

Smokescreen

by Monica Levy

LOGLINE

After her best friend dies in a school shooting, the teenaged daughter of Republican lawmakers risks her life in a controversial plan to force the passage of an assault weapons ban.

COMPS

Super 8 x The Fallout

SYNOPSIS

Paige Pratt, 17, is the daughter of Senator Vanessa Pratt and Congressman Jim Pratt – Republicans in deep with the NRA. A mousy kid who doesn't fit in at her elite prep school, she struggles with her parents' blistering expectations and marital discord, finding solace in her best friend, Madison West. After Maddie is killed in a shooting while on a college tour, Paige devises a fake massacre at her high school to force her parents and other lawmakers to vote for an assault weapons ban.

Using her drama club's production of "Hamilton" as a backdrop, Paige recruits several other kids to assist. They source fake blood, empty shell casings, and smoke bombs, and figure out when to drop the curtain and escape without being seen. They pretend that left-wing extremists have kidnapped them and tell their parents to vote yes on the ban if they want the kids to be released.

But... then a right-wing extremist group **actually** kidnaps them. The kids are in real danger as parents/cops/FBI struggle to figure out real truth of what's going on. Congress comes together in a remarkable show of unity to trick the extremists and enable the FBI to rescue the kids. With her life on the line, Paige learns that there's no such thing as a great idea when it's the only one you have.

WHY THIS, WHY NOW, WHY ME?

No matter who wins any near-future election, there are likely to be more school shootings. Thoughts and prayers, good guys with guns and hardened targets clearly aren't working to solve the fundamental problem -- weapons of war have no place in the hands of civilians. **In the last 2 decades, more than 600 kids have died or been injured in nearly 450 school shootings, and the number and severity are increasingly exponentially.**

The topic and tone are serious, with some lighthearted moments to offset the grittiness, but the lightness doesn't diminish it. Both sides of the gun issue are presented clearly.

While not a "politikid," I grew up in the DC suburbs and lived Paige's backstory. I learned, as she does, that agency is something you get when you deserve it, when you meet the moment in which it arrives, and when you're willing to sacrifice something important for something even moreso.