a good thing and occasionally awkward phrasing. As often happens, I read this first book of the series after the second (third?) and these issues are less notable in the series later.

Overall, a promising new series that will stay on my to-read list.

Dolores Ayotte says

I enjoyed this debut novel by John L. Betcher. I always appreciate a good suspense story and that is exactly what "The Missing Element" is!

The plot is intriguing with the likeable character of James Becker, better know as Beck to his friends, as he steals the show with his super detective skills. He is an attorney-at-law in his present life but has the much needed sleuthing skills from his former job to do the detective work that needs to be done. Between both he and his lovely wife Beth, the computer goddess as she refers to herself, along with some pretty "high up" contacts...they manage to solve the case of the mysterious disappearance of Dr. Whitson.

I was captivated with the story line and all the twists and turns that took place in this suspenseful/thriller novel. However, there were a few times when I got lost in the computer technical descriptions. I think this aspect was a bit overdone. All in all I would have to say that "The Missing Element" is a well-written and interesting read.

LORI CASWELL says

James (Beck) Becker and his wife Elizabeth (Beth) have retired from their high pressure lives as government operatives, Beck in military intelligence, Beth as a CIA code-cracker and moved back to Beck's childhood home of Red Wing, Minnesota to enjoy some rest and relaxation.

Rest and relaxation doesn't last long as Beth gets a call from an old acquaintance begging her to help find his wife, who he believes has been kidnapped. Katherine Whitson, a computer genius, has left her husband her car keys, credit cards, most of her belongings and a note saying she's leaving him, but he doesn't believe it for a minute.

Beth talks Beck into taking the case and it takes him on a route through Katherine's personal and professional

lives and into the inside the mind-bending world of computers and microprocessors that he doesn't even understand. He realizes he needs Beth's help, and the help of some of their friends if he is ever going to find Katherine alive and close this case.

This is such a good book. It is written at the perfect pace that keeps you turning page after page after page. It is hard to believe this is the author's first mystery novel. The characters are wonderfully developed, my favorite character of the book is Bull, an American Indian, with some very special skills and a very dry wit. The plot is one that may scare anyone who uses a computer, which today is everyone, when you realize this story can actually be true. Are machines running the world? Are humans THE MISSING ELEMENT?

There is also the wonderful love story of Beck and Beth and the perfect amount of humor to keep the story from getting to technical or heavy. If you are a fan of Tom Clancy, John Grisham or Robert Parker, you will truly enjoy this book, but even if you are just a cozy mystery reader this is still a book for you. I truly recommend you add this book to your Summer Reading Lists today!!!

Jael says

James "Beck" Becker and his wife Elizabeth (Beth) return to his childhood home in Red Wing, Minnesota to enjoy a quiet life. They try to settle into small-town life after years of working on secret government operations. All that is about to change when computer nerd Katherine Whitson is kidnapped from her luxury apartment.

Upon first glance, it's assumed Katherine is just a woman who got tired of living with her obsessive compulsive husband, George. But her husband and friends refuse to believe that. Beck is drawn into the mix by his friend and cop Gunner. The most obvious suspect, George, is a man with a secret. Could Katherine have done something that set off her husband? Did she discover George's secret? Or was it a jealous co-worker at Katherine's office ComDyne? Maybe Katherine was working on something that got her trouble? With help from his "computer goddess" wife and enforcer friend Bull, Beck sets off to explore the complex world of computer technology.

The Missing Element by John L. Betcher is a fast-paced, tightly written mystery novel filled with lively characters. The husband and wife dynamic between Beck and Beth is a source of much comic relief. Regardless of the stress of the day, they can still sit down to a glass of wine and mock each other. Beck's friend Bull is a man of a few words, but you just know he doesn't take any crap. He's a character who wants to get right to the point, and do away with all the nonsense. With just a look or a gesture, you know what Bull is thinking.

Just reading the blurb on the book, I initially got a little scared off. A book where computer technology plays a big part seemed daunting. I'm not very savvy in that area. But, Betcher's writing style makes it very easy to follow. If you're a mystery fan, sit down and get to know James "Beck" Becker.

Note: I received a copy of this book from the author in exchange for an honest review.

Mike says

This is an easy read. It flows along comfortably enough and the characters are lively, and gently humorous.

As the first in the Beck series it will invite readers to sample the later offerings although 'The 19th Element' chronologically pre-dates this story.

It should appeal even to those female readers who are not great fans of guns, kidnapping and computers, as us chaps seem to be, because Betcher is at pains to include the minor daily details that (here is a sweeping generalisation) female authors include much more than male counterparts. For instance, the back and forth banter of the marriage relationship and minor domestic events are made much of even though they do little to advance the story line and in fact do little to round out the characters after the first couple of chapters.

There are unnecessary details where the writing needs tightening. For example, on getting a phone call we are told "I pushed the button to receive the call." as if Beck's answering didn't tell us that. This sort of thing happens quite often. And: "The garage door opened obediently. I parked the Pilot, closed up the garage and went inside through the back porch into the kitchen...cut through the dining room and foyer to the living room." Step by step transitions lead to lack of the crispness this genre needs.

The main concern is that there is not enough put in the way of Beck and his team to prevent them from achieving the objective. It is obstacle and set-back that makes for tension and to be honest this feels a shade bland.

Nevertheless a fair beginning, and Beck, his missus, Bull, and Red Wing will gather followers.

Dorothy says

Riveting

Besides being educated in more computer technology than I could have imagined, I loved the characters. The story kept me engaged from beginning to end.

John R. Hoffman says

Beck and Bull are back for the second novel in this series. A computer expert disappears or is kidnapped and Beck is recruited to find her. As the investigation continues, it becomes clear that the disappearance is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Jumping into the realm of cyberespionage, the plot rushes headlong into a conspiracy of a systemic breakdown of computer security. Once again the main characters are well-developed with deep connections to call in favors when needed. This is a quick and fun read, but the overall character pacing seems slow when responding to a potential kidnapping. I liked this better than the first novel (19th element) and Beck's wife Beth proves that she is more than just arm candy as a former CIA computer hacker/code breaker/stay-at-home mom. Overall a nice crime thriller without the constant gun play and fist fights.

Nathan Hayes says

The Missing Element is the story of James "Beck" Becker and his wife Elizabeth, who have returned to Beck's childhood home in Red Wing, Minnesota to enjoy retirement from their covert government jobs. Of course, life is anything but quiet with Beck around.

When Katherine Whitson, a Minneapolis computer genius, disappears under mysterious circumstances, her husband George calls the local police. After receiving no help from police, George then solicits a Red Wing acquaintance to convince Beck to help find Katherine.

Beginning at Katherine's luxury apartment in the Minneapolis Warehouse District, Author John L. Betcher puts his protagonist through a labyrinth of red herrings. Beck's investigation starts with George as the unfaithful husband, and then moves to his lover, to Katherine's work colleagues, and on through the ranks of an influential computer company, and into the overwhelming world of computer microprocessors before he can begin to find answers.

To solve the mystery of why Katherine was kidnapped—and to save her—Beck must draw on his resources with the FBI and their computer experts, as well as the expertise of his wife Elizabeth, the former CIA agent.

Betcher leads us into the world of advanced computer technology and international espionage with this captivating suspense thriller. As we follow Beck on his quest to locate Katherine, we are introduced to several colorful characters. There is the Ottawa County Sheriff's Deputy, Doug Gunderson, and his wife, Connie, who enlist Beck's help. The brawn in this story is provided by the enigmatic Terry "Bull" Red Feather. Bull is drawn into the story when Beck requests his assistance in dealing with the nefarious characters who try to stand in his way.

The Missing Element is well-written, the plot is intriguing, and the characters are interesting. Betcher draws you in from page one and holds your interest to the very last. Unlike many recent novels, Betcher takes his time tying up the loose ends and concluding the story. This book is obviously the beginning of an exciting new series of suspense novels for Betcher. The Missing Element is recommended for those who love to curl up with an entertaining mystery/suspense novel. It offers a little something for everyone: lively characters, espionage and cyber-technology, and of course the mystery of who took Katherine Whitson and why. Fans of Parker, Grisham, and Clancy will enjoy this first installment in the James Becker series.

Norm Clark says

John L. Betcher

I found John's whodunit to be an entertaining and enjoyable read. Excellent plot and characters. Story flowed smoothly. I highly recommend 'The Missing Element' to all readers who like the genre. I gave it five stars.

Jason Kerr says

Another excellent addition to the series. Beck is witty and improvisational as always, and Beth & Bull get more time in the spotlight. Great dialogue and a intriguing plot. The Parker estate should boot Brandeman and let Betcher write the Jesse Stone novels.

Beth says

A suspense / mystery story revolving around computers and hacking. Add in some kidnapping and some very intelligent women and you have an intriguing story.

The main character (a male lawyer) is a bit of a doofus but he runs the investigation and solving the mystery very nicely.

