



Slow Down

Lee Matthew Goldberg

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Goldberg successfully evokes empathy for characters who start out as self-absorbed, only to have their selfishness increase.

“You are such a pretentious loser,” one character announces to the protagonist, Noah, of Leo Matthew Goldberg’s debut novel. *Slow Down* is a brilliant rush of a work charting the rise and fall of Noah and other “pretentious losers” as they use and abuse people and substances to get ahead in the movie business, regardless of whom they hurt.

Noah, a college grad buoyed by his parents’ trust fund, thinks he has the talent to write the Great American Masterpiece, but he refuses to pay his dues to achieve acclaim. After hooking up with arrogant movie man Dominick and his scheming wife, Isadora, Noah’s dreams of fame have a chance of becoming reality. As Noah ingratiates himself to Dominick’s crowd, Goldberg heartbreakingly captures his moments of lucidity as he realizes that life in the fast lane has sucked away most of his goodness. Yet, Noah still cares for Nevie, a young woman he befriended in elementary school, when they were both still children. Even as he continues to manipulate others, Noah recognizes that his beloved has become a drug-addled shell of the vibrant girl he once knew, thanks to becoming Dominick’s mistress in her own quest for glory.

The book makes masterful use of the story-within-a-story conceit, bookending Noah’s powerful first-person narrative with a prologue and an epilogue written in the third person. The prologue piques interest to keep pages turning rapidly, while the epilogue tantalizes with the notion that Noah’s story still remains unfinished. The pointed use of cameras and camera-related imagery in the narrative enhances the theme that all the characters crave being seen in multiple senses. The author’s creation of a drug called Fast, juxtaposed against the title of the central movie, *Slow Down*, wonderfully captures the twin contradictory impulses in everyone’s lives. Savor this book, though, or miss apt turns of phrase such as, “His hair was a brown ball of chaos.”

JILL ALLEN (Spring 2015)

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