



## Book of the week

### AIR KISSES

Zoe Foster

Michael Joseph, \$32.95

**Beauty writer turned novelist Zoe Foster proves witty and shrewd in her satirical take on the Australian magazine world, writes reviewer Rachel Wells.**

Comparisons between Sydney beauty editor Zoe Foster's debut novel, *Air Kisses*, and *The Devil Wears Prada* are inevitable. Even Foster herself namechecks Lauren Weisberger's 2003 roman-a-clef about the 10 months she spent at the beck and bark, sorry, call, of *Vogue's* editor-in-chief, Anna Wintour. In Foster's book, we get 20-something Sydneysider Hannah Atkins, who has just landed the plum job of beauty editor at *Gloss* magazine.

Referring to her new boss — *Gloss* editor Karen — Hannah muses: "I like her. She wasn't the devil, she didn't wear Prada, and I knew I would learn a lot from her." You can draw parallels between Hannah and 27-year-old Foster, who penned the book while working as beauty and lifestyle editor at *Cosmopolitan* magazine. She was later appointed beauty director at *Harper's Bazaar* and is now editor-in-chief of the soon-to-be-launched beauty site [primped.com.au](http://primped.com.au).

While Foster admits the book is loosely based on her experiences in the world of glossy magazines, she denies Hannah's troubled relationship with a high-profile media personality is based on her on-and-off relationship with rugby pin-up boy Craig Wing, which is well and truly on right now.

Real comparisons between *Air Kisses* and *The Devil Wears Prada* are few and far between — albeit for the minor fact they are both set within the shiny corridors of a glossy-magazine office where wearing the right clothing is just as important, if not more so, than getting your copy in on time. In Foster's expose of the beauty beat, Hannah spends more time sipping champagne at slick beauty launches — or re-applying her make-up in the back of a cab on the way to one — then she does in her shiny office.

Like every heroine-made-chic, Foster's Hannah Atkins' begins as an ugly duckling confronting life's swans.

"The Glossettes looked unbelievable, like they'd fallen off the layout board," Hannah muses. "My dreariness flashed like Vegas lights next to a collective of girls whose butts would fall off if they were any hipper."

But that's where the similarities end. Hannah's boss, as we've already established, isn't the devil; she loves

rather than loathes her job — particularly the part where she gets to go to dozens of champagne-fuelled beauty launches every week, receives a "frenzied stream" of beauty products on a daily basis, and has unlimited access to the "goo room" — i.e. the beauty cupboard.

And besides, as Hannah reminds us, comparing mag land's fashion girls with its beauty girls is like comparing apples and oranges. For a start, beauty girls "eat like sumo wrestlers" whereas the fashionistas don't eat at all.

I spent a former life as an assistant to a far from devilish publisher — though booking babysitters and fetching lunch was part of the deal — then served time as a beauty writer on a gossip-fuelled weekly where red-lipstick-wearing editors were just as adept at throwing phones as they were at coming up with the most ludicrous headlines you've ever seen. So, to my jaded eyes, Foster's account of magazine land is not only spot on, but a helluva lot of fun: in particular, the challenge of making a story about blackheads or bobby pins digestible, let alone entertaining.

Writing about beauty is a lot harder than it looks, folks. You fill another glossy page or 10 with useful tips on how to remove unremovable fine lines or whip up a step-by-step guide to achieving long, clump-free lashes or expound the virtues of drinking eight glasses of water a day — for the umpteenth bloody time.

Foster, the daughter of Miles Franklin Award-winning author David Foster, made it look easy when given the task — by former *Cosmopolitan* editor Mia Freedman — of filling 10 beauty pages every month, back in the early noughties — quickly making an impression with her lively, conversational voice.

And it's not surprising. This girl can write, with a humour and charm that frequently has you thumbing through the wit-strewn pages of *Air Kisses* with a smile stretching from ear to ear — at times, even laughing out loud.

Foster's "Zoe-isms" as one blogger put it, are just as much fun. She writes about "textversations", "multi-dating", "style-biting" — i.e. copying someone else's style only to end up "looking like Lily Allen wearing Mick Jagger's wardrobe" — and my favourite, performing fateful acts of "sexpectation" such as getting a Brazilian wax and cleaning your room.

"I knew the immutable law that if you expect sex, you won't get it," she writes. "Whereas if your room is a pigsty and you are wearing your nastiest, oldest undies, you'll get lucky for sure."

It's gems such as these that undoubtedly prompted Penguin to sign Foster to a three-book deal. We can only hope the rest are just as much fun.

Rachel Wells is *The Sunday Age* fashion editor.



“

*I was scared of them. They were the Mafia of the beauty cupboard. They made me feel, think, believe I was older and wrinklier than I should be, and that I needed them, had to use them, or I*

*would lose my looks, appeal, friends and probably my home too, judging by their menacing demeanour.*

FROM AIR KISSES BY ZOE FOSTER

”



According to Foster, life on glossy magazines really is as glamorous as it sounds