



Reality Check

Jen Calonita

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Sixteen-year-olds Charlie, Keiran, Brooke, and Hallie have just been signed up for their own reality television show. They can't even believe it. "You'll be *The Hills* meets *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*," the Armani-suited executive tells them, "and the hottest thing on our network." How could they say no?

But soon enough, cameras following them everywhere and interfering producers surreptitiously scripting their lives start to affect the four best friends' relationship. Brooke seems to want all the screen time. Keiran is abruptly written out of the show-and consequently the group's friendship-when she doesn't rate well. As soon as Charlie realizes what's going on, she figures out the perfect way to give the studio and her home audience a much-needed reality check.

Because friends don't let friends do reality shows.

Reality Check Details

Date : Published June 14th 2010 by Poppy (first published June 2010)

ISBN : 9780316045544

Author : Jen Calonita

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Contemporary, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Realistic Fiction

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Claire says

Ok.. I am rounding down to 2 here... maybe 2.5. It really wasn't terrible but there were a few things that irked me about the book. For me, it was too slow to get started, nearly 80 pages in before they even start filming them. Also the timeline was a bit out for me, for example the party/going to New York/Charlie's date with Zac is completely messed up to me. They are invited to a party that is *next* saturday, over the next few days Zac asks Charlie out for *next* friday (now the book is not clear on which day the book starts but considering they talk about school, it's safe to say it's a weekday) so next week arrives - party on saturday night (looking forward to next friday when Charlie has her date with Zac), next chapter opens with - "Talk about warp speed. The following friday..." I'm sorry isn't the following friday her date? Next thing you know they are shooting and then it's not until chapter 6 that we get to the date. Time just doesn't make sense to me in this world *n.b.* - *if someone could help clear this up for me that would be great!*

There were a few things repeated that threw me off as well, example - (also spoiler) "He confessed that he was only dating her to get one TV" then barely half a page goes by and we get - "He dated Hallie only because of the show". I actually stopped and went 'hang on, haven't we covered this?'

Anyway, those things aside, it is not a bad read. Brooke is a total bitch and you can tell from outset she is. Charlie is not nearly as pushy as everyone says she is, I really didn't see it. Keiran is lovely and Hallie is pretty funny. Even I felt myself cringing when the first episode aired!!

I think I would have enjoyed it more if I wasn't overthinking it, which is totally my fault not the authors.

Nasty Lady MJ says

To see full review click [here](#).

Alright, to be honest I wasn't expecting much when I checked this one out at the library. I've read plenty of Jen Calonita books to know what to expect, but this book is by the far the worst one I've read by her.

I will give it this, it's good clean fun. I would have no problem letting a younger sibling's or friend's kid reading it. But besides that, I really can't be complimentary. Oh, wait it was relatively short. That allowed the book to be finished, but I'll talk more about that in the best feature portion of this review.

Now, let's talk about the actual contents of the book. As I said before, not impressive. Perhaps it's because I've read a lot of the authors books that I was able to spot all her tropes (seemingly normal girl who becomes famous, secretly bitchy friend, boy that is based off of a celebrity (in this book it's Zac Efron), Hollywood's surprising dark side which really isn't that much of a surprise, seemingly normal girl is able to get everything fixed by the end of the book, oh and over saturation of description of clothing). Yeah, I sort of knew what I was getting myself into too, but I had hopes. Her recent series, Belles, while it relies on some of these tropes is different enough. This though, just seems it was written to fulfill the requirements of a paycheck. There was nothing unique about it at all.

I think it also didn't help matters that the characters were hardly developed at all. All of them just stuck to

their roles. I was really hoping there would've more to all of them or at the very least Charlie and Brooke. Brooke's transformation to bitch, really didn't make sense. I was hoping that there would be more explanation than I just wanna be popular. At one point, I actually thought that she secretly was in love with Marleyna. It would've made much sense and a more interesting storyline had this been the way Calonita went, but nope. As for Charlie, other than having these friends, working in a coffee shop, and being in love with some guy who apparently wants to be a journalist despite the fact he throws up anytime he has to do public speaking whatsoever, we know nothing about her. She's just as bland and stupid as her other two friends. When she's threatened with breach of contract instead of talking to her parents who'd surely get their lawyer involved, she just takes everything at face value (see more about the legal issues in this book in the worst feature section), and their big plan at the end to get out of the contract I think would've left more legal issues than they or the author would've thought about.

So yeah, not impressed. At all.

Honestly though, I don't really know what this book could've done to improve itself. Better character development and research would've helped, but the general concept is cliche. I sort of had an idea it was going to at best get a middle rating from me when I checked it out because how bland the plot summary was. We've seen reality TV turned to YA book before with LA Candy and The Real Real, so this is really nothing new. And the cherry on top is that Calonita didn't try to make it new. She used tropes that she has used in her other books and still uses in the Belles series. However, unlike Belles, which has its moments, this book does not.

Best Feature: Short: This book was mercifully short, under three hundred pages. So I could stomach finishing it. To be honest about it, I hate DNFing anything, but if a book is ridiculously long and bad I will usually stop it unless it's train wreck bad like Starcrossed.

Worst Feature: Kangaroo Court: The lack of legal research in this novel was laughable. First of all, one of the biggest conflicts in this book involved breach of contract. However, since the contract was made by a minor it would generally be voidable in the first place. This means when push comes to shove, all those threats about being sued by Fire and Ice would be futile. That's a pretty big plot hole if you think about it. One that could've easily been covered. There were other aspects of the whole deal between the parties that had me shaking my head as well. A lot of this could've been fixed with a little research, but God it was annoying.

Appropriateness: Clean as a whistle. Honestly, these books are probably middle grade books masquerading as YA books. I feel with Jen Calonita you always get a clean book which is nice. The characters might have a little more sophisticated tone than you'd see in some middle grade book, but it still read pretty young to me.

Katie says

Siiiggggh. Reality tv books is one of those genres that is just not what I want! I am pretty sure I've talked about this before, but I'm interested in hearing nitty-gritty details about how it works and how you live your life with cameras following you and articles being written about you.

But the books always turn into "It sucks and get off the show." And maybe that's true! For all that I want to read books about reality tv, I haven't really watched the non-singing show variety.

Anyway, this does get an extra star because I love that (view spoiler)

Caitlinleah says

I couldn't figure out if it was poorly written or just bad characterization. I knew exactly what was going to happen to these friends and I didn't care from the moment I met them.

Susan says

I loved Jen Calonita's "Secrets of My Hollywood Life" series and I was excited to see something else by her.

Essentially, the plot follows a group of friends (charismatic Charlie, boy crazy Hallie, shy Kiernan, and ambitious Brooke) from a sleepy beach town in New York who are approached to have a reality show starring them. The girls are thrilled--money, success, fame, and glamour will be right at their fingertips and all they have to do is let cameras follow them around. However, fame quickly changes the girls for the worse. Filming stresses them out, especially when they are forced to repeat hurtful arguments for the sake of continuity and eager hanger ons are desperate to be their friends just for fifteen minutes of fame. Plus, they don't know who they can trust--their producer Addison, who is responsible for capturing all their catfights on film or the show runner Susan, who was nice at first but is now increasingly distant.

The book's strengths are that Jen Calonita manages to keep the action and drama going until you just can't put the book down because you want to see how it'll end. A positive note is that the girls support each other for the most part and do their best to keep from becoming back-stabbing frenemies that the show wants them to be which is a breather from all those reality shows airing right now. Plus, the book sprinkles some details on how reality shows work and confirms that yes, some reality is scripted.

However, Jen Calonita doesn't flesh out the girls' personalities well enough especially since the POV is only focused on Charlie and her issues with Brooke, who becomes increasingly insecure and jealous, and her crush/boyfriend Zac, who is uncomfortable with all the cameras.

Also, there is a little too much telling than showing. We're told about the girls' personalities, family life, and back stories but none of it is really shown. Honestly, the only character who has a fleshed out story is Brooke, not our main protagonist. Additionally, the outfit descriptions are tedious and unnecessary. I love costumes and outfits as much as the next person but it's pretty jarring to have the characters talking and then have Charlie constantly comment on their clothes.

Regardless, it's a good beach read and I'm relieved that this book wasn't the type where the characters all turn on each other and then make up, despite their crappy behavior towards one another. In this book, Charlie, Hallie, and Kiernan stick together and refuse to let fame gets to their heads while Brooke becomes increasingly enthralled by the world of reality tv to the point she chooses the show over her friendship. I was a little disappointed that there was no redemption for Brooke but honestly, she was beyond redemption and it would have been inauthentic for Calonita to cram in a happy ending.

Ana says

Gostei imenso, é um livro que nos faz pensar no que é realmente importante

Amy says

I love this author but was very disappointed by this book! I didn't expect reality check to be so full of catty girl characters. It just gave me a headache because there's enough girl drama at school in real life so I didn't want to read about more girl drama. Interesting to see some truths behind reality tv, but I would recommend checking out one of her other books instead.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by John Jacobson, aka "R.J. Jacobs" for TeensReadToo.com

Take four sixteen-year-old girls: Charlie, Keiran, Brooke, and Hallie, each different and a unique personality. Charlie is the group leader, entertaining and peppy. Keiran, her long-time best friend, is quiet and always stuck babysitting her annoying siblings. Hallie is the flirt, both extremely pretty and constantly modest about what her boy skills do. Brooke is the one who wants fame and glory, and to get out of Cliffside and her life as the daughter of two farmers. The offer to do a reality show for Fire and Ice, the new MTV, is just too good to pass up for these girls. Before they know it, they're rocketing towards fame and fortune, and they can't get enough of it.

Of course, once the cameras start rolling, things don't go as planned. 'Scripted reality' just isn't cutting it. Either they have to redo scenes, or they fight because of one thing or another. And when the previews for the show start to come in...they realize that what they say on screen is entirely different from off. Then Brooke starts getting buddy-buddy with one of her old-time rivals, and a smattering of envy at Charlie's position as the show's star. Cliffside is seeing enough drama with this new reality series - but with the constant problems of this once-close group of friends, they may be getting too much.

With a reality show style book, characterization is hard to work. Pretty much every book, this one included, has each girl as a personality archetype that fits the reality television standard. While it gets annoying after a while, I felt like Calonita really pulled off a good balance between the archetype and a fresh character. Charlie was an excellent protagonist to use; I love that she is the rock of the group instead of the one being changed by the spotlight. Her solid personality and ultimate goal of friendship was wonderful - heck, even her motivation for doing the show was great. Instead of thinking about fame, she thinks about paying for college, which is a lot more levelheaded than most heroines of books like this. Kieran and Hallie were also favorites of mine: Kieran being a great example of a quiet friend that, while maybe not the most outgoing personality, holds a special type of friendship with Charlie, and Hallie being well-rounded in that she flirts and is outright beautiful, but is searching for long-term relationships and not reveling in her popularity with the male sex. Brooke was an interesting turn from heroine to villainess throughout the book, and the way fame changed her was very saddening to me, as a reader, because of the strong portrayal of the group of friends before the fame got to her.

As for the events....it really turned out like L.A. CANDY. It wasn't bad by any means - I liked the ending of the book a lot - but in the beginning, it's the same set-up of getting pulled into reality television for what it really is, and being duped by a producer that aims at getting ratings more than a good group of friends out of the deal. My main quip with it was that, until the last third of the novel, it didn't move as quickly as I would have liked. The drama wasn't as dramatic because of all of the characterization going on. While I liked said characterization, a faster plot would have been great. The romantic side bit with Charlie and her crush, however, was a great highlight. It was nice to see a generally good girl going for a sensible guy, and the relationship was really cute and frustrating.

REALITY CHECK provides teenagers with a look at what fame through reality television is like without the glitz and the glamor. The drama breaks friendships and causes people to drift apart, and getting caught up in the fame never bodes well. Jealousy, envy, deceit, and ignorance are all big themes that play a role in the fame card, and Calonita displays each one well in the adventures of these four - or three, as the case may be - friends.

As someone who has gone through and seen a lot of these types of changes in people, reading REALITY CHECK hit home in a lot of areas. It could have been more exciting and fast-paced, but the portrayal of real teenagers and real friendships is just too good to miss. If you need a good dose of Chick-Lit with a good writing style, then run to Jen Calonita. She's already worked her way to becoming a new favorite author in the same vein as Meg Cabot - fun books with real messages.

Lauren says

More like 3 and 1/2 stars

After reading Jen's previous novel Secrets of my Hollywood Life a couple of months ago, I was ecstatic to read more by her. So when Reality Check ended up in my hands, I jumped right in, eager to see if this novel would live up to her previous one. Sadly enough, while I did overall enjoy it and liked the characters it introduced, I felt that sometimes it lagged a bit when it came to the actual plot.

Charlie is the classic door-next-door type of character since while she does have a great group of friends and a possible chance on having an amazing boyfriend, she isn't exactly what you would call High School royalty. Though, this soon changes when her and her friends Keiran, Brooke, and Hallie are offered an amazing deal filled money, money, and, well, more money. That deal? Well, a reality show, of course!

I really liked Charlie and her friends because each brought a different side to the story that made in the fun read it was! My favorite character probably would've been Charlie, the narrator of the whole ordeal, because from the start she was sweet, smart, and a good friend, making her a character that was not only very likable, but one that I constantly rooted for. Plus I loved her cutesy type relationship with Zac!

Adding to this, I also liked how Jen showed the different ups and downs of friendship throughout with Charlie, Keiran, Brooke, and Hallie. Since it not only rang a high point of reality, but it shows to girls out there that have gone through something like the Charlie went through in Reality Check that sometimes no matter what you do to stop it, your best friend can drift away and turn into someone you never thought she would be. And while this can be a hard thing, it does make you stronger and give you a better look on all of your friendships in the end.

I also loved how Reality Check gave you a reality check when it comes to all those reality shows you see on the TV constantly, and showed you that even though it can be a sweet deal, there is a lot of bad aspects that come along too.

Though, as mentioned above, the plot wasn't always filled with action, and because of that it became predictable. Leaving me to be able to tell from about halfway through what was going to happen, but because of the characters this wasn't always the biggest of problems. Plus, it did manage to pick up the speed it had lost in the beginning at the end and became a mostly decent read plot wise in the end. But I did like Jen's writing, I just would've liked to see some more action.

Overall, Reality Check is the perfect read for a lazy summer day that in addition to being a fun and charming read has some great messages thrown in also!

Grade: B-

Valerie says

This light read was just what I needed right now. I used to be a huge fan of Calonita's secrets of my Hollywood life series so it was fun to read something else by her.

Farrah says

I loved this book. Especially toward the ending I couldn't stop reading! I just hooked me

Carly Korleski says

Oh, boy. This is one of those books that fits the description for "guilty pleasure" perfectly. I feel like I enjoyed it for very shallow reasons; wanting to see Brooke get what she deserved, and wanting to see Susan meet a similar fate. The thing I found interesting about this book is that it was a reality show in book form, which is why I feel it belongs on the guilty pleasure list.

Charlie, Keiran, Brooke, and Hallie were fun to read about, but they seemed like they were meant to work off each other, and not to build as their own individual person. Whether or not this makes the book more enjoyable is debatable, but it took away from character development, and made the story less realistic for me.

I loved the story. I was hooked onto every page and enjoyed the book thoroughly, and since then I have re-read the whole thing multiple times. It's an easy read, and a fun one, too.

While I loved the story, I felt that I was reading a reality show. Not the actual reality show in the story, "The Cliffs," but the plot itself. I was hooked, but was it because it had the addicting quality that reality shows use to capture viewers? I felt that I was driven to read this book purely out of spite for a character at times, and, in my opinion, that should not be the main reason to read a book.

Maybe that's the point of the book, and it just went over my head. Either way, I enjoyed this book

immensely, and if you're looking for a quick and highly entertaining read, this is not a bad choice.

Reading Vacation says

REVIEW

The reality of reality shows is that they are not reality. I knew that going into this book, but I enjoyed the clever way Calonita presented it. In fact, I am going to view reality shows in a whole new light now. Before The Cliffs reality show, the girls were truly best friends. They were nearly inseparable. However, they learned that the cameras were only capturing part of their story and most of that was staged by the producers. As you can expect, their relationships were put to the test. The characters each had their own personality. Leader-of-the-pack Charlie was bossy when she needed to be and she was a good friend. Keiran was quiet and often had to babysit her younger siblings. The producers thought she was boring, but I didn't think so. Brooke was the back-stabbing, camera-hogging bad girl of the group. Finally, Hallie was easy-going and just along for the ride. They were a typical group of teen girls. I liked how the story ended and I found this to be a quick read. Thank you to Little, Brown, and Company for sending this book for me to review.

RATING

4 Plot
4 Characters
4 Attention Grabbing
4 Girlie Meter
4 Ending

20 TOTAL

4 STARS

Sara says

First of all: the cover of this book has got to be one of the ugliest covers I've ever seen. That has nothing to do with my feelings for the book itself, but good grief - if I hadn't read and enjoyed previous books by this author, there is no way I would have picked this up.

Anyway, on to the review. Charlie, Brooke, Hallie, and Keiran are teens in a quiet New York town who are plucked from obscurity to star in a reality show about their lives and their friendships. Of course, as you can probably guess, the "reality" part of show isn't quite as real as they thought it'd be, and the new pressure in their lives from the show threatens to ruin their friendships forever.

The girls are pretty interchangeable, the attention-demanding Brooke being the only exception. I never really got a feel for the differences between the girls otherwise and their personalities seemed so shallow that it didn't even seem to matter; they never became real people, only characters in a mediocre book.

The plot was cute enough, or at least the premise was, but the delivery fell flat. I never fully bought some of the plot points. In the first chapter, for example, it's revealed that the show's producer found Charlie endearing because she waitresses at a cafe and sings, using a mop or broom as the microphone, when only

her friends are around. Um, okay. If you think that sounds like it wouldn't be amusing to read about in a book, you're right. I was curious to see how the book ended and what would come of their brush with fame, so I read the entire book, only to find the big finale lackluster. Sigh. It was a quick read that definitely felt long!

Cait S says

This is one of those YAs that is just very, VERY young. Like if you're any older than 14, probably too young for you. I tried it for a chapter but couldn't get into it.
