

# The Kill Factor

AUTHOR

**BEN OLIVER**



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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Lower to Mid Secondary  
(Violence, Sexual References)

## SYNOPSIS

In a near-future, where a virtual currency of digital content fuels a fame-hungry society, a brand-new experiment that combines social media and reality TV has been greenlit.

Voted on, contestants are sent to a maximum-security reform camp on an island, where they can have no contact with the outside world. To lose means prison. But to win is to be free. The most popular young offender with the most upvotes by the end is given both a second chance in society and a cash prize.

This kind of money could mean everything to Emerson and her family who live in the Burrows, one of the subterranean villages where the government have buried affordable housing. It's more than freedom. It could mean the chance to change her family's circumstance and finally find a place in the society they've never been allowed into.

But what Emerson doesn't know, what the viewers don't know, is that the prison on the island is empty. Those who lose, those who are voted off aren't incarcerated. Each challenge will leave more and more contestants to die. And the only choice they have is to win over viewers before it's too late.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Oliver began writing creatively at age seven and was promptly placed into the lowest reading and writing group at school. Frustrated by his lack of immediate success, Ben chose to step-down from the world of writing.

Three years later, he came out of retirement to write a 'What I Did During My Summer Holiday' assignment, where he claimed he saved the world from the apocalypse. Encouraged by an enthusiastic teacher, Ben returned, triumphantly, to writing. Now a high school English teacher, Ben's first novel, *The Loop*, was published in 2020.

## THEMES

- Survival
- Death
- Games
- Social Media
- Views and followers
- Friendship

- Betrayal
- Thriller
- Competition
- Reality TV
- Suspense

### WRITING STYLE

The novel is written in first person narrative, past tense—this personal style of storytelling reads as a recount of events, giving the reader insight into the thoughts and feelings of the main character, Emerson. Ben Oliver’s writing is fast-paced, compelling and gripping, making you unable to stop turning the pages!

### STUDY NOTES

- ‘There are six faculties that good, responsible, law-abiding citizens have. Six faculties that criminals lack. They are: Self-Worth, Empathy, Work Ethic, Discipline, Respect and Restraint.’ The Producer’s intentions are for the games to test and instil the previous six values into the contestants. Let’s imagine that you have been tasked with re-inventing the games, a version where absolutely no harm must come to any of the contestants. What challenge would you create to represent each value?
  - Create a mood board for each one, outlining the different rules and elements to each challenge. Share your ideas with the group.
- The author, Ben Oliver, uses both the economic situation in *The Kill Factor* and the video diaries as a way of commenting on the role and influence that social media has on the character’s lives. As a class, discuss the positives and negatives of social media. What effect does it have on our mental health, our relationships and the world as a whole? What do you think is the future of social media?
- Using the below two quotes from *The Kill Factor*, write an essay arguing how far you agree with the following statement: ‘Social media is a bad thing’. Use your own knowledge and evidence from the book to back up your arguments.
  - ‘Record your video diaries. Be lively, be eager, be dishonest! Show the people what they want to see. Take them out of their drab lives for a moment and let them live vicariously through people who are better than them!’ (p 228).
  - ‘I like science and nature, and people who like those things too follow me. It’s not a bad thing. And when you were sad and going through the experience of guilt, people weren’t following you out of cruelty. They were following you because they had felt those feelings too and they empathized with you. There are spiteful people in the world, Emerson, but they are outnumbered by the good people.’ (p 274).
- *The Kill Factor* has a brilliant cast of characters, most with their own individual backstory and ‘arc’. As a class, create a list of all the named characters—then, separate into groups, assigning each group a character or two. The group should create a profile for each of their assigned characters. The profile should include all the information it’s possible to glean about the character from the novel—including:
  - A portrait sketch
  - Name
  - Age
  - Backstory
  - Important relationships
  - Character traits
  - Manner of character’s death (if relevant)
  - Other.

Now, the teacher should collect all the profiles, shuffle and reassign different characters to the groups.

Imagine the character in front of you is now the main character of the story and write a scene of your choosing from their perspective.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES**

- If you were in Emerson's position at the start of the book (before knowing the reality of the games) would you take the offer?
- How much do you think Emerson's decision was based on her relationship with her younger brother? What are some specific pressures she may have felt as the eldest daughter?
- Discuss how Emerson is able to capture the audience's attention by the end of the games.
- What did you think of how relationships between Emerson and Kodi played out?
- One of the key themes in *The Kill Factor* is the role of reality TV. What do you think viewers' real reactions would have been? Would their opinions have changed throughout the games?
- What does the book make you think about the criminal justice system in both this fictional set up and our own society?
- Which part of *The Kill Factor* shocked you the most?
- What do you think happens next, after the end of the story?