

Take Fountain

Adam Novak

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Hollywood's strivers take a skewering in this noir-ish satire.

Beneath the glib Hollywood-insider banter captured on a podcast interview lurks a dark, satirical tale of bad luck, betrayal, and murder in Adam Novak's book, *Take Fountain*.

A transcript of the podcast is turned in to the Santa Clarita Police Department. Larry Mersault, big cheese at a Hollywood talent agency, was interviewed by Dollars Muttlan, a lowly screenwriting instructor for a local community college. Now Larry is dead, and Dollars is missing. Through the course of the interview, the contrast in fortunes between the two become glaring. Dollars's application to film school was rejected; Larry's dad didn't just know somebody at the film school, he actually saved the life of the school's top fundraiser ... Larry got in. Larry went to the Academy Awards; Dollars won a Golden Raspberry Award for Worst Screenplay. Larry has rubbed elbows with everyone: Woody Allen, John Cusack, Mick Jagger, even the president. "There's lucky, I suppose, and then, well, there's you," Dollars observes. During the podcast, Dollars's students are invited to text in questions. One of the first is "What's the best way to get into Hollywood?" Larry responds with an aptly cynical quote attributed to Bette Davis: "Take Fountain."

The two characters are well drawn through fast-paced dialogue loaded with subtext. Larry's name-dropping and false humility adorn insider stories that seem bent on impressing the students. His lack of awareness of the role privilege and luck played in his success is almost painful. Dollars's not-so-subtle jabs go by unnoticed.

The novel's black-and-white cover art evokes film noir; other aspects of the book echo it as well: its fatalism, sense of impending doom, glamor, and murder. The dialogue can almost be heard as a voiceover, through which Dollars's sense of failure mounts. And yet there are plenty of laugh-out-loud humorous moments as well. Larry says, "I wrote a novel about a script reader at a talent agency who gets radicalized and turns into a suicide bomber." Dollars replies, "I self-published a sex manual called *Make Him Marry You*."

The transcript format essentially works. It is interspersed with a selection of Larry's script reviews, some clearly recognizable blockbusters among them. These interrupt the flow of the dialogue without adding a lot to the story, although true Hollywood insiders will find some interesting developments there.

The suspense could have been heightened—it is fairly easy to guess what is going on early in the book—but the real point is its skewering of Hollywood's strivers, the look at the way luck plays out in the business (as in life), the ruination of quality scripts for the sake of marketing, and the bodies that lie literally and figuratively along Fountain Avenue. In this, *Take Fountain* works as a satirical romp through a screwy and savage world.

KAREN MULVAHILL (April 3, 2015)

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