Clarion Review

General

Succession

Herbert Lobsenz
CreateSpace
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Opening in New York City during the final days of the Kennedy presidency in 1963, *Succession* provides a behind-the-scenes look at blatant greed and high-powered manipulation in competitive manufacturing and its impact on private lives.

Garrison, the protagonist, is a stressed-out writer working as a paid researcher for a man named Carnusty. A sleazy businessman, Carnusty intends to take over Kensington Typewriters without disclosing his intentions for the floundering company and its vulnerable employees. In time, Garrison realizes that not only is Carnusty paying him to obtain information for the wrong reasons, but Carnusty also may be sleeping with Garrison's wife, Diana. Diana herself is an ambitious woman in the publishing industry.

Throughout this intriguing but somewhat deflating story, Garrison comes across as a patsy under tremendous pressure to perform. The dialogue is laced with testosterone, an unrelenting banter that may irritate the reader more than propel the plot. Yet a distinctive, almost uncomfortable realism permeates every page.

Garrison is preoccupied with Diana's ability to get pregnant. When she finally does, he doubts the paternity of the baby and regards Carnusty with suspicion. Garrison's cynicism, a trait that surfaces all too often, overrides the joy he could have felt at his wife's news: "He bought her a corsage, hailed a cab, took her to Le Chambertin, ordered champagne, did all the things you were supposed to do, said all the things you were supposed to say and through it all a frigid trickle of rancid sewer water seeped slowly through his gut."

The dialogue has a macho delivery that frequently comes across as hyped, even though this may be part of the book's appeal to some. Though the writing is technically well-executed, the author has a propensity to force-feed the reader with acerbic, disagreeable wit. The reader's reaction may swing toward distaste rather than empathy.

Reading *Succession* is a caustic trip into the not-so-distant past, a sour glimpse of the American dream. This novel could actually have been set in our own decade, so little has changed in that respect.

Herbert Lobsenz won the Harper Prize in 1961 for his first novel, *Vangel Griffin*, which became a *New York Times* bestseller. *Succession* is a commendable comeback from a talented author.

Julia Ann Charpentier