

Rock Star Short Guide

Rock Star by Jackie Collins

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Characters

Kris Phoenix embodies all the English superstar rock musicians from John Lennon and Mick Jagger to David Bowie. He has questionable morals but a strong conviction and determination to succeed, and any unpleasant things he must do are done with the belief that his art will justify his life. Bobby Mondella, black and handsome, is the talented child of the ghetto who makes all the necessary compromises to reach superstardom. Rafealla personifies the aimless rich kid who leads such a fast life that she is jaded before the age of twenty-one, and almost falls into the profession of rock stardom because there is nothing else left to do.

There is the ruthless, powerful older man who controls the lives of others with the dispassionate abandon of a child manipulating dolls. Marcus Citroen represents the power to create or destroy the lives and careers of people who try to make it in the entertainment business.

As always, Collins has a "loose cannon" character, in this book Maxwell Sicily, who deliberately sets about to interfere with the plans of the major characters, resulting in the usual climactic scene of terror and violence.

Her "good" characters have their flaws: the three rock stars are by turn callous, arrogant, selfish, and occasionally stupid. But they are also loyal, sensitive, dedicated, and kind-hearted. The "bad" characters have few redeeming qualities: Marcus Citroen is a controlling, vindictive, unfeeling, rapacious, perverted man of great wealth, power, and position who manipulates everyone for his own purposes and entertainment. His only sign of humanity appears when he for some reason allows Bobby Mondella to resume his career after he (Citroen) had violently ended it.

Nova Citroen, his wife, is cold, calculating and completely self-involved.

She shows what seems to be a vulnerability after being badly beaten by her husband. But even then Collins casts doubt on her sincerity, so the reader cannot be positive that Nova in fact has a touch of humanity or is simply playing a part for her own gain.

Maxwell Sicily is rotten through and through. Even his own father, Carmine, disowns him as a complete loser and family disgrace. By the end of the story, Carmine is so fed up with Maxwell he has planned to "put a hit on his own son and get him out of his life forever. The boy was no good, never had been."

Some of the minor characters, relatively good or relatively bad, contribute to the mix. Luiz Oliveira is a likeable scoundrel loved by Rafealla and apparently worthy of her love until she finds out he's little more than a gigolo.

But, aside from stealing her heart, he's no worse than any normal human being. Speed, the would-be getaway limo driver, is such a bad-luck character he's hilarious. He has so



many mishaps trying to assist Maxwell Sicily in his heist that he comes off as a pathetic buffoon.

By the end of the book, in the Epilogue, all loose ends are tied up neatly and succinctly. What happens to all the characters is accounted for: the "good" characters get together in appropriate couples, the "bad" characters get punished. The merely despicable ones live to undo someone else another day.

Social Concerns/Themes

Fame, greed, sex, drugs, and the depravity of the rock music world are the ingredients of this story about the denizens of rock-and-roll. The ambition to make it big in this world of megahits and screaming fans motivates three different characters in *Rock Star*: two males (one English, one African-American) and one female (a mixed blood European). How they make it to the top, how drugs and the rich and powerful pervade their existence, and how ultimately their basic "goodness" prevails, all make for a typical Collins read.

Collins gives lip-service to the prevailing concern about AIDs. For example, one of her main characters, Kris Phoenix, forswears promiscuity and settles down to more or less monogamous sex: He has one live-in girlfriend Astrid at his home in England and another one, Cybil, at his California home. Having fornicated his way through much of Europe and the United States over a period of several years, by the time he is about thirty, he finally becomes more sexually responsible. By 1988 Collins has become more socially responsible.

Collins almost always has as a villain a wealthy businessman who portrays the ugly side of American capitalism. Ruthless and concerned only about the bottom line, Collins's businessmen have no compunction about firing, ruining, or even killing those who get in the way of their profits and power.

One of the delights for Collins's readers is recognizing snippets of real life in the personalities and doings of her characters. Perhaps because the rock music world is, according to some critics, a somewhat alien milieu for Collins, one can find yesterday's news in many of the descriptions and events of *Rock Star*. For instance, Nova Citroen's fabulous jewelry collection and her violet eyes bring to mind the movie actress Elizabeth Taylor. Bobby Mondella's horrendous "accident" that left him blind and his career on the skids recalls a similar Teddy Pendergrass tragedy. Also Mondella's early beginnings as a child entertainer recall "Sugar Chile" Robinson and even "Little Stevie" Wonder. Zella Raven reminds us of the celebrity Grace Jones.

Jackie Collins's own experience of being expelled from school at age 15 becomes part of Kris Phoenix's background.



Techniques/Literary Precedents

Rock Star follows the formula of several previous Collins novels: the major characters each have their own lives and problems but are brought together by mutual interests and/or acquaintances. Concurrently, some person, either deranged or extraordinarily single-minded, plans an act of vengeance or simple crime aimed at one of the major characters or at someone close to the major character. Circumstances conspire to join all these elements in a scene ending the suspense and creating surprise, violence, and resolution. Ultimately, the major characters survive, wiser and better able to accept the relationships that had tormented or confused them before. This formulae was also used in *Hollywood Wives* (1983), *Sinners* (1984), *Lucky* (1985), and even *The Love Killers* (1975).



Related Titles

Rock Star continues the Collins exploration into the lives of the rich and famous. Instead of Hollywood actors and movie makers, she focuses on the recording industry, its talents, and its behind-the-scenes manipulators and money makers. Still, the Hollywood jet-set lifestyles are here; the underworld/counterculture is as well, providing the unsuspected danger to the main characters and a large part of the suspense. The familiar character types — the various strong and misused females, the ruthless and the compassionate, amoral, and deranged males — are here. Collins has a highly successful plot formula; she rarely varies the basics, but she always creates a new slant, unique scenes, and plot twists to deliver just what her fans want and expect. Some critics stated that she seemed out of her element dealing with the music industry and thus did not create in Rock Star her usual steamy, bold, confident work.



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