

City of Whores

Mark B. Perry

Starboard Home Press (Aug 1, 2014)

Softcover \$14.99 (416pp)

978-0-9914193-0-2

This unpredictable story is an entertaining fictional view of old Hollywood, full of public glamor and private scandal.

The tale of the small-town boy or girl who heads to Hollywood to be “discovered” is classic Americana. So is the tale of Tinseltown’s all-consuming corruption, self-delusion, and hypocrisy, which have chewed up and spat out thousands of such innocents. In this provocatively titled debut novel, Mark B. Perry uses these familiar tropes as starting points for a more complex story that both satisfies and subverts the reader’s expectations.

When penniless but handsome Dan Root arrives in Hollywood on New Year’s Eve, 1951, he’s certain that if he can only meet the right people and impress them with his brooding good looks, his path to glory will be clear. No longer a mere boy from the sticks with an embarrassingly plebeian name, he’ll be christened with a new name, a new identity, and the worshipful adoration of a nation of fans gazing up at his face on the silver screen.

But from the first chapter, it’s apparent that these ambitions are doomed, since Dan’s older self has already informed us that as the “once promising young actor named Dexter Gaines,” he had only the briefest brush with stardom, and that his memories of that time are a source of bitterness and anger, revisited in his mind only because the death of his onetime mentor has forced him to revisit this lost and painful past.

Perry is an Emmy and Golden Globe-winning writer and producer of a number of successful television shows, and *City of Whores* displays an excellent sense of plot and pacing as the story line alternates between the young Dan of 1952 and the aging Dexter of 1994. The historical settings sparkle, especially a vividly described transatlantic passage on one of the last great ocean liners, the SS *United States*. Celebrities like Tallulah Bankhead and Judy Garland make appearances, but Perry wisely does not rely on their reflected glamor to carry the story. Instead, he focuses on the internal emotional world of his charismatic but flawed and deeply conflicted protagonist as he becomes increasingly, dangerously entangled with a troubled Hollywood “power couple.” Sexuality pervades the world that Dan/Dexter inhabits, and Rock Hudson is not the only man in Hollywood with a closeted sexual identity.

City of Whores is an unconventional love story in which attraction doesn’t necessarily pull people in predictable directions, or even in directions that they are willing to accept.

BRADLEY A. SCOTT (Fall 2014)

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