

Bing spreads humor too thin in latest novel

Chicago Final Edition

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Chicago Tribune. Chicago, Ill.: Nov 2, 2003. pg. 3

FICTION.

You Look Nice Today

By Stanley Bing

Bloomsbury, 291 pages, \$24.95

If you're looking for a breezy novel to whisk you away from the monotony of your corporate life, Stanley Bing's new work of fiction could be a curious choice.

Bing's "You Look Nice Today," set inside a sprawling, impersonal, multinational corporation, may hit too close to home. But if fictional accounts of stressful merger meetings, gossipy cubicle whispers and overpaid executives in the midst of existential crises get your blood pumping, this one may be for you.

The backstabbing business world is one Bing knows well; he regularly lampoons it in his sarcastic columns for Fortune magazine. In this, his second novel, he draws full characters out of what typically in his writing are caricatures.

The book centers on the relationship between Robert Harbert, an executive at Global Fiduciary Trust, and a secretary named CaroleAnne Winter. As a temp, Winter rescues "Harb" by miraculously re-creating a critical lost document.

Harb and CarolAnne become close personally and professionally over several years, but she later shocks everyone by slapping Global Fiduciary with a \$150 million sexual-harassment lawsuit. Harb and Fred Tell, a friend, co-worker and omniscient narrator, are floored. The suit sends Harb into an all-out tailspin, while the previously bright, competent and pleasant CarolAnne also shows signs she's going mad.

With sex, money and power as its building blocks, the novel starts with great promise for intrigue. Unfortunately, the promise goes largely unfulfilled.

Bing's humor spices up the story, but it is spread too thin. As a writer, Bing appears better suited for the sprint of magazine columns than the marathon of novels.

[Illustration]

PHOTO; Caption: PHOTO: (Book cover.)

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