

'A gripping page-turner about a reality TV game turned deadly, where you truly can't trust anyone – dark and twisty, this is a read-in-one-sitting thriller!'

Ravena Guron, author of *This Book Kills*

'Fun, fast-paced and twisty, *Lie or Die* races towards an explosive conclusion. I loved it!'

Amy McCaw, author of *Mina and the Undead*

'*Lie or Die* is a chilling page-turner of a debut that kept me gripped all the way to the shocking, unpredictable end. Perfect for fans of *The Traitors*, I loved the insights into the ruthless world of reality TV. I was cheering for Kass from the beginning as she navigates the twists and turns of gameplay and learns to stand her ground among the "shiny people".'

Jan Dunning, author of *Mirror Me*

'An intriguing concept well-executed in a pacy, read-in-one-sitting package! Nothing is as it seems, and there is a high price to pay for having fame or wanting it in the fevered world of reality TV and influencers. Ben Elton's *Dead Famous* for teens.'

Teri Terry, author of *Slated*

'This is a tense and exciting thriller, which faces each reader with the question of what they would be willing to do for fame, and the issue of how much of our own reality

TV is a form of “entertainment” tantamount to torture for contestants. A thought-provoking, twisty and genuinely terrifying novel in which the reader has to try and work out who the killer is among those who are just pretending, in a high stakes game of bluff, in which you lie well or die hard.’

Bryony Pearce, author of *Raising Hell*

‘*Lie or Die* pulls back the curtain on reality TV and exposes the dark side of society’s fixation on the cult of celebrity. Sharp, pacy and thought-provoking, this brilliant thriller will keep you on the edge of your seat until the very last page with twists that you’ll never see coming.’

CL Miller, author of *The Antique Hunter’s Guide to Murder*

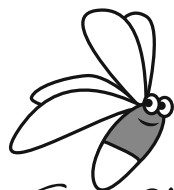
‘*Lie or Die* is a can’t-look-away thrill fest, complete with a bristling cast and an electric plot, and written with razor-like insight into the reality TV industry. It’s punchy and fast, sharp and satirical. It’ll make your head spin and leave you hungry for more.’

Luke Palmer, author of *Grow*

‘An edge of your seat thriller that will have you gasping as the tension mounts. I tore through this brilliant locked-room mystery as it hurtles along at breakneck speed and leaves you feeling like you can’t trust anyone!’

Tess James-Mackey, author of *You Wouldn’t Catch Me Dead*

**LIE
OR
DIE**



Firefly

First published in 2024
by Firefly Press
25 Gabalfa Road, Llandaff North, Cardiff, CF14 2JJ
www.fireflypress.co.uk

© Alison J. Clack 2024

The author asserts her moral right to be identified as author in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act, 1988.

All rights reserved.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form, binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library.

print ISBN 978-1-915444-41-7
ebook ISBN 978-1-915444-42-4

This book has been published with the support of the Welsh Books Council.

Typeset by Elaine Sharples

Printed and bound by CPI Group UK



For Tim, always x

Things I've learned about reality TV

*There are three parts: Pre-production,
Production and Post-production.*

Hot head cameras, lights and action.

A million Insta followers.

All that glamour and glitz.

At no point did anyone mention murder.

LIE OR DIE

Objective

Players must identify and eliminate both Agents before the Agents eliminate all Players in order to deactivate the Ticking Time Bomb and release the prize money.

Cast

Narrator/Judge – Not a participant in the gameplay but acts as a guide and moderator.

Contestants are given one of the following confidential statuses:

Players – Eight Players must uncover the Agents hidden among them, accuse and vote them out.

Agents – Disguised as Players, the two Agents must work together to eliminate Players. Players are killed by placing an Agent card on them.

Detective – A Player with special abilities. They have the power to find out the status of one contestant of their choosing each night.

Glossary of Terms

Accusation Window – A passage of time in which the Players must accuse a contestant of being an Agent. Up to two contestants can be accused and nominated per round.

Courtroom – The accused are brought to the Courtroom to defend their innocence. If found guilty by the remaining contestants, they are eliminated from the game. Only one contestant can be eliminated per session.

Kill Window – A passage of time in which the Agents can select a Player to murder. The Detective may go to Confessional and have one contestant's status uncovered during this time.

Ticking Time Bomb – When an Agent is eliminated a code will be released. Both codes combine to deactivate the Ticking Time Bomb and release the cash prize. Codes can be used by either the surviving Players or the surviving Agents. The Ticking Time Bomb must be deactivated within the time limit, or the bomb will detonate, and the prize money will be incinerated.

***Pink Pony Productions** reserves the right to change any or all rules or gameplay without notice or permission.*

1

I get it. I'm a crap friend. I violated the girl code. I've apologised till my throat hurts.

Kissing your best friend's ex is a shitty thing to do. I deserve to be punished, hundred per cent. But is it *really* worth killing me over?

Staring into Thea's eyes, I beg her to judge me for the person deep-down she knows I am, not on what she thinks of me right now.

'I'm sorry,' I mouth, my voice catching in my throat.

She throws me a look, her perfectly painted lips pursed in a hard line. *Damn*, if I thought for one second she still fancied JB, I never would have told her. And it was weeks ago, I mean, it's not like I shagged him or anything. It was one stupid kiss.

How many times is she gonna make me pay for it?

My eyes sweep the crowded room, taking in my fellow Citizens' expressions. It's too late, nothing I say is gonna change their minds. No one will look at me. Losers. My head's too mushed to think of any clever words to throw out as a last defence.

I should have seen it coming.

I hold my head up and stick out my chin, channelling strong and defiant.

Thea's first, her polished pink nails reaching up towards the ceiling.

'Guilty,' she says, subtext slapping me round the face. She casts an expectant look around the other Citizens. One by one they vote, raising their hands in a Mexican wave of 'guilty', unanimous in their decision to end my stupid life.

The Narrator clears his throat, and the room falls to an expectant hush.

'Kass Kennedy. You have been found guilty of murder. Your fate is sealed. Death by the electric chair.'

Whatever. Does he have to sound so damn pleased about it? The overcrowded room is suffocatingly stuffy, and the smell of boy BO mingles with Lynx Africa and Domino's. Someone open a window already.

'And as she is dragged kicking and screaming to the electric chair,' the Narrator says, his tone wobbling with anticipation, 'she shouts...'

'Innocent.' I look straight at Thea. 'I'm a Citizen.'

'Bollocks.' Thea humphs. Ignoring me, she turns to the others. 'I was certain Kass was the Mafia.'

The living room fills with chatter as the remaining Citizens talk excitedly. This is so sad. A bunch of teenagers squeezed into one small lounge on a scorching hot evening playing a stupid game. Okay, maybe not stupid. Mafia is the craze of the summer and I love it. Ever since my brother came back from uni and introduced the game to us, we've been playing pretty much nonstop. It's all anyone can talk about.

The thing about this game is that even those you trust

will throw you under the bus, aka the electric chair, with a smile and a *Love you!*

Toby MacPhee is staring at me, a stupid grin plastered all over his equally stupid face. Knob. He is so Mafia, I can tell by the way he keeps double blinking every time he says he's a Citizen.

The Narrator begins again, intoning with a deep, half-wasted vibe. 'Night falls.'

The remaining players shuffle back into the circle. At the Narrator's command they fall quiet and close their eyes. I've totally lost track of his story, something about a spaceship and an alien axe murderer – it's all got very *Among Us*.

I can't be bothered to see how this plays out. I attempt to get up off the floor in one graceful movement. It doesn't work. Halfway up I lose my balance and fall sideways, just missing the side table. Ignoring Toby MacPhee's snorting, I head into the kitchen, helping myself to a Fanta.

Lewis is perched on the kitchen counter, some weird-coloured drink in his hand. He raises his glass. 'My own creation. Vodka, green Sourz and some dubious-smelling pineapple juice I found in the fridge. I've had three. Want one?'

'Big no.' After the JB incident I am *never* drinking again. My end of Year Twelve celebrations are definitely over.

Lewis swirls his drink like a pro. 'Not gonna lie, Mafia and Vodka. Baaad combo. One of the many reasons I can't stand the game. Too brutal.'

I lean against the countertop. 'That's the best bit. You get to hide who you really are and mess with people's heads.'

Lewis grins mischievously. 'No wonder you're so good at it.'

Ouch. I deserved that.

'Why do they keep killing you? You're never Mafia.'

'I guess I have a guilty face,' I mutter.

'Duh, not just your face that's guilty,' he says, waving his finger in circles in front of me. 'You are beyond the doghouse; you're like past the house and way down the garden; you are neck deep in shi...'

'Okay.' I interrupt. I really don't need the graphic description of where my friendship with Thea is right now.

Lewis' thickly lined eyes study me, serious and stern.

'What?' I say frowning. 'I've apologised. I've said it was nothing and she still won't talk to me. She hates me.'

'Stop it,' Lewis says. 'She totally loves you, she's just mad at you right now. Remember the time your mum found weed in your bag and Thea totally owned it so you wouldn't get grounded? And who called out Holly Mortimer on that slapper-story rumour? Or the time that...'

My hand signals for him to stop. 'I get it.' Thea and I have been friends for so long I can't remember a time without her. She and Lewis are my rocks, they're my

armour in this crazy world. That one stupid kiss has totally messed everything up and I have no clue how to make it right. 'I just wish she would forgive me already.'

Lewis frowns. 'Then maybe you should prove to her that she can trust you again.'

'Easy. And while I'm at it I'll have a go at solving world peace.'

'Good,' he grins, 'because I love you both and the middle is not a fun place to be. What would Taylor say?'

'Mind your own business?' I grumble. Do I look like I need a Swift-ism right now?

'*It's Time to Go.*' Lewis gives me his dreamy Swiftie look. '*Evermore*, bonus track.'

'Uh, *We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together*,' I say, not sing. 'That was me being Thea, by the way.'

'*You Need to Calm Down*,' Lewis says, wagging a finger. 'Before there's *Bad Blood*.'

'And I'm the sad one,' I say.

A scream of delight comes from the lounge. I jump like a guilty person.

'Sounds like Thea's caught the Mafia,' Lewis says. 'And we can go, fi-nally.' He jumps down from the counter with a slight wobble. 'Whoops, those drinks are strong.'

Thea appears in the doorway. 'We won!' She does an excited 'Yay' dance with Lewis. 'When I say *we*, it was totally me. They had no clue who was Mafia.'

'Toby MacPhee?' I say. I might as well be invisible.

Taking out her phone, she poses for a selfie, lips

pursed, fingers held up in a victory sign – one triumphant Insta posted. She points her phone in my face.

‘You’d better not be filming,’ I say, pushing my palm over the camera.

‘Stroppeee,’ Lewis sings, nudging me quiet.

I hate being filmed and Thea knows it. ‘Why would anyone care?’

‘It’s not about caring, it’s about sharing,’ Thea says. ‘The key to staying relevant is to keep sharing.’ She turns the camera back to her. ‘How did you know Toby was the Mafia?’

‘Just a hunch.’ I have this weird ability to see through lies. I could be the queen of this game if I was actually good at lying myself. Can’t do it. I get all twisted up and tongue-tied. Then I do stupid things, like full on admit to my best friend that I kissed her ex when it wasn’t a big deal and I should have just shut the hell up.

Lewis ushers us out of the front door and into the street, shouting our goodbyes over his shoulder. Thea’s head remains buried in her phone, her fingers dancing over the screen, her face hidden by a glossy curtain of silver hair.

‘What the actual?’ She stops so abruptly I almost walk into her. Her head flips up in one sudden move. She pushes her screen into my face. It’s a picture, from tonight, before the game started and it’s of me. JB is in the background, top off, striking a pose and showing off his six pack. And I am staring. Understatement. The wistful look of adoration plastered all over my face is in direct

opposition to my loud appeals of indifference. My mind goes blank as panic overrides logic.

‘I ... I...’ I stutter.

‘You told me it was nothing,’ she hisses, her lovely deep-dark eyes narrowed.

‘JB wasted and showing off his abs, nothing new there.’ Lewis leans in further. ‘Oh, I see.’ He whistles slow and loud. ‘Game over, hun.’

‘No,’ I say, desperately trying to find a coherent thought. ‘It’s not what it looks like.’ My stammering is not helping to prove my innocence. ‘I didn’t even see JB.’

‘To be fair he didn’t stay long,’ Lewis says in my defence.

‘It’s just the angle.’ I point to the phone. ‘The picture is wrong.’

‘The picture is wrong?’ Thea says. ‘That’s your defence?’

‘Why would anyone take a picture of that?’

‘Uh, hello?’ Lewis says. ‘This is Boredomville. This is literally the only thing that’s happened all week.’ He holds up his palm. ‘And no, it wasn’t me, anyone in the room could have posted it.’

I bet it was Toby MacPhee, no wonder he was sniggering.

‘But it’s a lie...’

‘Doesn’t matter, it’s out there. People see what they want to see.’ Thea crosses her arms across her chest. ‘Lies are the new truth, everyone knows that.’

My words are tripping over each other. ‘It’s nothing, I swear.’

‘You said that last time, remember? When you were

too busy to make conversation because your lips were stuck to his?’ Lewis is behind her miming slitting his throat. ‘This looks pretty obvious to me.’

Lewis is right, she really doesn’t trust me. I turn on my heel in frustration and head for the high street. It’s late, ribbons of red streak across the sky like a fanfare, celebrating the promise of a sunny tomorrow.

Thea follows, her heels clipping on the pavement as she hurries to catch up.

‘I don’t know what else to say,’ I say, striding past the shops.

‘You got off with him,’ she says.

‘I kissed him. Once. And it was weeks ago.’

‘Tongues?’ Lewis says. ‘The definition of getting off is the use of tongues.’

He really isn’t helping.

‘Admit it. You fancy him,’ Thea says, waving her phone in the air.

‘No. Yes.’ She’s confusing me. I turn to face her. ‘Does it matter?’

‘Ooh, Rocks is still open.’ Lewis points at the chippie ahead. ‘Chips?’

We ignore him.

‘This is stupid,’ I say.

‘Oh, I’m sorry. You perving over my boyfriend is stupid, is it?’

‘He’s not your boyfriend,’ I shout in frustration. ‘You finished with him.’

‘Doesn’t mean I’ve *finished* with him,’ she shouts back.
‘Doesn’t give you the right to full on flirt with him ... again.’

‘I wasn’t.’

‘Oh, so your face always looks like that?’

‘I have no idea what I was looking at, but it wasn’t JB.’

‘You’re lying.’

‘I am not, I swear.’

‘Why should I believe a word you say? You’re a liar and a cheat and a crap best friend.’

‘Enough.’ Lewis is standing in a dramatic pose, arm draped over his eyes. ‘I can’t take any more of this.’ He points to me. ‘Kass, you messed up, BIG time, own it and Thea, you need to let this go. This picture says more about slime ball JB than Kass. Find a way to forgive already. Being stuck in this dump is bad enough, but what I don’t need this summer is you two ruining my holidays boy-bickering. *Chicks before dicks*, remember? Our friendship is so much bigger than this and I refuse to have it defined by a boy.’ He takes a dramatic breath. ‘Now I have had way too much to drink and need some chips and curry sauce.’ He opens the door of Rocks. ‘When I come out, I expect you to have found a workable solution to this problem and to have remembered why you are best friends ... forever.’ He flicks his blue fringe from his eyes in one easy movement. ‘You are welcome.’

Lewis disappears inside the chip shop.

Thea crosses her arms, two angry red dots colouring her cheeks, looking anywhere but at me.

Not sure what else to say, I stare at my feet and keep my mouth shut while the silence bangs at my temples.

I shuffle on the pavement. 'You want chips?'

'No.'

More silence. I chew on my fingernails and will Lewis out of the shop. How long does it take to get a bag of chips?

'I really am sorry,' I say. 'I never meant to hurt you.'

Thea frowns. 'Well, you did. Big time. You never think. You totally take us for granted.'

The accusation stings sharper than a bee.

'I would never put a boy before you.'

Thea's not even looking at me, staring at her phone – she's way more interested in whatever is going on in the world of social media.

I try again. 'You're my best friend.'

'What am I then? Apart from delish eye candy.' Lewis steps out of the shop, bag of chips in hand.

He wraps his arms around Thea, smothering her within his gangly frame.

'Urghh, get those chips away from me,' she says, wrinkling her nose.

Thea was just like me until Year Eight. Then she hit puberty and like the predictable cocoon-butterfly analogy, spread her dazzling wings and flew into the sun, leaving caterpillar-me alone with no clue how to build a cocoon. I'm still waiting for my metamorphosis. I'm starting to wonder if this is it.

Our phones ping.

‘Check your phones,’ Thea says cryptically. I do as I’m told, zooming in on Thea’s message.

Casting Call

Big Brother meets Mafia

We are looking for CONFIDENT, COMPETITIVE & INVESTIGATIVE contestants (17–18) to take part in this EXCITING NEW reality TV game show.

BIG CASH PRIZE.

Do YOU have what it takes to survive?

Email: casting@pinkponytv.com

‘What am I looking at?’ Lewis pulls his phone right up to his face.

‘*Big Brother* meets Mafia? I was totally born for this,’ Thea says, hopping from foot to foot.

‘I’m glad you said *I*,’ cause hell would have to freeze over before I go in front of the camera,’ Lewis says.

‘Me too,’ I say. Let Thea have her crazy ideas. As long as I don’t have to join in, I can be supportive and crutch-like. ‘Besides it’s what’s on the inside that counts, not who you are on the outside.’

Thea tuts. 'No one cares about what's on the inside. It's all about what you can show in fifteen seconds.' She taps her phone screen. 'It's alright for you two with your brains and your books. I don't want to be left behind with some crappy job. This is my way out of mediocrity. I want more. I want KSI more.'

'There are loads of careers you can do,' I say, trying to be helpful.

'I don't want a career; I want to be famous.' She straightens up with determination, pushing her chest out, boobs like weapons. 'So, I'm doing this. And I want to win, so you're helping me. You're so good at reading people. You *owe* me.'

'Sorry?'

'You just said you wanted to earn my trust back.' She holds up her phone, making me cringe all over again. 'Prove it. Put *me* first. Help me win.'

'Oh, nice move,' Lewis says.

I've been totally played. And it worked. I'll do whatever it takes to get us back to normal.

'Fine,' I say. 'I'll do it. I'll apply for your stupid show.'

Thea guilty grins. 'Okay, so I already filled in the online form weeks ago, for both of us.'

'Oh no, you didn't?' Lewis shrieks.

'When were you going to tell me?' I gasp.

'I'm telling you now,' she giggles.

Lewis skips up the road, singing. 'My girls are gonna be famous, my girls are gonna be...'

I ignore the frenzied rhythm of my heart. I'm no
Thea. I don't belong in front of a camera. I can't even do
an assembly. I choke, every time – it's a whole
embarrassment of stammering gibberish. But it's one
application in thousands, there's no way I'm getting
through... Right?