



Chart Throb

Ben Elton

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Ben Elton is about to put the “real” back into Reality TV in his biting satire of one of today’s most popular cultural phenomena — the TV talent show.

95,000 hopefults. Three judges. Just one winner.

And that’s Colin Simms, the genius behind the show.

Colin always wins, because Colin writes the rules. But this year, as he sits smugly in judgment on the mingers, clingers and blingers whom he has pre-selected in his carefully scripted “search” for a star, he has no idea that the rules are changing. The “real” is about to be put back into “reality” television, and Colin and his fellow judges (the nation’s favourite mum and the other bloke) are about to become ex-factors themselves.

From the best-selling author of **The First Casualty**, **Popcorn**, and **Dead Famous** comes **Chart Throb**. One winner. A whole bunch of losers.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Chart Throb Details

Date : Published January 9th 2007 by Bantam Press (first published 2006)

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Author : Ben Elton

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

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From Reader Review Chart Throb for online ebook

Bethan Stranks says

I previously read 'Blind Faith' by Ben Elton, and wanted to try reading some of his other work. Once again I was forced to re-examine something I had grown to accept about society and Western popular culture. I love that it's so easy to get lost within Elton's books, yet at the same time they make you question things that you'd never previously given much thought to. There were just a couple of things that niggled me about this book. Firstly, the use of the word 'babes'. It was used a lot in Blind Faith and I thought that was a stylistic choice specifically for the context of the book, but to see it repeated again here was annoying. Also, while this book is clearly on the subject of real programmes and people, I didn't like that those programmes and people were actually named. I think it would have been more powerful if it was still just as obvious who and what it was discussing, without spelling it out by naming them. Still, another very good piece of work by Ben Elton.

Nick Bonich says

Inadvertently came across this in our bookshelf (Mary had randomly picked up in Dubai of all places). Fortuitous - as it fits perfectly with a current strain of thinking - how do we edit our lives? Chart Throb addresses this en masse - a top-rating TV reality show that brutally edits the hopes and dreams of unwitting contestants in order to produce 'good telly'. Elton at his satirical best here (up there with Popcorn - perhaps slightly less twisted) - and you get the feeling he knows what he is talking about, which makes the painstakingly predetermined production of this so-called 'live' reality show all the more outrageous. Wonderfully demented characters and the savage wit of Elton ("I just want people to see the real me") makes this a thoroughly enjoyable read.

Emily Benet says

Like other people have said, and not that I watch much Reality TV, but I don't think I'll ever look at one the same! Rings so, so true. Everything is just manipulation for maximum entertainment. Hilarious and brutal.

Dora Maw says

Ever seen American Idol? Well... this book surely gives you an inside on how reality tv works. Very... educational - making you wonder why you waste all that time ringing to vote for your favourite!

Emma says

This started off quite promising, but got so bogged down in so many different stories and so much detail. Some of it I just skipped over because it was so boring, despite the fact that the subject matter interested me.

I would've enjoyed this more about 5 years ago I think.

I did give this 2 stars but then I remembered about the Prince of Wales subplot and OH GOD that was just so bad, so I'm knocking a star off. Utterly unnecessary and the whole thing was so hard to believe.

Weebly says

Great book. Ben Elton again hits a nerve by writing a book based on another popular entertainment phenomenon. Having done a take on Friend's Reunited and Big Brother - now the Pop Idol/ X Factor genre of program gets the Elton treatment. I do wonder how much of it is how the program happens, because if you 'do the maths' then alot of it must be! Also watching Simon Cowell on Britain's got Talent last night I could just picture Calvin Simms doing the various funny faces to show his emotions - and the earnest talks to camera 'in all seriousness blah blah blah' about Flawless just sounded so Calvin-esque.

Great book - recommended if you are an X-factor fan.

Simon Taylor says

Ben Elton's Chart Throb is the successor to X Factor and the novel follows the lives of the judges and contestants in what can be generally described as a satire of the format.

The judges are pertinently Simon Cowell, Sharon Osborne and Louis Walsh-esque, right down to the Beryl's The Osbornes style show. The characters in the book actually refer to Cowell and Osborne (and their superiority to them) and to X Factor, which Chart Throb has replaced.

It's fair to say Chart Throb, as a novel, is not generous to the reality TV scene. It presents Calvin 'Simon Cowell' Simms as an uncaring puppet master and the show is shamelessly manipulative. Is this reality? I would like to give X Factor more credit than Elton does, but there are also clearly elements of truth.

The main characters are all likeable in their own bizarre way, lampooned to breaking point but entertaining for the reader. The contestants, too, have distinct personalities and back stories. One of the most prominent and interesting storylines is Calvin's attempts to have Prince Charles win the competition which begins as a thoroughly bizarre twist but, with enough suspended belief, becomes all part of the fun.

The concluding twist is completely unexpected and very well-played. Elton delivers a thoroughly shocking final act that ties up the remaining loose ends and delivers the book's message.

The drawback for me is how dark and graphic the novel becomes in parts. The high jinks and nonsense are juxtaposed with a bulimic character who almost kills herself, for example, and crude, explicit sexual details. The unpredictable tone makes it hard to swallow.

Overall, Elton has devised a clever story and writes it very well, creating colourful, hilarious characters that doesn't quite get three yeses from the panel, but manages to get two and through to the next round.

Jo says

Ben Elton's 2006 novel *Chart Throb* is certainly not a new release, but is a novel that I've been wanting to read for some time. Considering my own cynical view of reality TV in general, and talent-style shows in particular, I had quite anticipated Elton's take on 'The Ultimate Pop Quest'.

The novel follows the producer/writer/judge Calvin Simms as he ruthlessly manipulates his fellow judges, the hopeful contestants, and the British public, throughout the process of creating his X-Factor-style entertainment show, *Chart Throb*. He and his fellow judges, transexual rock-superstar and reality-show matriarch Beryl Blenheim, and Rodney "nice guy" someone-or-other, sit in judgement over the countless clinger, blinger and minger hopefuls who "have a dream" and "want it so much".

There are some great 'everybody knows' moments in this novel. Everybody knows that if the three judges really auditioned all 95,000 applicants for the show, it would take years rather than the 4 weeks they show on TV. Everybody knows that the singing is less important than the story and the entertainment value of the performers. Everybody knows that the producers make more money from telephone voting than they do from any kind of recording careers that may come out of the show. But everybody knows that admitting any of these things takes away from the fun of the experience for both performers and audience. So, seeing these facts presented through the cynical self-promoting bastardry of Calvin Simms is both darkly amusing and queasily unsettling.

In saying all of that, I didn't enjoy this novel as much as I thought I would. That's really no fault of Elton's, mind you. The characters are all suitably tacky and self-aggrandising. The plot is all-too-believable. The desperation and shattered dreams of the contestants are sympathetically presented. Really, there's nothing that I can complain about.

Except that the novel really is a cynical look at the behind-the-scenes roller-coaster ride of a TV reality show. There isn't a single likeable primary character in this book. And, despite hoping-against-hope that somehow the underdog wins, the truth comes out, or the bastards get their just desserts, everybody knows that the only thing real about reality TV is that nice guys really do finish last.

Steve Horsfall says

Chart Throb is a savage commentary on the contrived world of talent shows like the X-Factor with a wonderful satirical view of the overblown egos of the Judges. At times the observations and pathos of the contestants, and how they are manipulated, make you cringe as much as the real thing. Having a famous member of the Royal Family as a contestant did seem to be a surreal step too far, until I saw Simon Cowell talking about his efforts to involve President Obama in *American Idol*!!

Lisa Macon says

I downloaded this book to my Kindle on the recommendation of my sister and her husband, who are huge Ben Elton fans. I must say that I really appreciated the sarcastic humor that Elton lays on like peanut butter. It's a lot of fun. I am a little disturbed when I think that *American Idol* and other competition shows like that

are really run similarly to the way Chart Throb, the fictional talent competition that the story surrounds. I mean, really? Wow, if that's true, I'm never watching AI or SYTYCD again. Anyway, I guess I was in the mood for something more literary, but I do recommend this book based on the sarcastic humor. It's very entertaining.

Cass says

After reading "Chart Throb", by Ben Elton, I don't think I will ever be able to watch a reality tv series again. I feel kind of dirty and want to cry. It rings so true that it is almost upsetting.

The story revolves around the producer of a hit reality television show similar to Idol or X Factor. The book focuses on the manipulation used to make the show such a success, the scripting of events, the frankensteining of interviews, the general lack of conscience exhibited by the staff of the show as the exploit contestant after contestant.

The manipulation of the characters was horrendous, and yet I struggle to believe that it is really fiction. I am kind of left with the feeling that that must be the way it is... and that sickens me.

I am fast becoming a fan of Ben Elton, his novels just seem to hang around in my mind for days and weeks. He creates the most realistic visuals that I can't seem to forget, and he seems to have such an understanding of the human psyche. Ben Elton writes unforgettable books.. Funny, dark, and always deep.

John says

Everyone who watches those god-awful Simon Cowell productions should be forced to read this. Or more likely listen to the audio book due to them being barely past the Janet and John stage. Elton is by far a better writer than he is comedian, and this book cuts through the bullshit surrounding such shows. If I was to have one complaint, it would be too many characters. But that aside, it is still very funny and Ben Elton proves himself to still be at the cutting edge of British satirical writing.

Rachel says

This book is essential reading for everyone in the world who has ever watched and enjoyed a reality television 'talent' show.

Seriously. If you love them, it will open your eyes to how foolish you have been in trusting them, and if you are already a sceptic, you will enjoy the fantastically witty way in which Elton rips into them.

Chart Throb is name of the most popular reality TV talent contest on the air in the UK as our novel opens. The mastermind behind it, Calvin Simms, is Simon Cowell, but meaner, more manipulative and savvy. He has a bit of a problem. He has just gotten married to a southern belle who reveals she wants a divorce as soon

as they return to his mansion from their honeymoon. Of course, being an expert gold-digger, she plans to take him for at least half his wealth and he is having none of it. So he makes a desperate deal. He will give her ALL of his money if he fails to manipulate the public into crowning a person of her choice as the Chart Throb winner in the upcoming series. But if he can make the hapless person win, she gets absolutely nothing.

Dakota, his money-minded wife sees an opportunity and takes it, choosing one of the most hated men in Britain as her ‘winner’. He just happens to be His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales.

As you might expect, this story is of this series of Chart Throb in which we see a master manipulator at work, getting contestants and viewers alike to perform for him like puppets in order to save his fortune. But it is much more than this.

Elton weaves in a huge cast of characters, populating the novel with an array of colourful contestants (the “blingers, clingers and mingers” but not necessarily singers) including a desperate girl on the edge who “wants it so much”, a loved up duo which happens to include a vocally-talentless blind man, an aging male stripper, and a couple of teenaged bimbos, one of whom suffers an eating disorder.

Some serious issues hide underneath the mockery, including the exploitation of vulnerable people, the risks of the pursuit of fame and how one should never trust the media for a fair representation.

Aiding Simms in his judging of the talentless masses, are a British rocker whose sex change has made him into Beryl Blenheim, a Sharon Osbourne-esque reality television star and ‘mother’ of the year to a pop-star wannabe teenage daughter with a failing album, and Rodney Root – a former music mogul who longs for publicity and fame, while suffering from being the boring third judge. Hosting is Keely, a perky, pretty shoulder for the failed contestants to cry on – a mish-mash of Cat Deeley and Kate Thornton, hosts of So You Think You Can Dance, and X Factor respectively.

Now, I do really like this book. So much in fact that I got through the 464 pages within a day, laughing out loud several times.

As someone who used to love these ‘talent’ contests and who recently, (by way of the latest series of X Factor in the UK) has become very disillusioned with the idea, I felt validated by this book. It made so much sense, was funny, smart and bold. Though out in 2006, this book covers so many issues that were raised in the just-finished X Factor series, such as vote-rigging, judges keeping in talentless, unpopular contestants to keep in controversial, and editing to make contestants seem better or worse to the audience. Which is why everyone who loves X Factor should read this book as it points everything out, but in a way that won’t make loyal fans rush to defend the show.

The pacing is brilliant, hooking the reader in with a glimpse of a character called Shaiana, crying her eyes out on an episode of Chart Throb with Keely cajoling her into uttering those clichéd phrases. “I want it so much. It’s my dream.” Then introducing us to Calvin and his plot line, then to Beryl and her US fly-on-the-wall TV show a la The Osbournes, and to desperate Rodney Root trying to cling to fame. Then we meet the crew behind the scenes, researchers and assistants Emma, Trent and Chelsea, who go through the task of finding the ‘blingers’ ‘clingers’ and ‘mingers’ for the show. Just as you think too much is going on, it switches back to Calvin’s storyline, or to HRH the Prince of Wales, or to the research team. Then some contestants get their stories introduced.

Despite sounding like all these characters and their threads are all over the place they do all come together. It’s seamless at times, and I often found that as I was starting to grow tired with one scene, the next chapter

would take me back to something interesting.

Some things did bother me though. Firstly, the name dropping of people such as Simon Cowell, Sharon Osbourne and Louis Walsh – though necessary to show that the characters were not these people but parodies of them, took me out of the story a bit at first. I found myself wondering what happened to them to make these replacements bigger than them. I mean, it's a little difficult to think of anyone being 'Mr Nasty' but Simon Cowell, and he's not exactly going to go away even if his TV shows lose in the ratings. But that aside, the parodies are so well done I can forgive Elton this little thing.

Also, as it was released in 2006, 2 full years before 'Saint' Cheryl Cole became a judge on the X Factor, I can forgive the lack of Cheryl-Bashing. I really would have loved to see him rip into her though, as she is perfect for parodying.

The ending was so full of twists I was almost left confused. Almost. In the end it finishes both surprisingly and predictably, if that is even possible. It's rather clever. As was the characterisation of HRH The Prince of Wales. Close enough to the real thing to be funny, but different enough and flattering enough to prevent an angry Royal. I bet even he laughed at himself if he ever read this book.

Overall, the comedy was perfect, as you come to expect from such a celebrated comic as Ben Elton. With Blackadder, The Young Ones, Maybe Baby and We Will Rock You to his name, it is inevitable that he will create enough laughs. He does get his point across though.

He really gets it to hit home just how ridiculous reality television talent shows are.

So after reading this, a book given to me as an unexpected Christmas gift and devoured within a day of me receiving it, I will most definitely be giving Ben Elton's other novels a go.

Entertaining, thought provoking and just so very, very funny!

I_ty_toje says

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Pvw says

In this parody of popular talent shows, Ben Elton's writing has become way too formulaic. Like most Elton novels, this one starts with a dramatic flash forward, in this case the tear on the cheek of one of the contestants in the final. Then, like in all other Elton novels, we travel back in time and lots of characters are introduced. Many of those are the contestants in the show and a lot of attention also goes to the jury, all three of which are absolute assholes. You can imagine all those people coming together at some moment, thus creating a story. That doesn't happen until the last chapter, so saying that this book has a rather long build-up is a major understatement. The actual ending is the biggest, most forced and terribly unlikely anticlimax that I have ever read.

What is lacking in this book is the humour you usually expect from Elton. Except for a few descriptions of some of the more pathetic candidates, the book is drowned in the way too serious tone with which Elton wants to kick everyone a conscience.

Furthermore, there is the totally unnecessary plot element of the Prince of Wales taking part in the singing contest. As if he has been paid by Buckingham Palace, Elton presents this old aristocrat as a good natured bloke with his heart in the right spot and as someone who can actually sing very well. Can this be written by the same guy who collaborated on "Blackadder"?

So let's not waste more words, this is an awful book that is way too preachy and that just follows the structure of every other Elton book, while lacking the humour that makes it worth you while. I can think of only one redeeming quality: the machinations behind the screen of such a talent contest have been quite convincingly described, and it is impossible to view such shows afterwards without seeing through all the make-believe and the scenario that is created by the redactionists.

But apart from that, "Chart Throb" can only be a huge disappointment for any Elton fan, and a reason not to read anything else by him for all new readers.

Isabel (kittiwake) says

I would recommend this book to any reality television fans whose illusions won't be shattered by the amount of behind-the-scenes manipulation in this X Factor satire. If you really believe that the X Factor is a talent contest which the best singer will win, you may like to skip this book, especially if you see Sharon Osbourne as a lovely motherly person who hates to send any of the contestants home. Although Ben Elton has made the female judge on the Chart Throb panel a transsexual ex-rock star with a drug-addled wife and twin step-daughters who like to annoy her by calling her Dad instead of Mum, Beryl's mannerisms and comments to the contestants are totally Sharon Osbourne.

I wouldn't say that this is one of Ben Elton's best books, as it was repetitive and the story dragged at times, but I found it very funny and didn't spot the final twist coming at all.

Monique says

Well... what can I say? I'm in two minds about this book. I love Ben Elton, and his books are usually quick, fun reads. The ones I've read, at list. This one is a quick read, too, and at times it's quite fun, but somehow it lacks the sparkle of, say, *Past Mortem* or *Dead Famous* and the likeable characters and tragicomedy of *The First Casualty* and *Inconceivable*.

I like the way Elton gives an inside view into editing and television making, but he had already done so before in '*Dead Famous*', so it's a bit repetitive. Same goes for the over-the-top characters; they were funny first time round, but this time I found it all a bit too much.

Still, it's not all bad. It is Ben Elton after all, so the writing is good. The pacing of the book is okay too, and some scenes are quite funny. It's certainly an easy read, it's just a shame that it lacks real sparkle and nice characters. A nice enough book, but for those wanting to sample Elton's work I'd sooner recommend *Past Mortem*, *The First Casualty* or *Dead Famous*.

Thomas Strömquist says

"Disappointing book after the very funny and clever "Inconcievable". This is unbelievable both in characters and events and even if the "revealing" story about how this kind of TV-shows are made probably is (at least partly) true, it is not very interesting. Since I do not enjoy watching "talent search shows" I certainly do not enjoy reading about them, and a considerable part of the book is just a narrative of the TV-programme. I do have plenty of Ben Elton books left to read and will definitely be giving them a chance. "

Charmaine Elliott says

I laughed a lot at this excellently narrated exaggerated farce. The characters were gigantic caricatures whose dialogue pushed the boundaries. I learnt new words, like 'love pump' and am still assimilating a Bizarre Beryl and her progressive gender conversion. Highly amusing, yet tragic my naive view of talent spotting shows like *Idols* has been blemished forever. The trouble with this book is that the manipulations and twists are simply too credible. I tired of the Rodney character and the phrase 'you owned' that song. But I suppose the endless repetition of such comments highlights what unimaginative bores judges can be. And since it seems they are bought and instructed it makes sense to portray a Rodney as a parroting puppet. The fact that wannabes set themselves up to be ridiculed and scoffed at is equally sad. I had never heard of Ben Elton before this book was mentioned on Radio 702 and noticed a new one in Exclusive Books today. I'm tempted to try another Ben Elton. I think he is clever, witty and sadly cynical

Lara says

I read up to page 117 and stopped. I actually found a review that precisely says what I think about this book so i'm going to paste it below; because honestly, it's not worth my time writing my own review.

"The point of the satire seems to be that these competitive reality shows are obviously highly engineered. The problem is, that point is so obvious that it's hard to be terribly interested in such an easy target, presented in such an easy fashion.

Chart Top is bloated with a variety of other subplots and contestants, who all fall into Calvin's categories of "Mingers, Clingers, and Blingers," and good lord do the characters ever repeat that phrase as if it were hilarious, every single time.

The contestants represent all the range of ego, delusion, anorexia, pathos, and questionable talent that you'd expect from the average reality show. The Prince of Wales is one of them, a pawn in a bet between Calvin and his soon-to-be-ex-wife to see if he can truly manipulate the audience into choosing his preferred winner.

The Prince is presumably a caricature of the current holder of that title, but while I'm no Brit, and no royal watcher, the portrait didn't resonate at all. Chart Throb's royal is a goofy, eager-to-please idealist devoid of any wit and intelligence who calls himself "muggins." If that's how Charles appears in the UK press, I'd join those wanting to vote to overthrow the monarchy.

Bloated and ultimately meaningless, Chart Throb is on par with the kind of entertainment it's attempting to skewer."

At 400 pages it's a light read, irritating and completely unenjoyable, completely obvious in its intentions and execution, lacking in true wit and humour.

Source- <http://blogcritics.org/books/article/...>
