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Rock On: An Office Power Ballad

Dan Kennedy
Algonquin Books (Feb 12, 2008)
Unknown $14.95 (224pp)
978-1-56512-509-4

Growing up a music junkie in the 1970s, Kennedy faithfully dressed up as a member of the band Kiss every Halloween. After a handful of piteous musical attempts on his own, he landed in New York City, a self-identified slacker with no education. But by parlaying some freelance copywriting and production work for advertising agencies, he ended up behind a corporate desk at a major record label.

The painful (and hilarious) unwinding of Kennedy's carefully constructed and naïve dream forms the loose structure of this memoir's narrative; but lists, guides, and directions zero in on the often-idiotic world of the music business.

A Parental Advisory heads up the first pages of *Rock On*, introducing in a few short paragraphs his self-deprecating style and vocabulary based on the influence of punk innovator Iggy Pop. A subsequent "Field Guide to a Few of the Species I've Spotted Here in the Office" includes descriptions of creatures including the Heavy Hitter, Upper Management, Glorified Middle Manager, Glorified Foot Soldier, and Real Foot Soldier—all characters that could be found in any bank or accounting firm, but Kennedy's corporate cats wear sunglasses indoors and refer to colleagues as "Baby" with utter seriousness.

The arc of Kennedy's tale of music men is sometimes predictable, but he rescues them from the hack "corporate-machine-people-are-stupid" with his signature humor and a skewering insight here and there: "A sobering education, this reel of videos; feels like it could be part of a 'Scared Straight' outreach program to kids thinking about signing record contracts with major labels." Anyone who has ever had rock and roll dreams, as well as those who struggle to fit their dreams into a real world package, will appreciate the story.

Kennedy is the author of an earlier humorous memoir *Loser Goes First*, and is a frequent contributor to *McSweeney's* and *GQ*.

CHRIS ARVIDSON (December 11, 2007)

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