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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ PICTURE BOOKS

The Adventures of Sir Ambrose Elephant: A Visit to the City

E. Smith
Ivy Marie Apa, illustrator
Xlibris (Sep 7, 2012)
Softcover $9.95 (19pp)
978-1-4691-8378-7

Extremely polite and charmingly innocent, Sir Ambrose Elephant is on an adventure to the city for the first time. On his way, he encounters a rabbit, a frog, and a bicycle and learns how dangerous trucks can be, all while trying to remember advice from his recently departed mother.

South African writer E. Smith tries to help readers know her beautiful and diverse country through her writing. While the animals are distinctly South African, especially the secretary bird that records most of what Sir Ambrose Elephant does, the plot would benefit from other interesting elements of Smith's native country.

The structure of the story is strong but presents minimal plot turns, resulting in a lack of suspense. Sir Ambrose Elephant's main goal is to reach the city and when he achieves this goal, he leaves immediately for another adventure. This quick turnaround may leave readers wondering about the point of the tale.

That being said, Sir Ambrose Elephant is a beguiling character, and Smith does a fine job of introducing a delightful cast of secondary characters along the way. The dialogue is often full of humor and bizarre wit, which adds to the book's allure.

While Smith's writing is better than average, the bright and professional illustrations by Ivy Marie Apa are what really carry the book. In the high-quality prints, Sir Ambrose Elephant takes on a new personality and reveals an enchanting range of emotions. The extremely cinematic images beg to become part of a children's television series because of the movement and life within them.

Unfortunately, the beautiful illustrations are minimized to between two and three inches in size and embedded within the text. Because of this, they seem too small in comparison to the large amount of words on the page. The writing and content are well suited for four- to six-year-olds, but the 8.5“ x 11“ portrait format and the layout seem oriented toward older children. The book would be much improved if the drawings were full-page prints interspersed with full pages of text.

While *The Adventures of Sir Ambrose Elephant* is Smith's first book, she hints that it won't be her last. There is great potential for this series if Smith can balance the lively pictures with engaging text and provide some needed plot twists to keep young readers captivated.

COLBY CEDAR SMITH (November 14, 2012)

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