

BOOM TOWN SNAP

JAY MARTIN

ABOUT THE BOOK

When Georgie's boss-turned-lover, Nico, offers her a high-stakes job in Canada, she wants to say no. But burdened by debt and swayed by Nico's promises that the gig will be quick and lucrative, Georgie feels she has no choice – even though it means leaving behind the people she loves the most. Swapping an Australian mining town for the rugged Albertan oilfields, Georgie's finally getting her life back on track.

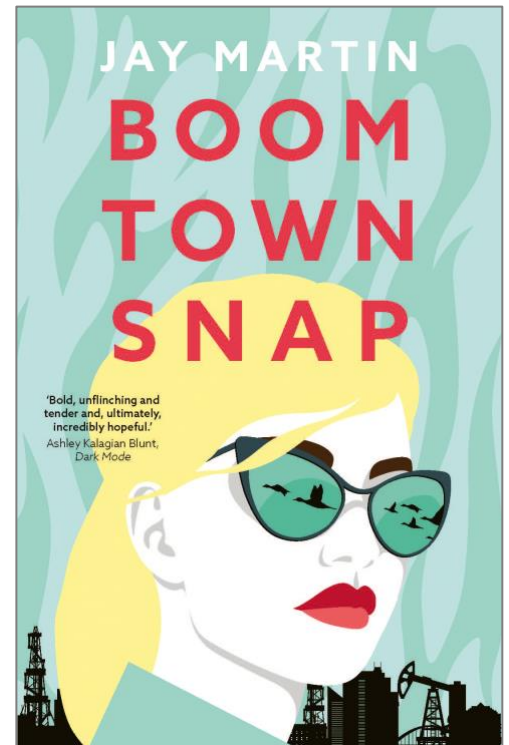
But as the stakes rise at work and at home, Georgie discovers the real reason she got the job – and just what she stands to lose.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jay Martin lives and works on Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar. She studied Asian languages (Indonesian and Vietnamese) and has worked in a range of roles, including in community development, government policy and consulting – both in Canberra and Australia. Her first book, *Vodka and Apple Juice: Travels of an Undiplomatic Wife in Poland*, won the City of Fremantle Hungerford Award and was published by Fremantle Press in 2018. Jay's short-form writing has been featured in European and Australian publications including *Warsaw Insider*, *Warsaw Business Journal* and news site *Crikey*, and she has been an invited guest at literary events across the world. Jay designs and runs writing workshops and programs around Western Australia, and loves helping others discover the joy and power of writing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is this novel called *Boom Town Snap*?
2. How would you describe the character of Georgie at the beginning of the novel?
3. Why do you think she has accepted Nico's offer?
4. Georgie experiences a lot of struggles – but also has a lot of privilege. Are there points in the book where she understands or notices her privilege? What difference does it make if one is aware of one's own privilege?
5. How would you describe the relationship of Georgie to some of the men in her life – to Josh, Nico, Randy and Tommy? Is Georgie a different kind of person around each of them? What do they need her for?
6. How do you think Randy exercises power in the workplace? Do you think his behaviour is gendered or the result of a power hierarchy?
7. What do the sisters Tara and Georgie have in common in terms of what each of them is experiencing in the domestic sphere / the workplace?
8. Why do you think it is difficult to name, call out and then act on coercive/toxic control?
9. Where are the times Georgie exercises her own power? Do you think there are any that could be considered coercive? What do you think is behind her decisions in those moments?
10. How are external factors like housing prices and boom-town swings experienced personally by Georgie and others?
11. How much control do we have really over those external factors that shape our choices and decisions? Are there examples of this in your own life?
12. What glimpses of disenfranchisement and powerlessness does the book provide?
13. Do you think that WA, Australia, and Alberta, Canada, have much in common?



14. What solutions are offered to communities in resource-rich areas, and why are they so difficult to adopt?
15. How are the relationships between government and the resources sector portrayed in this novel? Do you think that either of them has the interests of communities in mind? In what ways do they not? Do you think the author's assessments are fair?
16. In Chapter 19, Georgie thinks, **'It didn't seem right to say yes. And it didn't seem possible to say no'** (p. 211). When else do you think characters in this book are asked to choose between what's right, and what they are being asked to do? How does this relate to decisions you've had to make in your own life?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Did the Me Too movement influence the themes in this novel, or was it something closer to home? Have you noticed a glass ceiling in the workplace or felt that different genders receive different treatment?

In the novel, Georgie experiences various forms of more and less direct sexual predation. It's something I have experienced, particularly starting out in the workforce. At that time, it was constant and obvious. As I advanced up the professional ladder, it became more subtle and sophisticated – to the point where I was sometimes left questioning myself, in the same way that Georgie does in the book – 'Did I imagine that? Or ...?' And it's this kind of thinking that Me Too has helped to turn around, as we've become aware that what we thought were unique and personal experiences of discomfort were, in fact, collective experiences of harassment, shrouded in a silence that helped them persist.

As your question suggests, this relates to the concept of the glass ceiling. I am someone who did achieve a level of conventional success, including in the kinds of workplaces seen in *Boom Town Snap*, in consulting and in government. I benefited from programs that were seeking talented women to promote, and had opportunities I wouldn't have had a generation ago, when the laws still meant married women couldn't hold full-time work.

Yet, there are very sophisticated and subtle ways that people who don't tick all of the boxes – not just women, but many others from marginalised groups and communities – are held back, and encouraged to hold themselves back, in a professional environment. Even just people who didn't go to the right schools – which *Boom Town Snap* also talks about.

Georgie is not particularly disadvantaged. Neither am I. As a white, English-speaking, educated person, I have been protected from a great deal of harassment and danger. Yet, Georgie still ends up putting up with a lot. I really hope people take the opportunity to imagine what others without Georgie's resources might be putting up with – and those of us who might be in a position to better stand up for them do so.

To what extent did you want to make a comment about life in a resource-rich community? How is writing about it different to working within it?

The very first words I ever wrote about the concept that would eventually become *Boom Town Snap* were written as a journal entry not long after I'd returned to WA after a decade away, when the last mining boom was in full swing:

Yoga and coffee. It's all that will be here, one day. I can see it. The giant scars left when all the earth has been removed will be papered over, and people will don their activewear, and swing their technicolour mat over their shoulder and walk to their nearest café, or the newest one – all the time, the next, the next, the next, because you have to keep up with the trends – and order their caffeinated beverage in a bio-degradable cup and walk into the yoga studio and under a giant franchised Om, and the soil that was once here will have been transformed into this, although no-one will remember for what purpose – nor that it's all been built on a paper-thin surface over a giant hole.

Clearly, this city – with its streets full of business deals and fast money, workers in hi-vis flying in and out of sweaty, remote places, and people flooding in from all corners of the world, all desperate for a piece of it – were a curiosity to me. I think in part, this was from having lived here and elsewhere – so I had both an insider's and outsider's view of this strange boom-town state.

Yet, I still don't think I would have necessarily written *Boom Town Snap* – or any book about this – if I hadn't gone to Alberta, and found a city with the same sense of itself as my home town. The main difference seemed to be that it was seventy degrees colder – and even that just seemed a version of WA's extreme climate.

Not unlike my Me-Too moment, this was when I connected what I'd seen in Perth to the bigger picture: what I was sensing wasn't Perth, or Edmonton. It was life in resource-rich boom towns. But also not unlike Me Too, I could also feel the elements of collective myth-making in it – how we participate in that, how it enables things to go on the way they are. And – one of the ideas I really wanted to deconstruct in the book – how this all tends to end up with the most powerful people in the room getting their way, whether or not they're even there.

Do you agree with Bri that Georgie could be seen as 'a nice person who sometimes does mean things, or a mean person who sometimes does nice things'? What were the challenges in writing a character like her?

Throughout *Boom Town Snap*, Georgie is faced with moral and ethical – and sometimes simply practical – dilemmas. She often ends up stuck in the place we all find ourselves from time to time: between what you know is right or you want to do, and what you actually are able or are expected to do.

For example, there's a moment in the book when Georgie's little nephew calls with what is – to him – a big problem, right when she's got to meet a deadline for her boss. Someone has to come second. Who is it going to be?

I think this is a very relatable dilemma, particularly for women, as we decide how to divide our time and energy day-to-day between all the things that make demands of us.

The challenge in writing Georgie was to avoid her coming across as inconsistent or confusing. To do this, I concentrated on two things:

- One, making the binds she's in clear – when she has to choose between a family member and a boss, or her sister and her husband, for example. I think readers will be able to relate to these dilemmas.
- Two, making her emotional state clear as she navigates these competing demands. So, we might see her justifying to herself decisions that she knows are wrong– telling herself she'll make it up later, or that they'll understand one day. Or if she goes against what's expected, that Georgie – and hence readers – feel there might be consequences.

At best, she spends a lot of time just feeling guilty. For me, this also felt very relatable – sometimes, in the moment, Georgie does the best she can, like all of us.

And as for Briana's pronouncement, it's one of the points of the book where the mirror is held up to Georgie's behaviour and its consequences. Yet even as we see Briana questioning Georgie, we also see her going down the same road – Briana is also starting to choose work over family, and you sense the strain this is putting on her own relationship. It reinforces how hard it is to do what we know is right.

It's another way that the book speaks to the myth-making that goes on and, in turn, ends up continuing the status quo – whether that's sexual harassment or toxic workplace culture. The challenge for Georgie – of course – is by the time she realises it, is it too late to do anything about it?

What's next for Jay Martin?

Hmm, I wonder what I would have said to this question after my first book, because I don't think that I knew I had another book in me at that time. I was still very much in the corporate bubble then, trying to figure out how to manage and balance my creative side with paying the bills. Not unlike Georgie!

Since then, I consciously decided I didn't have the balance right, and that I wanted to make more space for the creativity – and I found the stories clamouring to get out! I not only have more books, but also I'm loving

becoming more formally involved in the writing and creative worlds with all the other wonderful writers we have here.

Part of what I loved so much about this book was the opportunity to write Western Australia, and connect our local stories to greater narratives. This is part of why Fremantle Press was the perfect publisher for *Boom Town Snap* – it's a story that takes Western Australia to the world.

I'll be continuing to write other stories from our unique outpost between the ocean and the desert, looking at how the local and the bigger picture intersect and interconnect. At the moment, the next step on that journey is looking like it's taking me to our south-west corner – stay tuned!