

PRESS KIT FOR
THE TWO-PLATE SOLUTION
BY JEFF OLIVER

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By Jeff Oliver
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Short Overview

The Two-Plate Solution is a satire about reality TV cooking competitions that features a diverse cast of chefs, TV producers, and terrorists-turned-chefestants! It's fun and a bit wild, but the author takes the characters and the food very seriously.

Longer Overview

A James Beard Award-winning chef stands atop a 50-foot-high diving platform having just plated a competition-winning culinary masterpiece. He looks down, faints from fear of heights, and careens into the water below. Worst of all? He knocks over his dish on the way down.

So begins *The Two-Plate Solution*, and it only gets better from there. Follow a diverse cast of young talented chefs as they compete in a high-stakes TV cooking competition set in Israel. Their culinary foes: fake “terrorists” brought in by the producers—that is, until some actual terrorists show up on set, and the producers must scramble to either integrate them into the show, or risk death.

Mysteries deepen, romances bloom, and chefs cook for their lives in this laugh-out-loud culinary adventure from Jeff Oliver, a major force in TV cooking shows the past fifteen years. His talented pen will have you caring about each character . . . and wondering how the many unforeseeable story twists will turn out.

Submission for Review/Feature



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Title Submitted: The Two-Plate Solution

A Novel of Culinary Mayhem in the Middle East

Author: Jeff Oliver

Subjects: Fiction/Humor/Food/Television

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Important Reasons to Review/Feature:

- 1) Praise from big names in food, entertainment, and literary worlds, all with an enormous number of social media followers:
 - a. Gail Simmons (food expert, tv host, author, and magazine editor)
 - b. Andy Cohen, of “Housewives” tv fame (now host and executive producer of “Watch What Happens Live with Andy Cohen,” which is now being syndicated, and ranks #1 of 12 late night ad-supported cable talk shows among women 25-54, which is our target audience, too)
 - c. Josh Friedland (James Beard award-winner for book humor)
 - d. The Fat Jew (he promises to tout the novel to his 10 million Instagram followers)
- 2) TV cooking shows and contests, which the novel satirizes, are viewed by millions of viewers (Food Network alone has 41 million viewers weekly; Cooking Channel 32 million), and watched by eight out of ten tv viewers every week
- 3) Publisher is employing Andrea Burnett, one of the top food publicists in the business
- 4) Video book trailer, which was shot on the set of one of a reality TV cooking show, is (like the novel) authentic and funny
- 5) Author, now a Bravo TV exec, is responsible for creating/producing some of the biggest tv shows in the history of food and cooking
- 6) This is a funny, compelling novel that largely takes place in Israel, brings into focus the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and thus is likely to intrigue Jewish readers everywhere
- 7) Fiction that is centered in the tv food milieu is relatively rare.
- 8) Bancroft Press is one of the top-ten indie book publishers in the U.S., and has been throughout its 25 years of existence
- 9) Excellent reviews from such book review publications as Publishers Weekly (a starred review from the bible of the book industry), Booklist (magazine of the American Library Association), and Foreword Reviews (magazine featuring the best books of the top independent book publishers in America).

One of the Gurus of TV Cooking Shows Satirizes Genre with Latest Book

Bravo TV's Jeff Oliver, in Novel that Earns a Rare Starred Review from *Publishers Weekly*, Delightfully Exposes the Underbelly of Reality TV Food Programs

From the talented pen of Jeff Oliver, a major force in TV cooking shows the past decade comes *The Two-Plate Solution*, a LOL satire about a TV cooking competition featuring a diverse cast of TV producers and terrorists-turned-chefestants who literally cook for their lives. As *Publishers Weekly* put it, "Fully human characters help make this hilarious send-up a standout."

"As a Food TV developer, I always wondered how far a cooking competition could be pushed. Then it dawned on me: What if terrorists infiltrated a reality TV cooking competition, and so had to be incorporated into the competition itself? My comedic thriller, which takes place in Israel, answers that very question.

"As VP of Current Production at Bravo TV and a former Food Network executive, I've worked on everything from *Food Network Star* to *Best New Restaurants* to *Worst Cooks in America*, and I developed *Cutthroat Kitchen*, one of the craziest, most beloved, and longest-running cooking competitions ever aired.

"When interviewed, I will happily (and entertainingly) describe my experiences producing and developing some of the most popular Food TV shows in existence, which is what just about every TV cooking show fan I meet wants to know.

I will reveal:

- the number one trick I've adopted when pitching shows;
- the best advice I've ever received about how to get in (and stay in) the business;
- and finally, what *really* happens on set and in the editing of some of TV's most popular reality TV shows."

A Satirical Novel Set in a Big World



Cooking shows are a staple of American society, and have been for some time. It seems as though more people than ever spend their weekends recharging with reruns on the *Food Network*.

The popularity of cooking shows is only one of the reasons that *The Two-Plate Solution: A Novel of Culinary Mayhem in the Middle East* by Jeff Oliver could be the next biggest novel. *The Two-Plate Solution* follows the filming of a “reality” cooking show titled *Natural Dish-aster*, but there’s a twist. *Natural Dish-aster* is set and filmed in Israel. In addition to the ridiculous drama that comes along with reality TV, the producers of *Natural Dish-aster* have to deal with impending bombing, terrorism, and all-out war.



The Two-Plate Solution, however, is much more than a novel about the conflict in Israel. Jeff Oliver masterfully combines comedy, romance, action, and drama to give readers a different perspective on what’s going on in Israel. He uses satire to emphasize the ridiculous nature of American’s definition of the word “terrorist.” At the center of it all is food, and its power to bring people together despite all odds.

Political figures and culinary experts have uniformly praised *The Two-Plate Solution*:

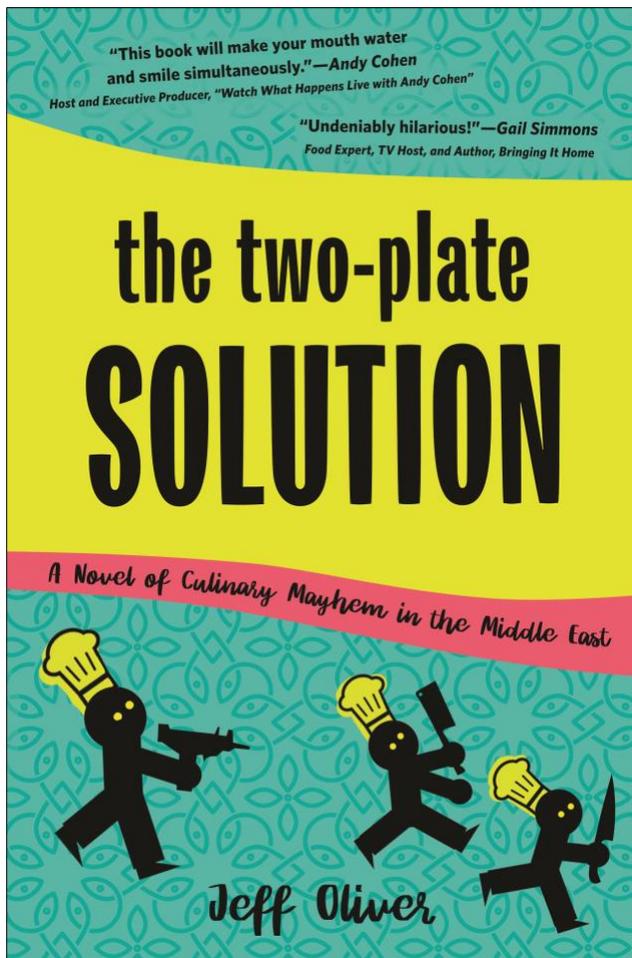
- Andy Cohen of “Watch What Happens Live with Andy Cohen” and executive producer of *The Real Housewives* franchise, described it as “a fresh perspective on the possibility of a terrorist-turned-chef, with a dash of humor and wit!”
- Gail Simmons, permanent judge on *Top Chef*, the #1 rated food show on cable, and author of *Bringing it Home: Favorite Recipes from a Life of Adventurous Eating*, called it an “outrageous (and somehow eerily accurate) romp through the inner workings of reality TV, set against the most unlikely possible backdrop.” She also described it as “deliciously absurd, definitely unorthodox, and undeniably hilarious!”

The Two-Plate Solution is exceptionally relevant. Oliver, a Bravo TV exec who created a number of cooking shows, including “Cutthroat Kitchen,” explores America’s obsession with cooking shows and reality TV in conjunction with the ever-present conflict in the Middle East and the threat of terrorism. This combination of seemingly unlike topics is a fresh and unique story that will not only inspire tons of discussion, but undoubtedly fascinate media consumers as much as it has fascinated readers.



PRAISE FOR JEFF OLIVER’S *TWO-PLATE SOLUTION*

“Fully human characters help make this hilarious send-up a standout.”
 —PUBLISHERS WEEKLY STARRED REVIEW



“For those of you who like food and reality TV, this book will make your mouth water and smile simultaneously. Oliver has cooked up a fresh perspective on the possibility of a terrorist-turned-chef, with a dash of humor and wit!”

—ANDY COHEN, HOST AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER OF “WATCH WHAT HAPPENS LIVE WITH ANDY COHEN”

“I have read two books in the last decade. One was *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, and the other was *The Two Plate Solution*. I loved them both. Funny, compelling, and wholly unique, *The Two Plate Solution* by Jeff Oliver is something that can never be un-read.”

—THE FAT JEWISH

“...[A] veritable stew of sex and drugs and heavy arms. Oliver’s production experience... gives him authoritative insight into this topsy-turvy sphere.”

—BOOKLIST

“*The Two-Plate Solution* is a molten broth of comic, nonstop action from page one . . .

Underneath the chuckles and the hyperbole, this romp is a fable with some hopeful themes about

the shared humanity of Jews and Arabs (and common love of hummus and halvah) and about cooking simply and with joy. *The Two-Plate Solution* ends up being a very satisfying book, wrapped up in a guilty pleasure.”

—FOREWORD REVIEWS (5 OUT OF 5 STARS)

“There is no finer guide to terrorism, gastronomy, and reality TV than Jeff Oliver’s hysterical *The Two-Plate Solution*. This madcap satire will have you laughing—and cringing—about the current state of food and entertainment.”

—**JOSH FRIEDLAND, SATIRIST AND CREATOR OF THE TWITTER CHARACTER RUTH BOURDAIN, WINNER OF THE JAMES BEARD AWARD FOR HUMOR, AND AUTHOR OF *EATYMOLOGY: THE DICTIONARY OF MODERN GASTRONOMY***

“*The Two Plate Solution* is an outrageous (and somehow eerily accurate) romp through the inner workings of reality TV, set against the most unlikely possible backdrop. It's deliciously absurd, definitely unorthodox, and undeniably hilarious! I devoured every word.”

—**GAIL SIMMONS, FOOD EXPERT, TV HOST, AND AUTHOR OF *BRINGING IT HOME***

“The book moves at a breakneck pace, with so many plot threads and characters it’s more comparable of *Game of Thrones* than *Cutthroat Kitchen*, and there are zigs and zags all along the way. Nobody is who they seem, and the stakes (steaks? The book inspires food puns) change constantly. The novel manages to be both cynical and naïve at the same time— on the one hand, it presents the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a violent quagmire (it is), but then emphasizes that the things that bring us together may be stronger than that which divides us... like a good meal. Also, for all its archetypal reality-show contestant characters, it does want us to care about what happens to the cast of *National Dish-aster* (season 5). Oliver, a Bravo TV executive, has worked on his share of reality shows, and knows how they tick— particularly where real-life ends and producing begins. He has imbued this knowledge into the book with humor, highlighting the absurdity of manufacturing, while also tightly controlling, drama. As for the cuisine described in the book, it’s as much of a character as the hapless network executive who picked the wrong time to visit the set. In fact, you might not want to read on an empty stomach. Oliver used to work at Food Network, and from coffee-braised brisket to mouthwatering halvahs to tahini-infused charoset, he serves up descriptions of all sorts of sorts of mouthwatering, cross-cultural treats. Think of it as a thriller/satire/culinary guide/behind-the-scenes of reality TV... And *The Two-Plate Solution* is full of tasty bites all along the way.”

—**JEWICY (EDITORS’ PICK)**

Bancroft Releases Bravo Exec's Novel Satirizing TV Cooking Shows and Israeli-Arab Strife

BALTIMORE, MD – In June 2018, Bancroft Press will be releasing Jeff Oliver's "The Two-Plate Solution," a riveting look into the world of culinary show-downs. In his second novel, Oliver asks the questions: What happens when a reality tv cooking competition is infiltrated by real terrorists? For the cast of *Dish-aster* season 5, they embark on a gut-wrenching journey into foreign cuisine, while in the company of Israeli terrorist. Along the way, the cast get cozy with the enemies, who, by the way, have to show up their culinary skills to award-winning judges.

Filled with a crazy cast with everyone from Chef Dex, the redneck cook from Texas, to Salid, the Israeli terrorist whose flawless skills leave the judges drooling, "Two-Plate Solution" satirizes



reality tv competitions in all their zany and outlandish material and manages to make it relatable. Oliver takes his lead character, Sara, a former IDF specialist, on a journey of unexpected romance and impending danger. Sara might have the lives of many at risk, but when put under pressure she seamlessly directs the carnival of a cast and a frightened crew. Oliver reminds the reader that when you throw people with starkly different

views together, you should expect that good food can and will bring them together.

Jeff Oliver earned his MFA in fiction from Brooklyn College and currently works as Vice President of Current Production at Bravo Media having developed shows like "Cutthroat Kitchen" and overseeing "Cupcake Wars" and "Worst Cooks in America."

The "Two-Plate Solution" is already gaining early praise; Jeff Ostrovsky aka The Fat Jew, a social media personality, says, "'Two Plate Solution' by Jeff Oliver is something that can never be un-read."

Oliver's publicist, Andrea Burnett, is one of the country's leading publicists when it comes to products related to food and cooking. She says she's "extremely excited" to be a part of the novel's marketing campaign.

Seasons of working with a range of showrunners, directors, and unforgettable cast from various reality tv shows, inspired Oliver's lead characters, he says.

Oliver lives in suburban New York City with his wife, who helped design the book's cover, and ten-year-old son.

Established in 1992, Bancroft Press seeks to publish the titles it's inspired by, regardless of genre. Recent publications include the bestseller, "The Missing Kennedy," which landed on the cover of People Magazine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Oliver is Vice President of Current Production at Bravo Media. He is a former Food Network producer and executive with credits that include "Big Brother," "Last Comic Standing," and "The Simple Life."



At Food Network, Jeff oversaw some of the network's most successful shows, including "Cupcake Wars," "Worst Cooks In America," "Food Network Star," and "Chef Wanted With Anne Burrell." He also developed the long-running series "Cutthroat Kitchen," as well as Cooking Channel's "The Freshman Class" and "The Culinary Adventures Of Baron Ambrosia."

Prior to being at Food Network, Jeff was a freelance Supervising Producer in Los Angeles working with production companies that included Magical Elves, Bunim/Murray Productions, Ryan Seacrest Productions, and World of Wonder.

A graduate of McGill University, Jeff has an MFA in Fiction from Brooklyn College (CUNY), and his debut novel, "Failure to Thrive," was published by DC Books in 2012.

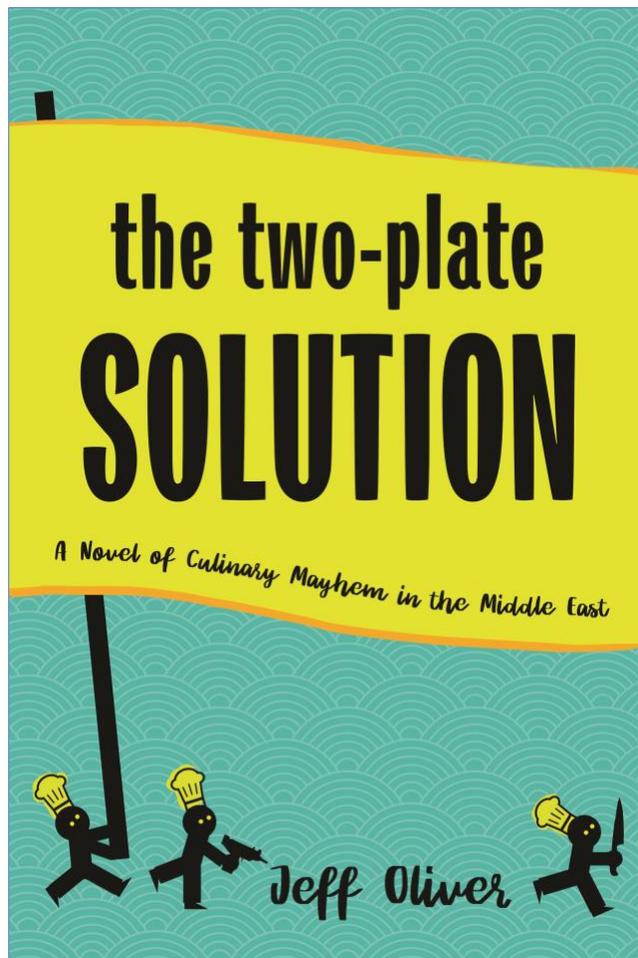
Jeff's wife, Liz Blazer, is an award-winning filmmaker, art director, visual artist, designer, animator, and educator. She also happens to have co-designed the "Two Plate" book cover.

The two live together in suburban New York City with their son.

Q&A with *Two-Plate* Author Jeff Oliver Jeff Oliver

You WORKED ON Food Network Star BOTH AS A PRODUCER AND NETWORK EXEC. How much of that inspired the story?

Food Network Star was my first experience working in food television, so it had a big impact on me and surely influenced the contents of this book. I was surprised by the high level of culinary



talent on that show, but also by the cast members' ability to adapt to what the show was asking of them: not just to cook, but to be a brand, and a person able to pitch their brand down the barrel of a camera. Two totally different things! Imagine telling a computer programmer: "Sure you can code, but from what point of view do you code? Tell us in an entertaining way (while coding) in front of bright lights and judges who have the power to permanently alter your career. G'head!" I don't think people understand the kind of freakish talent that a Bobby Flay or Giada or Alton, or the much-maligned Guy Fieri, have. They have to be a chef with a very clear point of view and a storyteller, but also need that rare ability to let an audience taste the flavors of food through a television screen. Magic sorcerers from another dimension, all of them!

Why set the story in Israel?

Middle Eastern cuisine makes my salivary glands explode and my palate dance. My birthday meal every year is shakshuka, and I eat hummus and babaganoush the way some people eat ice cream. So the notion that I

would have to spend real time researching the flavors of the region to write this book was a big incentive. But I wanted to set the novel in a place where the story was most plausible. Israel offers tax incentives to American reality TV production companies as a way to encourage companies to shoot there, so it's very possible that a show like Top Chef might shoot in Israel. And then there's the "terrorist" infiltration, which I suppose could happen anywhere, but seemed plausible (and more interesting) there.

The book draws on satirical elements of actual cooking shows. Why choose to write satire?

Forgive the pun, but it was time to roast the genre reality TV cooking shows. Cooking competition formats have gotten so zany that they've not only jumped the shark, they've filleted

the shark and cooked it sous-vide. Children competing in cooking shows is the big thing now (they've passed through celebrities already), though I admit that Master Chef Junior has brought me to tears on more than one occasion.

Did you feel there was a message to your readers regardless of the genre?

Even when there's an enormous gulf in people's passionately held views, if they get together (even involuntarily), they can't help but get to know each other, and maybe even listen. Food has always brought people together, and when your mouth is full, you can't talk, so listening comes more easily.



There are a lot of elements in the book that identify cooking as a passion. How much do you know about

cooking? Do you consider it a personal passion?

I am ashamed to admit that my knowledge of cooking is based on reading, working on hundreds of hours of cooking shows, and eating other people's delicious food. To avoid the work that it would take to become a competent cook, I have categorized cooking as a creative pursuit that would take time away from my primary creative activity, writing. So until that changes, my ten-year-old is just going to have to suffer through more bowls of microwavable mac n' cheese on the rare occasions when my darling wife (who happens to be a great cook) is taking the night off.

The book has LGBTQ+ characters and themes. Why did you decide that your main character has to be a lesbian?

The reality TV industry has so many talented LGBTQ+ professionals, and many are brilliant female showrunners that I have had the pleasure of working with and learning from. The main character Sara is modeled after some of the showrunners I have worked with, who also happen to be gay women.

Aside from the LGBTQ+, the novel has a range of diverse characters in terms of race and religion. Had you thought of including a little bit of everyone when you planned out the novel?

As an exec at Food Network and (currently) Bravo, I always push production companies to cast diverse characters and talent on the shows I work on. The chefs on *Natural Dish-aster* are my dream cast, but also what I aim for on my shows. As a side note that's not often discussed, the reality TV industry really pushes diversity in casting, and is far ahead of scripted TV and (especially) movies in featuring diverse talent. Scripted needs to catch up. So does literature.

How much of your characters' personalities would you say are inspired by the contestants on *Food Network Star* and other cooking shows?

I've worked on so many different kinds of reality TV competitions, including "Last Comic Standing," "Real World-Road Rules Challenge," "Big Brother," etc. The characters'

personalities in the book are pulled from a swath of hundreds of great reality TV characters I have worked with. Many of those characters live life out loud and are highly articulate about their feelings, so I gave my characters that quality no matter who they are.



A lot of Israeli political comments are included in the novel. Some of them might even be a little sensitive. How were you able to tone it down for ‘good laughs’?”

I had read many books by both Israeli and Palestinian writers before attempting to write this book, and tried my best to learn the history of the region so as not to misrepresent it. With a grasp on the history and some personal perspective, I felt sufficiently comfortable to inject humor, which is a great way to cut through really intractable conflicts and get to a basic humanity. So satire was my way to convey a hopeful message about Middle Eastern politics.

The title is also a pun on the Israeli-Palestinian border conflict. Why decide to address those issues at all?

It has been a global focus for almost 70 years, and what a cop-out if I didn't! There are few topics that get people so emotional and are packed with so much misinformation. Just go on Facebook. Two friends might post a video on the border conflict with totally different spins on history.

Have you ever been to Israel? If so, how much of your experiences in Israel influenced the novel?

I have been to Israel twice, once when I was fifteen with a youth group through my synagogue, and then again two years later as my grandmother's wish to visit the country with her family. I'm fairly certain that on both those trips, I was more in awe of the fact that Ahava Dead Sea mud mask cleared up my pubescent acne, rather than on any of the astounding historical wonders that surrounded me. I think that the influence of those trips on my novel was that it confirmed that some of my characters could be completely self-obsessed even when visiting one of the most fascinating places on earth.

The book also addresses the misunderstood Arab-Israel relationship. Tell me about that writing process. How did you manage to avoid stereotypes (except where necessary according to the genre)?

When I write, I get into characters in some depth, which humanizes them. Once you humanize a character, stereotypes fall away.

Why did you decide to end the novel the way you did?

I love a story that ends with characters getting what they want, but in a totally surprising way



that they probably wouldn't have wanted ... just like life! Writing in the omniscient voice turns a writer into a kind of genie—you have to grant your characters their wishes, but be clever in how you bestow those wishes. You can even be a bit of a prankster, and I always feel that's the most satisfying way to go with a story. Sarah wanted to make sure that her brother was safe, and she got that, but in the most roundabout way imaginable.

There are some underlying Jewish themes in the novel. Is Judaism, or at least the Jewish culture, important to you?

Oy, tough question! There was a Book. Was it fiction? Non-fiction? For sure, it was a hell of a read, and it defined a tribe of bookish people from thousands of years ago that I am genetically descended from. And being part of that genetic line brings with it a terrible and storied history filled with fascinating people who have accomplished some amazing things and contributed significantly to world history. Many were humorists and comedians, and they are the ones who make Judaism most accessible to me.

What other projects are you working on right now?

I'm working on a new satirical novel on the very grim subject of choreographed deaths. Fun!

How do you think readers will respond to *The Two-Plate Solution*?

While drinking a strawberry milkshake on public transit, they will laugh so hard, the shake will come out of their nose. I think they may be uneasy with the political stuff, but enthralled by the action and romance. I think that readers who happen to work in scripted development at Netflix, Amazon, or Hulu will say, "This is gonna make a hell of a series. Let's greenlight twelve episodes to start."

In the spirit of the novel, do you have any favorite dishes you'd like to share with your readers?

Toasted Laffa bread with labneh cheese and green zatar. Heaven. There's a great recipe for it in Michael Solomonov's "Zahav" cookbook.

Who do you think was your favorite character to write? Why?

I loved writing Lopez and his wife Sharon so much that I had to pull back from not getting too carried away. I would giggle madly writing their dialogue and could be entertained hearing them argue about cereal. I've been married for 15 years. While their relationship has NOTHING WHATSOEVER in common with the special one I have with my dear sweet wife Liz, there is a certain verisimilitude...

Would you think about writing a memoir or a non-fiction book on being a producer of cooking tv shows?



If there was interest, I'd love to write a non-fiction book about reality TV storytelling, and how to create great unscripted stories. That could extend to cooking shows too. I'd love to interview some of the best storytellers in reality TV to get insight. I think most people would be surprised at the amount of care and skill that go into making good reality TV.

If the novel were made into a movie, who do you see playing the lead characters? Why?

Sara would be Lizzy Caplan (*Masters Of Sex*) because she's kind of badass, and I'm thinking Ilana Glazer (*Broad City*) for Ruti if she can pull off an Israeli accent. I would love Riz Ahmed to play Salid, and if not him, then Omid Abtahi—both diminutive and vulnerable actors with so much fire and intelligence in their eyes. Al-Asari would be Shaun Toub, who is in *Homeland* and is brilliant and elegant. Lopez would be Horatio Sanz, and Sharon would be Selma Hayek. Comedians would fill the cast: Tanya would be played by Amy Schumer, Ghana by Leslie Jones, Jigna by Mindy Kaling. Cowboy is Andy Sandberg, Joaquim would be Jay Pharoah, Fred Armisen could play Etienne, and Carrie Brownstein plays LizZ (since all of them can play anything). Clora is Ali Wong, Chrissy is Chelsea Peretti. CJ Bazemore is played by TJ Miller.

Recipes and Food References from *The Two-Plate Solution*

“Amuse bouche” (page 6)

“a crudo with miso foam on a toasted pita brioche drizzled with fig compote” (page 7)

”swordfish sashimi drizzled with date syrup” (page 9)

“sufganyot, shakshuka with cumin, labneh cheese, and thick Turkish coffee” (pages 27-28)

“Sabra hummus” (page 36)

“babaganoush” : “dragon fruit, eel, turnips, mayonnaise, peanuts, etc. At least they had zucchini and beef tongue.” (page 39)

“*sinaya*” : “a hearty Palestinian dish layered with tomato, fried zucchini, ground beef, pine nuts, and a thick helping of tahini” (page 41)

“sage-infused hand-picked artisanal lamb shank steak with a maple mousseline and oregano-currried oxtail tartar with jalapeno aioli” (page 42)

“offal” (page 43)

“A stuffed vegetable *mahashi*” (page 43)

“devil the eggs with shaved truffles” (page 43)

“pomegranate-glazed *charozer*” (page 43)

“A delicious shank bone of roast lamb encrusted with tarragon and a foam béchamel glaze, an oxtail *maror* liverwurst infused with date reduction, fried parsley spiced with local hand-picked lemon rinds, deviled eggs with *za'atar*, and tahini-infused *charozer* ... *mahashi*, with braised prunes and pine nut puree” (page 45)

“cardamom” (page 76)

“persimmon jelly” (page 76)

“Minced lamb sizzled in bulgur crust; on the stove, lentil stew simmered with red peppers, dill, garlic, and cumin; turnips stuffed with rice, flavored with cloves, garlic, and cardamom, baked slowly in the oven; eggplant with pomegranate seeds and garlic cooled under a fan next to fried dough balls stuffed with meat, pine nuts, and onions.” (pages 145-146)

“fattoush salad, and small plates were set out with pickled cucumbers, black olives, hummus fool, grilled zucchini with *za'atar*, and labenah cheese” (page 146)

“*grhaybeh* sugar cookies” (page 157)

“Halva” (page 181)

“pork butt and turkey jerky halva with pistachios and honey” (page 192)

“triple-speed, pickle-brined rib eye *au-poivre* with smoky mayo” (page 210)

“soul food bahn mi’ sandwich with dill pickle emulsion, tiger shrimp, and veal meatballs” (page 210)

“smoked gouda and rachbier soup and minted saké sea shooters” (page 210)

“latka with gravlax, coffee-braised brisket, and tehina lentils” (page 211)

“Hummus Pitry out of emu eggshells that smoked with dry ice” (page 211)

“toast dressed with everything from foie gras, salted cantaloupe, and curried vindaloo” (pages 211-212)

The Two-Plate Solution: Book Club Discussion Questions

1. The novel gives a behind-the-scenes look at reality television with its satirical show, “Natural Dish-aster.” Are you a fan of reality television? Do you think you would watch the show if it were real? How do you imagine some of the behind-the-scenes of your own favorite shows to be like?
2. Food seems to be the common thread that brings everyone together throughout the novel, be it the contestants, the terrorists, or the judges. Do you believe that food has the power to bring people together in your own life?
3. The challenges that the contestants face on “Natural Dish-aster” are pretty extreme. Can you come up with an outrageous challenge of your own that you could picture being featured on the show?
4. How did you feel about the way the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was portrayed in the book? Do you believe it was portrayed accurately?
5. Al-Asari is the first to mention Sara’s time spent as a sergeant of the IDF and the lives she took in Jabalia. After that, it is clear that Sara still feels guilt over the incident and thinks about it often while she works. Do you know anyone like Sara who suffers from time spent at war? How does it affect their daily life and the lives around them?
6. Sara’s relationship with her brother Nathan seems to be the strongest relationship that she has, with their frequent phone calls and singing. It is clear that she cares about him. Do you have a close relationship with one of your siblings like Nathan and Sara’s? Were you ever forced to take care of a sibling in the absence of a parent, like Sara does for Nathan?
7. Each of Salid’s delicious recipes come from a specific memory from his past, which may be why they end up being so good. Do you have any specific dishes that you remember from your childhood? Have you ever tried to cook them now, in your adult life?
8. Sara’s mother suffers from a gambling addiction that puts her children in danger. Does anyone in your life suffer from an addiction that resulted in negative consequences for their (or your) family?
9. The characters make a number of traditional, delicious Jewish and Middle Eastern dishes. Which of the dishes most intrigued you? Which would you be the most interested in either having recipes for or tasting?
10. The book ends in a twist. Did this ending surprise you, or did you sense that something might be going on?
11. Ruti may have killed Sara for killing her father, but they still had a romantic relationship. Do you believe that Ruti fabricated the relationship for her plan’s benefit, or do you think that she had real feelings for Sara?

12. Author Jeff Oliver has said that his favorite scenes to write were the ones with Warren and his wife, Sharon. They spend almost every scene together fighting, but end up working together to stop the terrorists. Do you have faith in their relationship, or do you think they are doomed to be miserable together? Their relationship is obviously exaggerated, but do you know any couples that remind you of Warren and Shannon?
13. Each of the contestants on the show have strong personalities. Which contestant was your favorite? Which do you relate to the most?
14. The men of Mal-Malaika, despite being terrorists, are crafted as wholly human characters. Do you relate to any of them, or have a favorite? The master chef Salid, the stubborn leader Sheik, or maybe the young, romantic Ramin?
15. Genevieve Jennings is a strong female character in the book. She has moved up in the world of entertainment and met most of her career goals. She says, however, that she struggles to reach the same kind of success in her romantic life. Have you ever struggled to balance a career with your romantic life? Do you believe that it is difficult for women to achieve both in today's society?
16. The young romance between Ramin and Tanya is sweet and romantic. Tanya seems to be Ramin's first love. She falls easily for his well-written poems and musings, and he promises to always protect her. What was your own first relationship like? Was it similar to Tanya and Ramin's?
17. Cowboy approaches Ramin for help with Clora, whom he claims to be in love with. By the end of the book, they are engaged to be married. His love for Clora, however, seems to be different than Ramin's for Tanya. Do you believe Cowboy actually loves Clora, or is he simply infatuated with her looks? Have you ever been in a relationship that, in retrospect, you believe was infatuation rather than love?
18. The setting of the book is very important to the story, with the presence of terrorists and Jewish and Middle Eastern dishes. Could you imagine the book taking place anywhere else? How would changing the setting end up changing the story?
19. What points do you think that the author, Jeff Oliver, was trying to get across by writing this book?
20. If Sara had survived, where do you believe she would be now? Would she have returned to reality television, or do you think it would have been her last season on "Natural Dish-aster?"