Clarion Review

General

Lou Baga
Micky McDougall
Lulu
978-1-4583-7647-3
Four Stars (out of Five)

It is hard to imagine anyone, especially anyone who was a teenage boy in the early 1980s, reading this book without a smile on their face, at least for the first seventy or so pages. The opening chapters are delightful and entertaining chronicles of a clique of boys at Montana's Billings Senior High. The characters, as well as their situations and stories ring true.

The title character is the glue that binds this group—and the girls they meet and later marry. On many levels, Lou Baga is Henry Winkler's Fonzie from *Happy Days*, although without the sitcom silliness. Lou also recalls James Franco's Daniel Desario from *Freaks and Geeks*, a television show, which, in its truth and tone, *Lou Baga* has much in common.

As with those characters and many others in works of literary fiction, Lou is a bad boy with the good heart. He is a rough yet noble cowpoke, a tough but quiet hero. Lou saves his friends from bullies and brutes and becomes a legend in his town. His high school heroics are only part of the story, however. The novel follows the group of boys from their teens through their late thirties.

The early chapters are easily the best. There the author manages to joyfully imbue his characters with his own obvious love of comic books and comic-book superheroes. That Lou seems to possess an almost superhuman knack for being in the right place at the right time is no accident; nor is Lou's ability to win a fight effortlessly, rapidly, and decisively. Whether wielding his fists, a shovel, a saxophone, or a textbook as a weapon, Lou is a human hero of comic-book proportions.

High school does not last forever, however, and as the boys grow older the story and Lou have to adapt. Here, the author meanders quite a bit, shuttles back and forth from one character to another, inserts flashbacks, and takes the reader on a convoluted journey that is part drama, part comedy.

Eventually, author Micky McDougall gets his stride back. The exposition in the final chapters is well done, but may not come as a surprise to all readers. There are many, many clues in the body of the work that set up the explanation of key events as they truly occurred, rather than as the characters themselves believe they occurred.

Lou Baga is a more complicated character than first presented, and learning his story one puzzle piece at a time is what makes this book especially enjoyable.

Mark G. McLaughlin