Clarion Review

General

The K-9 Chronicles: The Journey ... The Pack Heroics Continue, Book Two
Tomi Krugel / Alan Louis Krugel
Chrissy Crum / Barbara A. Fowlkes, illustrator
978-1-4343-4640-7
Three Stars (out of Five)

Collaboration is hazardous even between like-minded people but Alan Krugel faithfully passes on dramatic narratives from man's best friends in service of big city police and fire departments. This second installment of a series set in New York around September 11 2001 is liberally sprinkled with pen and ink illustrations. It features a cadaver-sniffing mixed-breed dog named Hunter S. Thompson called Tomi for short. He's paired with Kate his trainer and work partner whose speech Tomi deciphers rather intelligently. Dogs use a basic but valid method for comprehension: "…we learned new words every single day. We'd match the words with what they were doing or showing each other."

Given the unavoidable fact that Tomi's workdays center around scent-detecting lifeless bodies the nobility of the task is clearly underlined and de-emphasizes aspects which would upset impressionable readers. That balance between unadorned dog's-eye view reporting and authorial tact tips substantially in the section set during and after the World Trade Center collapse. Tomi walks among chunks of human bodies on blood-slickened sidewalks. Such gruesomely frank description likely reflects the authentic conditions of the site. The dog sees a great many people jump from the towers which counters most credible news accounts though readers should know that former NYFD Commissioner Thomas Von Essen was consulted on content.

Tomi's emotional state is originally upbeat but he reacts to shock-inducing trauma with aggression lacerating the hands of those who try to touch him. He is aware of acting out and wishes to do better. "I kept telling myself that the meanness the anger inside my head had to stop. I felt like taking my paws and clawing it out." If Tomi cannot learn to control himself the people will send him to the medical room no dog walks out of. The last stop before humane destruction is in Los Angeles with a miracle worker for troubled service dogs known as "The

Man Who Runs With Dogs."

A repeating motif of butterflies that appear to Tomi stands for souls released to a peaceful realm. He senses the meaning and is comforted at the sight of them. The second of the K-9 Chronicles concentrates less than the series opener on patterns of dogs' assessments of the human milieu; the unique prism through which they interpret the world is already established. Instead this book's revelations are about the emotions which drive behavior. The Krugels navigate tricky territory from a believable perspective endorsing the importance of second chances and—by extension—affirming the value of all souls those in agony and those at rest as well. This is a story with a lot of heart suitable for both adults and young adult readers given the proviso that they should expect to face the grit and loss of Ground Zero a horror which caused too many survivors to turn in on themselves.

Todd Mercer