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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ HISTORICAL

The Ratters of Lightning Ridge

Richard W. Holmes
Authorhouse (Sep 14, 2012)
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The Ratters of Lightning Ridge chronicles the lives of men and women in Australia's opal mining industry, providing insight into the country's rich history and culture.

Though tales of many characters are interwoven into this adventure, there are two protagonists: Rusty, who hails from Sydney, and Kate, a rugged, sixty-year-old cattle rancher. It is through their work and interaction with others that the author draws a vivid sense of the mining environment, from the mechanics of the mining industry to the people living and working in the outback. Rusty and Kate team up to help an American businessman locate and run an opal mining claim. While Kate is attending to an accident involving a truck full of sheep, the mine is robbed by "ratters"—people who steal opals from other people's mines. As the story progresses, Rusty and Kate endeavor to strike it rich, catch a ratter and, later, decide to become ratters themselves.

Richard W. Holmes writes in simple sentences, and his narrative is informative and captivating on many levels. He offers well-rounded characters, mystery, tension, and a detailed take on the Australian landscape. The relationship between people and nature is especially appealing, and the abundance and diversity of living creatures in the seemingly barren outback is surprising.

The narrative is mostly descriptive and smooth, such as in the opening paragraph, which reveals the reason behind the name Lightning Ridge: "All lay silently in the fierce dark of night with sounds of thunder and rain pouring down on their bodies." However, in the first part of the book, the story is disrupted by italicized explanations of Australian culture, irrelevant information, and odd chapter endings that appear following some Australian references. Examples of these issues are evident in the details about Rusty: "Since Rusty didn't have a permanent job his ex-wife had applied to Centerlink and was receiving child support for the two children," which is followed by the closing sentence, "Centerlink is an agency of the Australian government not unlike the Social Security Department of the US Government."

The second part of the book is more cohesive. There are some awkward chapter endings, but irrelevant information is all but absent and explanations of Australian references are incorporated into the narrative or appear in a concise glossary at the back of the book.

Informal pencil sketches of the mining town and Australian wildlife, such as kangaroos, emus, and gallahs, help to bring the book to life.

The Ratters of Lightning Ridge is an appealing and enlightening story. It successfully details the lives of Australian miners and cattle ranchers while illuminating the beauty of Australia's wildlife and landscape. Because of the ease of the writing style and the diverse information offered, the book will appeal to both teens and adults, in addition to fans of all things Australian.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (January 14, 2013)

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