



Serpent Girl: A Novel

Matthew Carnahan

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“The guys who were supposed to be my crew, my pals, my posse, had left me for dead, after I had gone above and beyond for them, after I had sussed out the perfect score, after I had done my homework, after I had overcome their stupidity, after I had sacrificed my near-virginity by having sex with the limbless lady.”

When he wakes up naked by the side of the highway in the middle of the desert, twenty-two-year-old Bailey Quinn is only sure of a few things: He’s in a world of testicle pain. He’s tripping out of his head on peyote. And someone seems to have made a half-assed attempt at slashing his throat. He can’t for the life of him remember what happened. And then it all comes back: His boys screwed him over.

Bailey, college dropout and carny, was working props and rigging for a touring tent circus and freak show. The Freaks were the nastiest, most tweaked-out group of misfits Bailey had ever come across. But the Freaks were doing some shady bookkeeping in addition to a boatload of veterinary Quaalude and crystal meth. So to get the inside dope on the circus payroll, Bailey took up with Eelie, the Serpent Girl, and began an unexpectedly erotic and dangerous odyssey.

As Bailey hits the road to track down his “friends” and get his loot back, a black-edged, hilarious caper unfolds. From Tank Deerflower, the drug-dealing rodeo rider, and Arnold, the fire-eater with a temper as black as his charred throat, to Sissy, the beautiful ex-junkie/whore who steals Bailey’s heart, strange characters and stranger events converge in this fast, gritty, and unforgettable novel. Crafted with artistry and deftness, *Serpent Girl* is a voyage into the darkest depths of carny life—and, remarkably, a tender love story to boot.

From the Hardcover edition.

Serpent Girl: A Novel Details

Date : Published March 1st 2005 by Villard (first published 2005)

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Author : Matthew Carnahan

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From Reader Review *Serpent Girl: A Novel* for online ebook

Lillia says

There are elements of this book that aren't really my cup of tea, but it kept me reading, and the story is well told but easy to follow with just enough depth to make it worthwhile.

David says

This was a quick read... Lot's of white space on the pages. But it was a fun book. Bailey Quinn is a looser burnout petty thief who decides to get his act together by joining the circus. The story begins as Bailey wakes up on the side of the road. He had been dumped there by his double crossing buddies after they ripped off the payroll from the circus. Much of the story is told in flash back mode. We alternate between learning about Bailey's life in the circus and his quest to exact vengeance on his partners in crime.

The pleasure isn't in the plot, but in the way the story is told.

Donna Jo Atwood says

This book had some good blurbs, but the story is not for me. I had read *Geek Love* and was fascinated/repelled by the the characters. In *Serpent Girl*, I was just repelled. If you enjoy books about drugs and sex you might like this, I didn't. Oh, yes, the book do take place in a circus/carnie atmosphere.

Task 10.1 Under the Big Top

Carly Miller says

I devour books about circus freaks and this one was absolutely compelling to me from start to finish. A very easy read with some truly nasty characters.

It's been over a year since I read the book, so I fear this review isn't much to go on. I just remember sitting in stunned silence at the end and barely putting it down throughout. However, I can't remember it fully, so it obviously wasn't a life changer.

dana says

I picked this up on the behalf of the author's best friend who lived down the beach from me.

The depiction of the life is captivating, even from someone who has lived a parallel existance but in the luxury of tour buses and catered food.

I'm not one to pick up fluffy chic-lit for my weekend at the beach, this is more my speed. An easy enjoyable read.

Patrick Boye says

If I never read the phrase "copping free" again it will still be too soon. The book is shallow and trite. It lacks depth, character development and direction. It is derivative. On the plus size it is only 194 pages and can be read in two hours.

If you like banal books that seem to be written by a horny 14 year old, this is the book for you.

Victoria says

I really enjoyed this book! It was different, tautly written, highly entertaining and intelligent, too. Though short for a novel (just under two hundred pages), its pace was consistent and a startling amount of story and character was conveyed to the reader. Were it not for the whole circus aspect, it would make for an excellent film (I think it would be just too offensive on the big screen for most audiences). I really enjoyed this debut novel and will definitely be keeping an eye out for any future books produced by this unique talent.

M says

This fast-paced novel mixes high crime and circus freaks and hits puree. Bailey Quinn has finally found a way to get on his feet - by ripping off the carnival freakshow that has hired him. Unfortunately for Bailey, he finds betrayal at every turn - and a vengeful, limbless ex-girlfriend hunting him down.

Richard says

Written by screenwriter Matthew Carnahan, this reads much more like a first draft of a script than a fully realized novel. The setup- a former carny robs his old bosses, then is double crossed by his crew and left for dead- is interesting, but the rest of the book is rushed and forced into barely two hundred pages, which leaves no time for important things like characterization or plot. The book feels like a writing exercise combining the movies Freaks and True Romance, sadly removing the creepiness of the former and the drugged out charm of the latter. While a diverting afternoon read, I find it hard to recommend to just about anyone.

hawa says

so i read this book in middle school and it was one of the first books i read that had sex in it and i still think about that chapter a lot because it introduced that weird intersection of dehumanization and desexualization & it describes him rolling her body around like a tire on a pole or something & i kind of use it as a benchmark for comparison to other sex scenes i witness but also it was really fucked up and i kind of hated

the protagonist because what the fuck he burns down the entire circus or something and kills everyone including the snake lady he banged and i still can't get over that scene when snake fucko bites off a chunk of flesh from his face there are a lot of things that i read in this book that i still can't get over

& tbh the prose was so-so and wasn't the worst but wasn't memorable either but a lot of the shit that went down affected me so much and it was such a strangely hopeful, optimistic book that got me through some tough times and it's been like five years and i still cannot get any of it out of my head okay

Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Bailey Quinn

SETTING: American West

RATING: 3.5

WHY: Bailey Quinn is a college dropout and recreational drug user who decides to join the circus to get away from his messed-up life and prepare for returning to school. He and his friends do a lot of "copping free", meaning they steal stuff but don't really harm anyone. He figures out a way to do that with the circus. Part of his plan involves sleeping with the Limbless Lady, Eelie. His partners rip him off and almost kill him, which leads to a wild ride to retribution. I wish that Carnahan had stepped off the break and taken more advantage of the cast involving fire eaters, messed-up clowns, etc.

Autumn Christian says

A fun, short little book about a man who stole from the circus, and incurred the wrath of the limbless Serpent Girl.

The good: It's well written and engaging. Has several laugh-out-loud moments and characters that are like literary car-wrecks you can't look away from.

The bad: I do wish that the book expounded more on the relationship between the Serpent Girl and the protagonist, and the ending was a bit of a deus ex machina. Ultimately, I felt the protagonist really didn't change from his experience (Which isn't entirely necessary, but it felt forced at the end by his chance encounter with a new girl, Sissy) and the happy ending wasn't deserved. The protagonist's 'tough guy' persona did end up being a little grating - he didn't seem to care about much, and when he did care it didn't seem to quite fit with the rest of his persona. He does describe himself as 'almost a sociopath', but I still would've liked a protagonist that was more than just a wise-cracking observer.

Katie says

I've been on a circus kick lately, for no apparent reason, but when I saw Serpent Girl at a used book store for \$1, I figured it'd be worth picking up. I had no knowledge of the book, and hadn't read reviews, but the write up looked interesting and the praise on the book jacket looked promising. It's written in the voice of a young 20 something man, and although he's easy not to root for, you do end up getting somewhat attached.

Carnahan's writing is well detailed, but the timeline was slightly confusing, in that it's neither linear, nor very

clear at what point we are in the speaker's life. It's a quick read, and mostly enjoyable, but not one I'd rush to recommend to someone looking for their next book.

Jenni Lathrop says

Okay, sure, it sounds as crass as it is. And the plot is pretty thin (simple revenge plot). And there isn't anything really redeeming about any of the characters (aside from Sissy). But this book was so much fun!

It's a quick read, easily slipping from present to past events to even further past events and back again. Bailey really just wants to get some money to go back to college and he plans to get it by stealing from the circus owners who are pretty shady to begin with. It goes wrong when his friends turn on him.

This is a crass book and not meant for kids. The language is foul, the descriptions vivid, but Carnahan's writing is so fun and his descriptions so unusual that this is just such an entertaining book to read. I want to write more, but the description above pretty much covers the book. The main character is everything he appears to be. He never pretends he's doing anything for any other reason than getting his money back for school. There are little sketches throughout the book that don't really move the plot along but are a fun addition. In this day and age where authors don't like chapters let alone chapter titles, Carnahan has fun chapter titles. I usually just skim over chapter titles, but made sure to read them in this book.

While reviews say this is a "hilarious" book, laugh-out-loud, and riotous, I don't know that I would go that far, but this was certainly a fun summer read. Recommended highly!

Lee Ann Johnson says

Bailey Quinn wakes up by the side of a road after people he considered to be his friends stole his part of the take from a robbery. The writing, while not sparse, is also not padded in any way, lying to keep up the pace. An excellent read, particularly because it has a completely non-apologetic amorality to it.
