

books

Stranger Than Fiction

Rosie memoir pales in comparison to ambitious novel

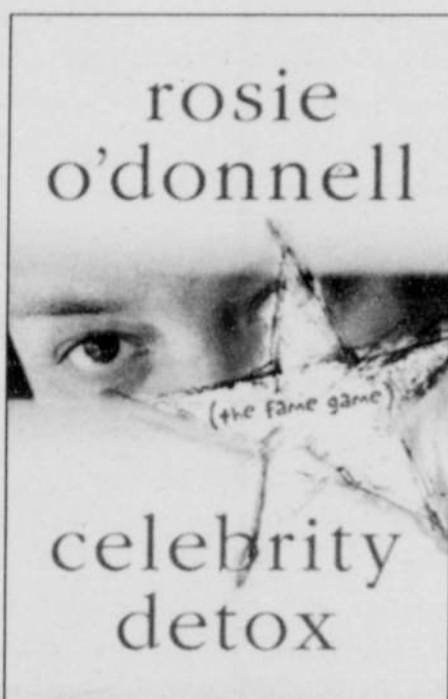
Celebrity Detox: The Fame Game

by Rosie O'Donnell; Grand Central Publishing, 2007; \$23.99 hardcover

Considering how long Rosie O'Donnell kept quiet about her personal life, I never thought I'd be wishing that she'd shut up already.

Don't get me wrong: I truly admire her candor in talking about raising four kids with her long-time partner. Thanks to her tumultuous year on *The View*—not to mention her HBO documentary *All Aboard! Rosie's Family Cruise*—she has raised major visibility for same-sex parents.

The former standup comic also deserves props for spicing up a show that had been stagnating since the departure of egomaniacal co-host Star Jones: awkward moments with humor-challenged colleague Barbara Walters; heated debates with logic-challenged colleague Elisabeth Hasselbeck; and strange public feuds with Donald Trump (concerning his arrogant treatment of Miss USA Tara Conner) and rival daytime diva Kelly Ripa (concerning her "homophobic" attitude toward Clay Aiken,



a closet case who likely didn't even want O'Donnell coming to his defense). Her hasty departure in May finally put an end to the drama.

So why in the world did she feel the need to write a whole book about a job that was simply a bad fit? *Celebrity Detox* begins with a familiar premise—that fame can cause as many problems as it solves—but O'Donnell soon abandons that subject and starts babbling about her adoration for Barbra Streisand (a truly tired symptom of mommy issues) and about how she equates goodness with "yellow." (Don't ask.)

O'Donnell teases us with potentially juicy revelations—like when Jane Fonda asked if she and Madonna were once lovers—but instead pads the book with her quasi-haiku, all-lowercase blog entries. The flow is illogical and frustrating, and the climactic moment that led to her leaving *The View* (a split-screen political feud with Hasselbeck) is left out entirely.

If you're looking for further insight into what went on behind the scenes, you're not going to find it here. The only good thing to be said about this rushed project is that the proceeds benefit Rosie's Broadway Kids,

a charity that offers a professional theater experience for children who might otherwise not have the opportunity.

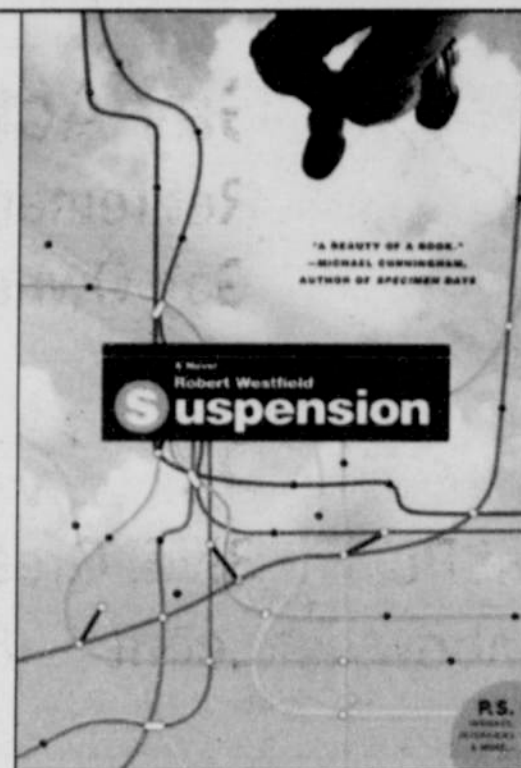
—Jim Radosta

Suspension

by Robert Westfield; Harper Perennial, 2006; \$13.95 softcover

Several novelists have tackled the thorny topic of the 9/11 attacks, with varying degrees of success. In his funny and touching book *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Jonathan Safran Foer detailed the aftermath of the events from the perspective of a precocious boy whose father died at the World Trade Center. Ian McEwan gave a British account of the fallout of 9/11 in the expertly written but stilted novel *Saturday*.

Now gay American writer Robert Westfield makes his debut with *Suspension*, the tale of a young man who is bewildered by the surreal changes in his life after 9/11. It's an ambitious book that blends elements of mystery, romance and outright farce. While the first half is highly engaging, the second half suffers from sloppy plotting, confusing changes of perspective and jarring tonal changes. Westfield might be up to something intrepid when he suddenly transitions from high drama to *Three's Company*-style shtick, but it was lost on me.



Andy Green, the narrator, is a New Yorker who makes his living devising multiple-choice questions for standardized tests. Through his best friend, Sonia—a Russian cabaret singer who speaks mangled English—he meets a wealthy boy-

friend who disappears under mysterious circumstances. Andy gets a grip on this romantic debacle, but he's driven into hiding after he and his future brother-in-law get savagely beat up.

So far so good, but the plot really gets out of hand in the remaining stretch. The events of 9/11 transpire while Andy is holed up in his apartment. When he finally emerges, no one is who they seem to be, and there's an unsolved murder and some white-collar crimes to contend with. Without exception Westfield's resolutions to these dilemmas are either uninspired or painfully contrived.

Without prowling for symbolism, the title refers to the suspension bridges that play a pivotal role in the plot. One is the Brooklyn Bridge, the site of a romantic interlude and, on a disturbing note, a death by gunfire. The second suspension bridge in question is in Wheeling, W.Va., site of the novel's anticlimactic climax.

—Stephen Blair 10

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