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Book Review: Skin City by Jack Sheehan

By Kirkus

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With an impressive roster of strippers, swingers, porn stars and prostitutes, Sheehan explores the very adult side of Vegas entertainment.

Journalist Sheehan, who moved to Vegas when he was in his early 20s, is as close to a local as one can get in a town of transplants. As such, he knew where to look when it was time to expose the city's seamier side—although the various activities he discusses are so widely accepted in Las Vegas and, indeed, crucial to the city's municipal coffers, that they hardly qualify as illicit.

In general, the author presents a decidedly sunny portrait of the sex industry. The strippers that Sheehan interviews find that they've never felt so strong and liberated as when they're onstage with their clothes off, and his porn-star sources love sex and are pleased to be getting paid to engage in it onscreen (sex is 'the funnest thing there is to do,' one explains). Prostitutes are delighted by how much they can rake in from just a few hours of work, and swingers are amazed by their ability to find nightly parties where they can be as randy as they please. Yes, Sheehan elaborates on prejudices within the culture: Strippers would never get in bed with a man for money, while some prostitutes find it demeaning to dance in front of a room full of strangers. He gives a nod to pimps who exploit hookers, to deadbeat boyfriends who sponge off stripper girlfriends, and he points out that every once in a while, a working girl will be a bit introspective or depressed. But for the most part, this is a valentine to the industry.

Bonus for those with plans to visit: Sheehan provides a number of sidebars with explicit instructions on how to behave in the underworld. If you'd like to know more about massage parlors and gentlemen's clubs, or learn the 'etiquette of mate swapping,' here's one for you.

Anything but subtle.

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