Clarion Review

General

The Doll Brokers
Hal Ross
iUniverse
978-1-4401-0352-0
Four Stars (out of Five)

When Mattel introduced Barbie in March 1959 the toy company couldn't possibly have known that the doll that would dominate the market for fifty years nor could it have predicted its lasting popularity or ultimately its cultural impact. Not fully knowing how successful a doll like Barbie would be Mattel had to gamble that the doll would succeed. Such a risk is what Ann Lesage the main character of Hal Ross' novel *The Doll Brokers* is about to undertake when she signs a multi-billion dollar deal to manufacture Baby Talk N Glow.

While dolls like Barbie and the fictional Baby Talk N Glow are created for sold to and intended for children Ross reveals that the toy industry lacks much of the innocence of its customers; this is a high stakes world that serves as the backdrop for Ross's exciting novel. Ann Lesage is the new president of Hart Toy a toy company started by her mentor Felicia Morhardt and Ann's just closed the biggest deal in her young career. In order to ensure the success of Baby Talk N Glow Ann must navigate a cutthroat industry that takes her through the doors of some of the largest toy manufacturers and sellers in the world.

Ross creates intrigue and mystery by interweaving Ann's risky career decision with buried secrets about her past and her unstable relationship with the Morhardt family. The plot is not the only noteworthy aspect of this novel; the dynamic characters have layered depth and while some of their actions and motivations are predictable they are ultimately true to the characterizations Ross has created. Additionally Ross's style fits the quick pace of the storyline and the author skillfully depicts snappy realistic dialogue.

Combining a fast-paced plot with stylistically suitable writing *The Doll Brokers* is without a doubt a clever story set in an unconventional industry. So will Baby Talk N Glow be the next Barbie? Will competitors like Mattel or Hasbro edge out the Hart Toy company by introducing new dolls of their own? Will Ann's secretive past overcome her present? These

questions will keep readers turning the pages eager to uncover the answers.

Jessica Higgins