Clarion Review

General

Women Can't Play
Clyde Dowell II
978-1-4343-7117-1
Three Stars (out of Five)

Virginia author Clyde Dowell's novel *Women Can't Play* is all about the games people play. There's the every Sunday board game of war called *Risk* that the book's five black male protagonists play religiously. It provides the focus for the story and the reason for the guys to get together expel their pent up testosterone and swap war stories about their women friends and their latest troubles. Then there are the games of daily life that each of them engage in as their separate stories are told in chapters under their names. And finally there are the more subtle games their female partners manipulate while perpetually competing with them. The women eventually win their place at the Sunday afternoon gaming table from which they have been traditionally barred. Although the book's about a quarter too long and has several typos and a couple of grammatical gremlins readers with a penchant for soap operas written or televised will enjoy the erratic sometimes erotic interplay of the five key players and their consorts.

Each of the gamesmen has a connection to the armed forces one currently on active service at home the others in a variety of former roles. They also exhibit an interesting range of backgrounds different but believable outlooks on their lifetime game plans and fluctuating relationships with their female counterparts. Their relationships run the gamut. There's the stable family of thirty-nine-year-old Master Sergeant John "JT" Taylor his German-born wife Kit and their two children; their relationship is as stable as one can expect from an interracial union and a haunting former liaison that resulted in a child. Then there's the womanizing divorced "playa" twenty-seven-year-old Gary who has a four-year-old son. Gary is the one who is played when one woman suckers him into paying for a pregnancy. The third friend is thirty-year-old Darren now a nurse at a local hospital and a fitness freak seeking play-time away from his increasingly obese wife. Even though he loses his extra-marital trophy mistress to a rival he's probably better off in the long run given her mental instability. Fourth player Preston Fontaine a divorced thirty-year-old accountant is rumoured to be gay at least until he begins his

game-playing with Joanne Wesley the single mom intern assigned to help him with an audit of the local municipal government where officials have been playing fast and loose with a substantial amount of funds. And finally there is lawyer Charles Jefferson and his next-door neighbour and longtime companion Sharon a doctor and the woman everyone expects him to marry. At least that is until he meets beauty shop owner Devera and it's soon "game over" for Sharon.

"All the world's a stage" Shakespeare said. "And all the men and women merely players." Clyde Dowell's stage and his players are living proof that lessons can be learned between the fun and games.