



All-American Aphrodite

Daniel Lyons

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All-American Aphrodite is the perfect political thriller for this age of constant sociopolitical controversy.

In Daniel Lyons's novel *All-American Aphrodite*, one politician's bad behavior connects him to a wider web of intrigue that could derail the entire state of Washington. It takes an investigative reporter to uncover the web's true shape, color, and substance.

When Republican Senator Milton Bergman of Washington is caught red-handed in a hotel room liaison, word gets out that the girl last seen leaving the room was a high-priced escort with the shadowy company Fantasies, Inc. Fantasies is in the business of supplying the rich and famous with only the best in all-night company. Bergman is also found to be a client of Larsen's Reproductions, a type of flesh factory described as capable of turning any "skinny Caucasian girl" into a "contestant in Brazil's Miss BumBum contest." All of this information draws the eye of Seattle-based journalist Natalie Schroder, who smells a real story.

Schroder initially thinks that she has nothing more than a salacious political sex scandal on her hands. However, Bergman's resignation and assorted connections leads her into a world where far-right extremism, men's rights activists, racial justice activists, convicts, and hard-nosed Seattle cops form an unexpected nexus. Specifically, all of these characters inhabit the same world of corruption, sexual escapades, and human decay.

This book is a thoroughly American knockout. Every word packs a punch, and every sentence is imbued with hard-boiled sentimentality. The streets that Schroder walks seem real (and really dirty). Seattle is described warts and all, if with a specific focus on the warts.

Schroder is both a human and humane lead. She is a bulldog-like investigative reporter with a heart of gold who stands in opposition to Bergman, the antithesis of a humble public servant who, even when he receives his well-deserved comeuppance, is given a second chance by equally unsavory public figures with sex addictions of their own.

While this novel moves along at a jaunty pace, its conclusion is underwhelming. Not only is Bergman's crime pedestrian, but the political maneuvering by Washington's Republicans in the epilogue is not outrageous, and in fact emphasizes that America's political institutions are rotten and bound to force good people to make difficult choices between morality and political expediency.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (April 2, 2019)

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