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Rock On: An Office Power Ballad

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*** Nonfiction.** By Dan Kennedy. *Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill*, \$14.95. **Grade: B+**

Book in a nutshell: Kennedy, a regular contributor to *McSweeney's* and author of the comedic memoir *Loser Goes First*, writes a riotously funny chronicle of his year-and-a-half stint in the music business.

Kennedy begins by establishing himself as a music geek of the first order, one who wore a homemade Kiss costume every Halloween and was stealing his sister's Led Zeppelin records by age 10. So when he takes a job as director of creative development at Atlantic Records, he's disappointed to learn that, behind the scenes, the music industry is more about office politics than power chords.

For starters, Kennedy gets off on the wrong foot with his future boss in a bizarre disagreement concerning a chocolate-chip muffin confused for blueberry. He suffers the usual workplace malaise (induced by the type of meetings lampooned on *The Office*) but also encounters unique sources of on-the-job humiliation (having to design an ad campaign for easy-listening crooner Phil Collins, getting tattled on by rock band The Donnas).

However, there's an even more ominous cloud than the figurative corporate takeover of rock 'n' roll hanging over Kennedy: the literal kind of corporate takeover, which could result in massive layoffs, including his own.

Best tidbit: "Look, I know I'm marred with a good old-fashioned alcoholic lust for career suicide, and I know by now you've figured out that I'm a pessimist hard-wired to fail, just like any other semitalented malcontent burdened by self-absorption, minor chemical imbalance and the guilt of wasting years, but you have to admit that this is shaping up to look like the end."

Pros: Kennedy's running commentary is hysterical, and his thoughtful inner monologue makes this a page-turner, more than a few times inducing laugh-out-loud moments followed by a whisper of "That's sooo my office."

Cons: The book ends abruptly - very abruptly. Once Kennedy's tenure with Atlantic is finished, there remain only a few short chapters and a snapshot of Jimmy Page in a business suit meant to illustrate the *fait accompli* of the corporatization of rock 'n' roll. I would have liked a bit more closure.

Final word: Kennedy has written a hilarious and enjoyable read that belongs on the bookshelf of every fan of the self-deprecating hipster memoir.

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