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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ HISTORICAL

Brassankle

David G. Weaver
AuthorHouse (May 17, 2013)
Softcover $23.95 (388pp)
978-1-4817-5026-4

A tale of two worlds, white and Native-American, is told with vivid language and an engaging plot.

Set against the backdrop of the cultural and military turmoil of the Revolutionary War, this coming-of-age novel looks at the fighting in the Carolinas, which often takes a back seat to fighting in the Northeast.

The novel follows a Catawban—the son of a white father and a Native-American mother—named Gray Cloud, who as a young man is sent to Charles Town to be educated. He is mostly known by his white name, Truly Doran—which uses his father's surname and is an apt authorial gesture toward the character's striving for honesty in all things.

Author David Weaver offers readers a sweeping look at his protagonist's life. After Truly's birth, his mother shows the baby to his father and vows to send the boy to the white man's settlement when he is old enough, setting up one of the books major questions: Can one really have the best of both worlds?

From there the book follows Truly's search for his identity. He takes a stand against the British as he pursues the answers to more personal questions of selfhood and belonging. In the end, readers find Truly taking a white wife and vowing to help his own future sons feel more included in society than he ever did.

The title is a reference to the label applied to people of mixed heritage like Truly—which itself is a reference to the historical precedent of enslaving conquered peoples. The cover is very busy, and it is hard to identify the images and read the type at a glance. The title in yellow against a cream background is particularly difficult to see.

Weaver's writing is smooth and clean, not getting in the way of readers' understanding or enjoyment of the plot. While the language and dialogue aren't overly artful or literary, they are vivid enough to give readers a glimpse of history and of the lives of the characters.

The appendices—paintings and photographs of key leaders and concepts (like leg irons) from the Revolutionary War and a year-by-year list of battles fought in South Carolina—feel more like filler than essential material. Readers could easily find this information online, and it's not required for, or particularly helpful to, understanding the novel.

Brassankle will appeal mostly to adults, but some more advanced, history-minded teens will particularly identify with Truly.

MELISSA WUSKE (September 23, 2013)

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