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FOREWORD REVIEW ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

Montooth 2: Race For the Ryland Ruby

Robert Jay
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In *Montooth 2: Race for the Ryland Ruby*, Robert Jay continues the saga of four teenage adventurers and a few other main characters from the first book in the series. *Montooth and the Canfield Witch*, Jay's debut novel, was a huge success, winning numerous historical fiction and mystery awards in the young adult and adult categories. Set in the 1950s, this new installment is an action-adventure story that follows a plethora of characters all over the globe. For example, Sally Canfield, the witch in the first book, becomes a more traditional member of society and discovers an old family story going back to the 19th century involving an oft taken for granted jewel in her possession. This family history forms the central cohesive story around which the rest of the characters orbit. Along the way, the reader meets notable historical characters from the post-WWII era including the Cuban Castro brothers, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and even key political players in Burma's 19th century colonial cache.

Montooth 2 was written for a crossover audience of both adults and teens. The book is valuable, if for no other reason than it makes historical lessons come alive almost effortlessly. At one point, the reader is transported through time, from tropical Florida in the 1950s to South Asia where they meet Mindon Min and his half-brother Pagan Min, political leaders in tumultuous 19th century Burma. The fact that each story line includes plenty of adventure serves as a bit of sugar to make what may be seen as boring history go down easier. Jay's descriptions of the environments he explores are vivid, and it's obvious that he's made an effort to include non-cliché tidbits of historical information. The book is weaker in providing an overall cohesive story arc, however, and readers looking for a tight plot may be disappointed. One reason for this may be the large number of characters that are involved; in addition to the thirteen characters inherited from the first *Montooth* book, Jay introduces thirteen more characters in this second book. This requires the reader to pay close attention, resulting in the occasional need to refer to the book's character list. This can sometimes pull readers from the story and make the book feel like it is several stories inside one binding. In fact, *Montooth 2*'s plot could have been strengthened by streamlining the story and focusing on a few key characters. Regardless, flexible readers not concerned with tight plot lines will delight in the most interesting story lines, including a delightful myth about how armadillos, animals found in the southern regions of the United States, came to have hard shells.

In the end, the author succeeds in giving readers a work they can chew on by providing plentiful historical context, a list of interesting and unique characters, and a storyline that is wide open for resolution. One can only wonder when the third installment will become available.

GABRIELA WORREL (July 19, 2011)

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