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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ FANTASY

The Plateau: Book 1: Voices of the Earth

Maureen Dudley
Erin E. Hunter, illustrator
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Even the smallest of our actions can affect what happens to the environment in the future. What if a mundane daily task could cause the difference between a life full of possibilities and a land unrecognizable from your own? *The Plateau: Voices of the Earth* examines these possibilities.

Despite this premise, the book is not a time travel story per se. Instead, author Maureen Dudley takes a complex look at how generations affect one another and interact.

The story is narrated from two perspectives—Keitha's and Catherine's. The women are linked somehow, and the actions of one can affect the other. However, their relationship isn't particularly friendly, and communication between the pair is fraught with complications. Yet despite their differences, the importance of their relationship to future generations forces Keitha and Catherine to continue interacting.

The author uses Keitha and Catherine's stories to illustrate how important it is to take care of the environment not just for their sakes, but also for that of future generations who must live with the outcome of their ancestor's actions. The story keeps the reader engaged by revealing just enough of the past's influence on the future. Despite the revelation of future outcomes to the reader, the author was able to maintain the suspense in the narrative and this is definitely one reason the novel works well.

Another strong point of the book is that the main characters are sympathetic and relatable. For example, Catherine isn't always the nicest or most likable person, but her difficult past and personal tragedies make her sympathetic. Some of the secondary characters aren't very well developed, but this doesn't detract from the story much thanks to the strong leads.

The main drawback of the novel is that the narrative takes a while to get moving. The beginning is confusing which makes it difficult for readers to be drawn in. Some may be turned off by the shifts in point of view and the early lack of continuity between the two story lines.

If readers stick with the novel, however, they will be rewarded. *The Plateau: Voices of the Earth* is a very interesting and well-written story. The plot is engaging, the characters are likeable, and once the action gets going, the book keeps a page-turning pace that will engage those who enjoy fantasy, general fiction, and stories about the environment.

LAURA MUNION (December 5, 2012)

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