

Rachel Abramowitz  
“Is That a Gun in Your Pocket?”  
Random House  
2000  
0679437541  
Rating: 8  
Review:

In one of the more telling accounts in Rachel Abramowitz’s “Is That a Gun in Your Pocket?”, Dawn Steel, president of Columbia Pictures, lay dying from a brain tumor in late 1997. She received a phone call from President Clinton, and the operator asked if she would hold the line. After sixty seconds she hung up the phone, refusing to wait. When the operator called back, Steel told her, “Tell him to hurry up, I’ve got a tumor here.” The scene exemplifies Steel’s intricate, driven personality, and the book offers an inquiring look at the dominant women in Hollywood. Abramowitz, a reporter who has covered Hollywood for *Premiere* magazine, interviewed hundreds of sources “to puncture the mythology and to circumvent the silence” of women in movies. The result is at times overlong, yet vibrant and often very funny, with a sensitive look at the lives of some of the most powerful women in Hollywood, including Polly Platt, Barbara Streisand, Jodie Foster, and Sherry Lansing, among others. Where other books in the genre followed academic formulas, Abramowitz’s novelistic style bounces between gossip and cogent biography, and it’s a formula that works. Because Abramowitz collected her material mostly from personal, one-to-one interviews, many of the chapters are personal and at times bittersweet (for example, many of these women tell of losing their fathers very early in childhood). But what the book does best is investigate the beguiling personalities

of these powerful women, and their often torrid relationships to both men and women in their domain (there is a lengthy chapter about the less than amicable relationship between Polly Platt and Peter Bogdanovich). They also openly discuss their conflicted opinions of life in Hollywood, and reveal how that life has changed their personal lives. It turns out that the women who run Hollywood aren't that crazy about it. This is a fascinating behind the scenes look at Hollywood, and one that is worth the read.

–Timothy Agnew