ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

JUVENILE FICTION

Chris Christmas Tree
Ronald Skowronek
Kenn Yapsangco, illustrator
Xlibris
978-1-4836-6360-9
Three Stars (out of Five)

A Christmas tree's journey to adulthood mirrors our own in this thought-provoking children's book.

What's Christmas without a Christmas tree? Ronald Skowronek's thought-provoking children's book, *Chris Christmas Tree*, is one part holiday story and one part coming-of-age story. The protagonist, a tree named Chris, grows up on a tree farm in the mountainous area of western North Carolina. The tree's journey mirrors a child's fear of the unknown: growing up. When he is taken one morning to be sold at a Christmas tree lot, the reader can't help but wonder if he will find a family before the big day. Lush illustrations and realistic descriptions make Chris's journey unique.

Though written for elementary-aged children, some of the language is dark. Skowronek depicts Chris's fear when he hears the "rumbling of truck engines and the shrieking of shifting gears." Such descriptions heighten the impact of the tree's experiences. After all, children often fear the day they have to grow up. As Chris's father says, "this was why he was born; this was his destiny."

One of the strongest sections of the book involves Chris's adopted family decorating him for the holiday. Chris emanates pride once he is strung with colored lights, fragile tree ornaments, and an old Nativity scene. The hustle and bustle of the holidays—from food preparation to visitors—showcase the Christmas spirit.

Kenn Yapsangco's warm illustrations are full of rich greens, blues, and reds. In fact, there are too few images in the book. Long pages of text feel cumbersome. Had the story been broken up with more illustrations, the content would be easier for a child to take in without the aid of an adult. The middle sections of the book are devoid of much illustration. For example, the section that explains harvesting the tree and transporting it for sale is more than three pages

long.

Though Chris's uncertainty and fear is important, some of the descriptions could be streamlined, and more time could have been spent on the Christmas-tree sales lot. The latter half of the book is broken up with shorter sections of text and more images.

A delightful twist on a Christmas tale and on the traditional coming-of-age story, the book mirrors important experiences for any child growing up: the uncertainty of the world. Just like humans, Chris experiences fear of the unknown, pride in self-realization, and the comfort of reuniting with family.

Lisa Bower