Clarion Review

General

Lost Diamond
John C. Redmond
Trafford Publishing
978-1-4251-3573-7
One Star (out of Five)

A diamond mine in post-apartheid South Africa a missing gargantuan-sized diamond and an engaging geologist hired to find it—what could be more exotic and enticing to mystery readers? Add a beautiful woman the South African countryside and you have the ingredients for an enthralling mystery novel. The author who holds a PhD in Geophysics knows the land the rocks the jargon and the ways of mining; unfortunately his fiction writing techniques lag far behind the science.

SoBots a young South Africa mining company recruits the American geologist Bret Taylor to pose as an IDB (Illicit Diamond Buyer) to ferret out the thief who stole the world's largest diamond from their mine. One look at Victoria the beautiful SoBots recruiter and Bret accepts the job hops a plane to South Africa and teams up with a cabbie who becomes his translator and new best friend. Taylor and Fatshe the cabbie spend their evenings buying drinks for diamond mine workers at the local watering holes (called shebeens) in hopes that a miner will sell the lost diamond to them. Readers learn more about the beer than the miners. Bret follows a trail littered with tortured and dead victims to a thief who readers first met in the opening chapter and a bevy of evil men bent on their own goals—some altruistic some political some simply greedy.

Minor characters such as Fatshe show a glimmer of development but most characters sound alike and talk in stilted sentences without humor or personality. They often carry on conversations that reiterate information conveyed through exposition and feel like a car spinning its wheels:

‘Those are jacaranda trees. They bloom this time of year. We are passing by Pretoria…Are they not beautiful?’

‘They are. I have a friend who lives in Pretoria.’

Stereotypical villains dot the landscape a treasure-rich African landscape woefully underserved and under-utilized. Readers will spot the murderer upon first encounter and will have solved the mystery long before the reveal. The plot flows toward a denouement rich with every detail explained and topped with a large dollop of South African history. For a change the capitalists are actually good guys and the woman offers only beauty no mystery. Attempts to create a romantic story line fail as does any effort to describe fashion: “She was dressed in a black dress with a lace ridge around the top. She had a patent leather belt with silver ornamentation around her waist that enhanced her attractive figure.” Contrast this description with one of a mining nature and you’ll see where the strength of the novel lies: “After the primary crusher the ore was moved by conveyor to another building that contained a hot-water-flushed cone reducer and a high-pressure roll crusher where the ore was further reduced in size and where scrubbers removed the fine waste material.”

Readers may be interested in the mystery involving Africa diamond mining and post-apartheid politics but the strong plot succumbs to weak writing and never recovers.

Dawn Goldsmith