Clarion Review

Thriller

Startup
Glenn Ogura
iUniverse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

This skilled debut author raises questions about the Silicon Valley business world with an action-packed narrative.

Startup, Glenn Ogura's first novel, is an intriguing and suspenseful good-versus-evil story set in the cutthroat Silicon Valley culture. It follows Zack Penny and his coworkers from Display/Technik as they plan to branch out on their own to form Imagination, a startup technology company.

Imagination's main product is to be a state-of-the-art, flat-panel display screen as thin as wallpaper to replace the type of traditional flat-screen television sets made by Display/Technik. Just as Zack and his coworkers are on the brink of launching the new company, Display/Technik owner Allen Henley finds out about the plan and abruptly fires all of them. And that is just the beginning of the trouble he will cause them. Henley is determined to ruin Imagination.

Further complications ensue because Zack is dating Henley's daughter, Mary Anne. Trust between the couple is destroyed as suspicions fly that Mary Anne is the one who leaked information about the startup to her father.

As a first-time novelist, Ogura shows deft skills at crafting a well-written narrative that is cohesive and logical. He raises broad questions about the nature of business dealings, while highlighting a specific example of corporate corruption and greed that addresses issues about human nature. He ably explains the technical side of Silicon Valley businesses, and when Henley sues Imagination to try to stop the company in its tracks, many legal issues are also explained—though these details become a bit cumbersome as they are recited in stilted and formal dialogue.

The premise for the plot is set very early, and while the scenes are action-packed, as

Imagination's owners struggle to get things going because Henley keeps putting obstacles in their way, some aspects of the narrative are clichéd: Zack relates his struggle establishing the business to climbing a mountain; many characters compare business dealings to war tactics based on the Sun Tzu philosophy; and Henley is often described as destroying "Imagination."

Scenes that don't move the plot forward through the lengthy novel—including awkward histories of San Francisco landmarks—sidetrack readers from the central and most interesting plot: whether Zack and his Imagination coworkers will succeed in establishing their startup company.

There are many characters, each clearly defined as Ogura introduces them in specific contexts, so there is no confusion when he jumps back and forth between fast-paced scenes. But the two characters at the center of the plot, Zack and Henley, are one-dimensional, which makes them less believable. Henley is the true evil character, with no redeeming qualities, while Zack is the idealistic and principled good guy with no flaws. A more nuanced approach to the characters would make them more realistic and relatable.

Startup will appeal to readers who want to root for the "little guy."

Maria Siano