



Center Stage: A Political Thriller

Wayne Avrashow

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Wayne Avrashow's political novel *Center Stage* follows an ex-rock star's campaign to join the US Senate as an Independent representative.

Tyler Sloan, a middle-aged rock star, retired lady's man, and ex-cocaine addict, decides to run for a Senate position after the person holding it dies. He does not inform his father—the Democratic ex-governor of California, Mike Sloan—of his run, though. Further, he runs as an Independent, stating that D.C. divisions keep decisions from being made. With the help of an experienced, tax-evading campaign manager and a newbie marketing manager, Sloan takes on a dull Democratic nominee and a charismatic Republican nominee—the latter a woman with whom Sloan has a sordid past, one that he hopes will not be exposed to the public.

Because of his charm and extensive experience with media from his singing and touring years, Sloan has a leg up on his opponents. Still, many don't take his campaign seriously. His drug- and drama-laden history is well known, so he has little to hide (aside from a damning sex tape), and his father's political career also benefits him.

Sloan's opinions, prospective policies, and reasons for running as an Independent align with his rebellious personality, but his reasons for running for the Senate seat in the first place are not documented. This missing foundation is a hurdle when it comes to understanding who Sloan is. Others, including Sloan's alcoholic ex-wife, are present to fill roles, like supporting Sloan's political venture or otherwise advancing the plot; some act in ways that contradict their histories and relationships with Sloan. There are many dramas shared between them, though, adding intensity to the plate-spinning act of Sloan's campaign.

Made up most of exciting, fast-paced conversations, the text is entertaining despite its political jargon. However, these storytelling methods lean away from Sloan's internal turmoil, placing more focus on the logic and chess moves of the campaign. Emotion is diminished: Sloan's romantic relationship is dry, and his interactions with his family members often read as transactional.

Sloan's Senate race begins a few months before the election; as election day approaches, the book's sense of suspense increases. Ever-shifting polling numbers are used to introduce each chapter, bolstering the tension leading up to the book's unceremonious ending.

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AIMEE JODOIN (September 9, 2020)

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