FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Sycophants

Linda Gould
Amazon KDP
(275pp)
978-1-79087-417-0

Sycophants *is a quintessentially eighties novel in which two friends who came of age together learn how to seize and share the spotlight.*

Linda Gould's novel *Sycophants* is set in the late 1980s, as former college roommates navigate the last years of their turbulent twenties and chart a course for success in the cutthroat entertainment industry.

The women at the novel's core are not equals. Sara is their success story, having revived Peace Enterprises, a struggling music label that was being driven to bankruptcy by her rock star older brother and its folk singer founder. Imogene is an aspiring screenwriter who's hoping that her old friend can jump-start her career through an ambitious and risky movie project designed to redefine the company. In fact, her coming-of-age screenplay is based on her and Sara's senior year of college.

Imogene starts at Peace Enterprises as an assistant and receptionist whose primary task seems to be diverting calls from Sara's office in the days before cell phones replaced switchboards. When the action moves toward Washington, DC, where Sara's movie is set and her pro football player husband has relocated to, she becomes inaccessible to almost everyone, including Imogene. This slows the plot's pacing to a crawl for several chapters.

Peace Enterprise's operations in both cities expand to encompass another former roommate, Emily, an actress whose Hollywood career is foundering after a fast start; the company's folkie founder; Sara's brother; entourages; two bands with shifting lineups; the movie's cast and crew; a pro football wives' club; and a politically motivated office support staff in DC. This ballooning cast results in a growing sense that Sara's movie project and life are beyond her former iron clad control. It also compromises the book's character development, though. Many of the cast members, including Imogene's husband and Emily's family in California, are under addressed, while the musicians, football wives, and Emily are formulaic, focused most on their pursuits of fame and notoriety.

After a slow start, the book's second half is active. It includes a Super Bowl run, a comeback concert on the National Mall, and a hostage situation. While these developments result in some energy, their sudden confluence is frenetic and unbelievable. The book's dynamic exchanges between characters are consistent and convincing, though, even as the plot becomes chaotic. The characters' inner monologues are less vibrant; many use the same phrases to express their singular feelings and fears.

Sycophants is a quintessentially eighties novel in which two friends who came of age together learn how to seize and share the spotlight.

CHARLENE OLDHAM (December 16, 2020)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.