

LORGNETTE

Quarterly Review of Children's and Young Adults' Books

Author

Dawson, Delilah S

Illustrator

Reviewer

Dameron, Holly

Pages

357p

Price

\$18.99

ISBN

978-0-593-48679-5

Publisher & Date

Delacorte, 2023

Classification

Fiction

Grade Level

9 and up

Book Review: MIDNIGHT AT THE HOUDINI

Imagine a magic hotel where no one ever leaves, a story with nods to The Night Circus, Caraval, and Alice in Wonderland. While the vibes and book blurb piqued my curiosity, the execution of this concept didn't live up to my expectations.

The main character, Anna, is a Type A who needs to be in control. She always has a plan, and she keeps her family on task. Anna's motivations lack any real sympathy. So what if she was teased at a birthday party for not wearing the "right" clothes? It would've been more interesting to focus on aspects of her family life, such as how her dad is a business tycoon in Las Vegas, that her mom mismanages the credit cards, and why her sister is the sweetheart of the family.

Max's character is quite fascinating since he has grown up in the Houdini Hotel with his mom, who controls the Houdini. All Max wants is to go out and see the world, which his mom doesn't want because of revenge. The romance between Anna and Max is generally quite cute, yet at times, the interactions between the two (and Anna's whole demeanor) seem more on a middle grade level than young adult, which is the audience for whom this book is marketed.

The magical world-building and descriptions of the Houdini fell flat and lacked any vibrancy I had hoped for. I'm greatly disappointed that the place and title both reference Houdini when very little in the book actually talks about or has anything to do with Harry Houdini. The novel is written in third person present tense, which contributes to a disconnect between the characters and the story. Having chapters alternate between each character (Anna, Max, Anna's dad, and Max's mom) in either first person or third



person omniscient would have allowed a deeper connection and more deeply fleshed-out characters. The story idea is such a great concept with so much potential that I'm saddened I didn't like it as much as I wanted to.

