

The Guys' Guy's Guide to Love

Robert Manni

Live Oak Book Company (March 2012)

Softcover \$16.95 (346pp)

978-1-936909-25-4

The exciting, high-stakes world of advertising and the lifestyle of the affluent, single man meet in this debut novel by Robert Manni. This mouthful of a title tells the humorous story of Max Hallyday, a New York adman, and his rocky, competitive relationship with his best friend, Roger, a committed playboy.

At first, Max is portrayed as the smart, sensitive, and ultimately naïve counterpart to his womanizing buddy. Roger seduces one of Max's important clients, triggering a series of counterproductive events, and Max secures a position as a magazine columnist who exposes the shortcomings of men like Roger and advises women to protect themselves from the predator instincts of the prowling male. Playing the part of a big brother and confidant, he says: "Look at the newspaper and you'll see how men continue to succumb to their addictions of sex, greed, violence, and hypocrisy. It's time for women to rule this world in a better way—one man and one relationship at a time." Max becomes an overnight celebrity, and soon his anonymity under a pseudonym can no longer conceal his identity.

The friends' instant role reversal puts Max in an opportunistic position that even Roger would envy and perhaps unsurprisingly, Max ultimately gives in to the same pressures and temptations, while Roger undergoes serious self-analysis and readjustment. Though this sounds like a cut-and-dried scenario, Max's new situation, with every sexual encounter, innuendo, and flirtation leading to a position of monetary gain or loss, is complex and interesting.

Despite its professional orientation, the novel is extremely well-written and edited. Robert Manni is articulate and witty, lending vivid description to every scene. Peppered with well-drawn supporting characters—girlfriends, clients, and colleagues—personal-professional boundaries blur with intent, adding to the story's richness.

Any reader will recognize the realistic flaws of each character, and fans of "Mad Men" will delight in the machinations of the Madison Avenue elite and the power-hungry set that emerges convincingly in an intriguing, though often predictable plotline.

Robert Manni is the president of Agent16, an advertising agency in Manhattan. He is currently working on his second book.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (March 26, 2012)

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