

Murder in the Dorm, like the college it is revolves around, is nothing like you'd expect. From the very beginning of the novel, Shahzad Rizvi uses wit, satire and a wide-ranging imagination to create a work unlike any murder mystery or college drama his audience has ever read. This hybrid of comedy, drama, intrigue, and Mafia legend creates a unique and entertaining world of its own.

Rizvi begins with the eccentric Dr. Fixit, the new college president, whose takeover signals big changes. Dr. Fixit is perhaps a genius, but his radical ideas tend to go wildly off the rails. From his poorly-received idea of building himself a glass office in the middle of campus, to accepting a large donation from a parent who just happens to be a Mob boss, Dr. Fixit can't seem to catch a break. And when he addresses a conference of world leaders, accusing them of racism and greed, he causes an international recession.

Three students, Sabby, Cary Grant, and CC, are at the heart of the book. The three could not be more different. Sabby is the earnest child of Pakistani immigrants, contemplating an arranged marriage and toiling in her lab. Cary, who has changed his name to that of the movie star he resembles, naively aspires to a career in movies. CC, the daughter of a powerful and doting mobster, includes 'hooking up' and 'clubbing' in her college curriculum. Poor, misguided Cary attracts CC's attention, and she whisks him away to her surreal world of opulence and violence. Cary is pressured into getting engaged to CC, to Sabby's dismay and disgust. Cary lumbers from crisis to crisis, refusing to look before he leaps.

While Sabby and CC are strikingly different, the family histories that shaped them have some surprising parallels. Both are the children of immigrants, who travelled America to avoid persecution. Sabby's family escaped the violence between India and Pakistan: "In the middle of the night they said goodbye to their weeping servants and their beloved mansion which they had built and improved for decades with loving care..." whereas CC's family left Italy to avoid the wrath of Mussolini. While Sabby's parents leave their bad experiences behind to start a new life in this country, CC's grandparents bring their experiences of violence to America where they become active members of the Mafia, as they had been in Sicily.

Murder in the Dorm is a page-turner with a rainbow of characters from all walks of life. Unpredictable, sometimes grotesque, it is an enjoyable read that ranges far beyond the college campus to encompass Second World War history, back-stabbing Mafia molls, Pakistani family life, and breakthroughs in medicine, among other topics. And it has a happy ending! Recommended.

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