



Banking On Paris

Ken Samanski

Willowbrook press (April 2012)

Softcover \$11.99 (268pp)

978-0-9880095-0-9

Samanski's debut comedic novel, *Banking on Paris*, starts with protagonist Bob Johnson, a middle-aged business man, chucking his smartphone into a Parisian trash can. Samanski then backtracks to chart the path of Bob's disenchantment.

Bob's boss, Jack, sends him to Paris (since he's the company's only Francophile) on a high-stakes, make-or-break-your-career mission: to get short-listed for a deal at Banque Technologie de Paris—and secure his own bank's future in the international market. The pressure and distance make for a lot of angry, urgent phone conversations with Jack, a practice Bob despises.

Bob arrives in the city a week early to get acclimated before the big meeting. Since he spent part of his young adulthood in Paris, his return after thirty years, along with Jack's rants, prompts Bob's introspection and increasing angst about life. Thus begins a slow and hilarious—and drunken—downward spiral.

Chapter by chapter, Bob's torment grows as he plays out the classic elements of a midlife crisis. Events rock his romantic life as well as his career, shaking up his self-image. Bob's voice, as well as that of his boss, feels predictable and at times almost cliché, but that kind of familiarity is part of the charm of the novel. The common name of Samanski's main character also heightens the comedy's appeal to the everyman.

Samanski flavors the story with humorous glimpses of French life: a jab at the stereotypical French open marriage; a homeless beggar wearing a sweatshirt bearing the logo of *The Economist*. The story rides the line between humorous novel and punchline-driven sketch. Occasionally the author overexplains in conversations, thus showing as well as telling the character's thoughts, and slowing down the quick pace.

Samanski's use of language is accurate and well researched. A working knowledge of bank terminology is helpful, but readers can easily gloss over terms they don't know and find the main action. Readers who know some basic French will feel more confident with the story's bilingual passages, and others will enjoy Samanski's subtle hints at meaning. Some readers may find the use of profanity jarring, but many bankers, business people, and comedy lovers likely won't bat an eye.

Banking on Paris is steeped in alcohol, corporate angst, and Parisian flavor, and Samanski crafts a not-too-predictable story from familiar elements. This fast-moving and fun, stick-it-to-the-man comedy is perfect for those who need a good laugh to drown the 9-to-5 blues.

MELISSA WUSKE (May 23, 2012)

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