

The Seduction Campaign

Lloyd Reman

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An amateur detective duo digs into a government conspiracy in this steady-moving thriller.

In this polarized political era, many US citizens expect cover-ups, and are convinced that the government is watching. Lloyd Reman's solid debut thriller, *The Seduction Campaign*, takes governmental treachery one step further...to murder. In this timely story, the author deftly takes on the themes of power, love, and the definition of torture.

Kurt Jennings, an ambitious staffer for a conservative Republican radio host named Rex Bellenboch, and Mindy Brand, a go-getter Harvard student journalist and Democratic activist, uncover information suggesting that higher-ups in DC are orchestrating the murders of American citizens. Mindy and Kurt are well-drawn characters, making them easy to root for. It is refreshing that they do not immediately team up or fall in love, but rather, take a slow and reluctant liking to one another. Both Kurt and Mindy discover information in equal measure, although it is Mindy's dogged persistence that keeps them in pursuit of an explanation for the mysterious deaths. Kurt experiences a crisis of conscience as he reconsiders working for a radio host who spouts vile hate-speech, even as he recognizes that staying in this position benefits his career prospects. Mindy, too, develops from a staunch anti-Republican living in her father's shadow into an investigative journalist in her own right who knows that both political parties have problems.

Realistic exchanges of one-liners keep the plot steadily moving. For example, here, Mindy and Kurt discuss the possibility of corporations murdering their enemies:

[Mindy asked Kurt], "So what type of conspiracies?"

"Claims that executives of a company conspired to kill someone."

"Did the companies do it?"

"Of course not."

"You say that as if it's not possible."

"I didn't think it was."

"I suppose that makes sense. You work for Rex. You had a frontal lobotomy when you joined his team."

The book falters in balancing the dual endeavors of character development and thrilling action. Almost at the book's halfway point, Kurt still remains unconvinced that a conspiracy actually exists. Part of the problem stems from the fact that there are so few victims, it really does seem that Mindy is grasping at straws when trying to connect the murders to one another. Additionally, although Reman displays inventiveness when explaining the role a mind-control drug plays in the killings, it seems unlikely that Kurt and Mindy would be able to discover facts about the victims' sexual behavior on the nights of their deaths—would victims' families really discuss their loved ones' sex lives with two amateur investigators? A greater number of suspicious deaths would make the story more frightening, and would also increase the plausibility that the protagonists could discover intimate details of the victims' last moments.

The book really takes off in part three, as Kurt and Mindy learn who their foes are and struggle to remain alive. With

the introduction of the villains, the story shifts from personal growth narrative to dynamic thriller, maintaining suspense until the end. Disappointingly, the antagonists fall into the stereotypical trope of women who use sex to gain power. Despite its flaws, this book will appeal to those fascinated by politics.

JILL ALLEN (July 7, 2014)

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