

The Showrunner

Kim Moritsugu

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Kim Moritsugu's entertaining crime drama *The Showrunner* unapologetically explores Hollywood's superficial show-business lifestyle, showing just how deadly ambition can be.

Cocreators of the newest hit television drama, industry veteran Ann and eager and smart Stacey have a fruitful partnership. But then Ann hires a flailing young actress, Jenna, as her assistant. Each woman believes herself to be the fairest, cleverest, most worthy of them all. They fight—by any means necessary—for success, fame, and adoration.

The women's shallowness is a compelling illustration of Hollywood, where youth, looks, and money are championed above all else. This is further addressed through carefully drawn minor characters, including a seductive bartender-slash-sugar-baby and a doomed young starlet caught up in the party lifestyle.

There is a sad humor in Jenna and Stacey's skewering of Ann's choices of foods. Skillfully written, unforgettable lines like her "oily lips formed a wicked smile," complete with green onion in her teeth, highlight Ann's disgusting habits as well as her subordinates' toxic relationships with food.

The main source of tension—the disintegrated friendship between Ann and Stacey—is far from a picture of female empowerment. The focus on their ever-increasing animosity lacks depth. Still, their bitter bickering and false niceties are at once funny and bleak; the story unfolds through Ann's acerbic first-person journal and in Stacey's fraudulently cheerful charm.

In a timely story line, an older, respected character uses their position of power to harass a hunky up-and-coming actor. The scene is chilling, particularly considering that it occurs in public, on set, as other cast and crew try to laugh it off. Though much of the book is lighthearted and showy, there are glimmers of heavy and realistic commentary.

The Showrunner is a sophisticated, compelling, and surprisingly complex drama.

PAIGE VAN DE WINKLE (May/June 2018)

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