

Utopia PR

Adam Bender

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Sharp and witty, the novel Utopia PR is a free range political send-up set in a chaotic, perplexing, and familiar future world.

In Adam Bender's future-adjacent political satire *Utopia PR*, a government public relations operative struggles to hold on to his marriage, his job, and some iteration of reality.

As the White House Crisis Communications manager, it's Blake's job to spin the escalating crises created by an imbecilic, unhinged American president (and former pop singer) for the public. It's a lucrative and powerful position through which he develops the nickname the Hammer. Indeed, Blake is a gifted deflector; his ideas have, so far, managed to distract and valorize the never-ending catastrophes that arise from the Oval Office.

When one of the president's vicious cyberdogs escapes and murders two civilians, the PR team turns to Blake. But, to Blake's dismay, the lies, pettifoggery, and cheap entertainment he dreams up fall short. Blake's first real failure proves pivotal to his evolution and eventual liberation. Also contributing is the fact that his wife is the top anchor at Triple N News; their respective dedication to their jobs interferes with their relationship, including their desire to have a family.

The narrative is directed by Blake's marital discord, the complication of a traitorous, ambitious member of the president's communications team, and a government decision to add opium to the nation's milk supply. That governmental bureaucracy is dysfunctional is clear; the book's climax places Blake and his cohort in a battle of wits against the deranged CEO of Woozle, a giant, omnipresent tech company whose social media empire is volatile.

Though set in the near future and featuring hover cars, computerized watch dogs, and jetpacks, the parallels between the ineptitude and dictatorial bent of Blake's president and that of a recent American administration are impossible to overlook. Blake's president is surrounded by shameful pandering; lies are promulgated by his lackeys in order to prop him up. Further, there is a constant effort to build his hashtags in order to please his fan base. From press releases to commentary on the entertainment requirement of news programs and the dominance of social media in politics, nothing escapes the story's targeted, incisive skewering. Only Blake's growing enlightenment suggests that all is not lost.

Some of the book's situations and crises veer into absurdity, and a few of its jokes are forced. Still, this contextual comedy moves with speed, and its outlandish idiosyncrasies and flaws are unabashed. Sharp and witty, the novel *Utopia PR* is a free range political send-up set in a chaotic, perplexing, and familiar future world.

RANDI HACKER (May 19, 2021)

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