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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ HISTORICAL

Crystal Ships

Richard Sharp
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An understanding of history and the art that came out of the 1960s adds a robust sense of time and place to this vibrant story.

Crystal Ships is an epic story about a group of young friends living through the turmoil of the 1960s and ’70s. Coming from different social, religious, political, and economic backgrounds, the main characters try to discover who they are and their places in the world. With compelling characters, an impressively researched historical landscape, and an artfully crafted plot, the book is entertaining and educational from the first page to the last.

Shane, Gil, Ira, Lucy, Camila, Ava, and Balinda form their friendships during the heady days of the Kennedy administration. They are very different people, but all are hopeful for the future and trying to pursue their individual dreams. They are scholars and artists, entrepreneurs and idealists, but their lives are unfolding during a unique and difficult time in history. Their personal triumphs and tragedies bind them together, and they grow and change as all people do. However, each of their lives is affected by the major events of the day.

Crystal Ships is a fascinating book. The story is extremely complex, but the author does a superb job of weaving the strands of the plot into a seamless narrative that is more about the time period than about the characters. The writing is very clean and readable, and the dialogue flows naturally.

The incorporation of historical detail makes the text come alive, with references not only to the politics and news events of the era but also to the art. Many chapters are given the title of a well-known song, and the meaning of the music reflects the content of the chapter, creating a soundtrack that enriches the plot.

The characters discuss dance and literature right along with news and politics. For example, Ava states, “Maybe Tom Wolfe and his circle of literary elites are infected with the ‘me-me-me’ disease they credit to the American people and, in particular, women. But that’s just the contempt for the bourgeoisie, as if he were Gustave Flaubert or some such.” Though some references are obscure, the delivery is natural and adds a robust sense of time and place to the narrative.

The sixties and seventies were turbulent decades. The Kennedy administration, the civil rights movement, women’s liberation, Watergate, and the Vietnam War all helped to define the culture and the people who were trying to make sense of it. Through the story of seven young adults, *Crystal Ships* offers a vibrant and compelling look into an important time in history and provides a remarkable context for understanding the art that came out of the era.
CATHERINE THURESON (December 20, 2013)

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