ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

SCIENCE FICTION

Vermin from Space: Aye in the Sky
Graham Deeks
Trafford
978-1-4269-9542-2
Three Stars (out of Five)

In comedy parlance, a throwaway joke gets delivered in a casual, easy manner. Its power comes from the lack of emphasis placed on it. A throwaway works only when the comedian or writer refrains from showing any awareness that he's even making a humorous remark. Drawing attention to the joke threatens to insult the audience by indicating they weren't intelligent enough to get it. This type of humor is used in abundance in *Vermin From Space: Aye in the Sky* , but not necessarily well.

In this fourth book in his cockroach- and rat-centric series, Graham Deeks continues the story of *Mandrake and the Third Aye*. Ratrigues, the ultra-cool rat who wears Ray-Bans and a Ratolex watch, discovers that he and some of his roach friends are to accompany Mandrake, a "'heavily' underweight, whitish mouse," on an intergalactic voyage to roach headquarters. And as the ranking non-roach in a roach society, it will be up to Mandrake to solve the pustule-producing plague he and his friends discover is infecting the space roaches.

Unfortunately, few readers will be able to make much sense of the plot for two reasons. First, the author attempts to cram some sort of pun or throwaway joke into each sentence. Relying on quantity rather than quality, the author includes everything from antroids (yes, referring to robots of Formicidae design) to stale '50s sexism: "Ships, for one, are referred to as 'she,' probably because they are difficult to handle."

Second, Deeks fails to choose a consistent perspective from which he can deliver the story. Ostensibly, it is told from a third-person perspective that randomly jumps from the thoughts of one character to another. But every few lines, the author interrupts the narrative thread to address the reader directly in the second person. This break in the narration not only makes it hard for readers to settle into the story, it also undermines the few truly funny throwaway jokes.

Sprinkled through *Vermin From Space: Aye in the Sky* are a handful of gray-scale drawings. From the cyclopic Eyeleen, head of room service, to spaceships that resemble various

insects found on Earth, Deeks's drawings bring his story to life in ways his writing doesn't. Although a rough read, *Vermin From Space* would make a good independently published graphic novel as it shows Deeks to be an excellent illustrator.

Joseph Thompson