ForeWord Reviews
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GENERAL

Kingdom Rattus: The Rodent Chronicles
Michael A. Novelli
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Imagine the intrigue, subterfuge, family secrets, and epic battles that occur between royal families and political factions. Now imagine that this drama takes place beneath your local park and the perpetrators are small animals. Welcome to Kingdom Rattus.

The Marrow-Vinjians and Least-Rogonians are warring rodent tribes that live on opposite sides of a park lake. Like most enemies, their lifestyles and philosophies differ. The Least-Rogonians worship gods, hold slaves, and have the power of magic. The Marrow-Vinjians are "civilized"—they wear clothes and don't believe in enslaving other creatures, but they conquer other lands (i.e., a flock of pigeons) to extend their culture and authority.

Both tribes want ruling power and know that in order to get it they must control the Citadel, an entry to their world which keeps the lake from crashing down into their deep burrows and warrens. It's currently controlled by the Strega and their sister tribe, the Wahid. Queen Ophiuchus, leader of the Least-Rogonians, sends her warrior mystic son Astran to capture the Citadel and offer the Strega the gift of immortality in exchange. King Marrow, the leader of the Marrow-Vijians, also plots to overthrow the Wahid and capture the Citadel and sends a rat named Bloodford. Everyone's plans are averted as one rat tribe attacks another, and other animals play all sides against the middle. This novel details four days of battles for the Citadel.

A descendent of Edgar Allan Poe, Michael Novelli writes fiction and film critiques in his spare time while deployed to Iraq. He has published many short stories, but this is his first novel.

Novelli's imaginative adult fantasy is wonderfully fascinating and occasionally humorous. The world-building is well done and the creatures themselves are characteristically human. In addition to rats, the story includes explosive-wielding squirrels, magic-resistant black cats, frogs that want to take the lagoon away from the ducks, and advisor ferrets that may not be trustworthy. A decades old, four-foot tall dollhouse serves as the Marrow-Vijians' royal palace. Their village is modeled after 10 Downing Street, they wear powdered wigs, and British army

dress uniforms (because unlike other vermin who dummy-up human clothing scraps, they're mastered the art of tailoring their own clothes).

Although the characters may make readers chuckle, don't mistake this for a soft humorous story, as the level of violence among the rats is bloody and harsh. For example, swords are used to gut one animal while a small cache of revolvers are mounted to make war cannons.

This book has a well-developed plot with interesting characters and good dialogue. The author is particularly good at infusing the animals with human qualities, but manages to balance this with descriptions, body movements, and behaviors that remind the reader that the characters are animals.

There are several point-of-view problems that distract from specific scenes, but not enough to detract from the overall story. For example, chapters switch from first-person perspective, as told by Bloodford, to third-person, as told from Astran's perspective. This gets confusing when other characters interject their thoughts and views.

Readers should enjoy this fantasy tale of war and politics which will challenge their view of what really goes on beneath the local park.