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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ HUMOR FICTION

Ratrigues and the Invisible Intelligence: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups

Graham Deeks
Trafford Publishing (Oct 13, 2012)
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With *Ratrigues and the Invisible Intelligence*, the third book in a series, humorist Graham Deeks imagines Cape Town, South Africa, through the eyes of a roguish rat named Ratrigues and his unlikely traveling companions, which include roaches, mice, and the occasional frog. Deeks takes a step away from the human drama of apartheid and offers a lighthearted look at what might have been going on behind the scenes, or under the floorboards, in 1960s South Africa. The tone is anything but sober as he sends a ragtag band of animals on a quest for a new territory to call home.

Seasoned traveler Ratrigues arrives in Cape Town with everything he needs: stylish sunglasses on his face, a camera around his neck, and money in his pocket for drinks at the nearest pub. His fondness for fermented peach juice—for fermented anything, really—leads him to the Rat & Roach pub, literally a hole-in-the-wall establishment serving drinks to all manner of bug and rodent. There, he learns of the impending homelessness of Cape Town's scavengers, whose resources will surely dwindle when the government relocates a huge portion of the bipedal community.

Luckily, there is an elite band of cockroaches in town that is ready for the challenge. Enter the members of the Invisible Intelligence, known simply as "Aye-Aye." Deeks adores puns, and this is the first of many that will make readers groan and guffaw in equal measure. Cracking jokes all the way, Ratrigues, the roaches, and assorted mice take to the road, or at least the train track. Their tour provides a travelogue of South Africa, as the pack encounters a parade of wisecracking elephants, mongooses, geckos, spiders, bats, and more. Each town looks pretty much the same, however, and the trip begins to feel more like a pub crawl than a quest. Deeks was born in Cape Town and has written about the area in a previous book, so the book's lack of local color is surprising.

It is humor that keeps the story alive. One has to laugh at a mongoose whose unimaginative parents have named him Mongoo, or be amused by the ironing-board preparation of underground recipes like earthworm fettucine. Deeks's own drawings add another dimension to the group's travels, as words alone cannot adequately describe, for example, a night spent inside an elephant's ear. His creator is obviously immersed in Ratrigues's world, and while his affection for the haphazard posse is charming, the self-referential humor can become tiring.

Deeks has continued his fascination with the Cape Town crew, and has published two more stories featuring the Invisible Intelligence. Those wishing for more antics from Aye-Aye can look for *Mandrake and the Third Aye* and *Vermin from Space: Aye in the Sky*.

SHEILA M. TRASK (November 14, 2012)

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