



Girlfriend on Mars

Deborah Willis

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A generation trades clicks for activism in *Girlfriend on Mars*, Deborah Willis's incisive satirization of Anthropocene dissonance.

Once an Olympic hopeful, Amber is now in her thirties and dead-ending it in British Columbia. She loves her boyfriend, Kevin, who she's been with since high school, but not in a soul-shaking way. In a fit of ennui, she rallies her remaining confidence to audition for MarsNow, a billionaire-funded reality television venture to choose the first two humans to colonize Mars. And she's selected. Her new life is set in motion.

Trading between coverage of Kevin's suspended life in the couple's apartment, where he waits for Amber to change her mind and commit to their earthbound future, and scenes that cover Amber's meteoric rise, the novel is voracious about skewering contemporary preoccupations: with (somewhat baseless) social media fame; with popularizing scientific leaps at the expense of proceeding with care; with claims of liberalism used to cover the acts of the rapacious one percent.

Amber longs for a sense of meaning, but quashes her better judgment to attain it—falling into an underbaked affair that audiences love; flirting with a tech mogul who represents everything that she detests at her environmentalist's core. And Kevin, though he knows the world is on fire, only longs to go back—to a perfect afternoon with Amber at the lake; to a time when his shaky foundations felt safe. It becomes clear that—even though two someones who are charming but undeniably underprepared will be sent into the sky—satisfaction will evade everyone, no matter their terrestrial states. That, it seems, is the cost of valuing fifteen minutes of attention over the hard work of making true forever plans.

A precious few compete for spots on Mars before rapt global audiences in *Girlfriend on Mars*, a sobering speculative novel.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July / August 2023)

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