

★ Camp Jeff

Tova Reich

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A disgraced writer fails to confront or acknowledge his crimes in Tova Reich's discomfiting novel *Camp Jeff*.

Jeffrey Epstein (not that one) founded Camp Jeff to rehabilitate people like Gershon, a high-profile author brought down by hashtag-related accusations. Blaming all of his and the other campers' troubles on antisemitism, Gershon commits himself to a path of revolution that may destroy all he claims to be fighting for.

Beginning with a literary punch in the face, the book dives into its irreverent, daring plot with no mercy and remains unflinching throughout. The stream-of-consciousness prose allows Gershon to expel all manner of self-pitying, self-serving musings about his "inevitable" comeback, reminisce about time spent palling around with Jeffrey Epstein (yes, that one), and heap outrageous abuse on Hedy, the only employee at the camp who cares about his well-being. A repugnant figure, his place on the victim-to-villain scale is complicated by his unreliable memory and the abuse that he himself may have endured as a teenager.

Camp Jeff itself reflects the state of its inhabitants: a rundown, half-refurbished wreck of what was once a glorious resort in the Catskill Mountains' Borscht Belt. Eschewing the camp's bombastic rehabilitation program, Gershon burrows deeper into his religion and, with Hedy's help, hatches a plot to erase antisemitism—to his twisted yet compelling mind, the real and sole evil behind his downfall—forever.

The arrival of COVID-19 presents an unexpected, high-stakes twist, but, thanks to Gershon's intelligence and stubbornness, it enhances rather than derails his scheming. All of his plans—and Camp Jeff's failure to stop him—lead to a finale as outlandish and disturbing as the characters who orchestrated it.

Brimming with the blackest humor, *Camp Jeff* is a satirical novel about the difficulties of seeking justice when the guilty are incapable of remorse.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2024)

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