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Sightseeing



Synopsis

One of the most widely reviewed debuts of the year, *Sightseeing* is a masterful story collection by an award-winning young author. Set in contemporary Thailand, these are generous, radiant tales of family bonds, youthful romance, generational conflicts and cultural shiftings beneath the glossy surface of a warm, Edenic setting. Written with exceptional acuity, grace and sophistication, the stories present a nation far removed from its exoticized stereotypes. In the prize-winning opening story "Farangs," the son of a beachside motel owner commits the cardinal sin of falling for a pretty American tourist. In the novella, "Cockfighter," a young girl witnesses her proud father's valiant but foolhardy battle against a local delinquent whose family has a vicious stranglehold on the villagers. Through his vivid assemblage of parents and children, natives and transients, ardent lovers and sworn enemies, Lapcharoensap dares us to look with new eyes at the circumstances that shape our views and the prejudices that form our blind spots. Gorgeous and lush, painful and candid, *Sightseeing* is an extraordinary reading experience, one that powerfully reveals that when it comes to how we respond to pain, anger, hurt, and love, no place is too far from home.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. The Thailand of Westerners' dreams shares space with a Thailand plagued by social and economic inequality in this auspicious debut collection of seven plaintive and luminous stories. In the title tale—*an exquisite meditation on human dependency*—a son and his ailing mother must accept the dismal reality of her encroaching blindness and what it means for his

plans to attend college away from home. In "Don't Let Me Die in This Place," the most exuberant of the stories, an ornery and uproarious widowed grandfather, recently crippled by a stroke, moves from Maryland to Bangkok to live with his son, Thai daughter-in-law and their two "mongrel children." "Farangs" and "At the Café Lovely" convincingly examine adolescent friendship and love, as does "Priscilla the Cambodian" although when a refugee camp is torched by native Thai xenophobes, it veers toward the politically dark and ominous. Politics and fear also play a role in "Draft Day," a painfully grim story about two young male friends, one of whom avoids military conscription because of his privileged background, and "Cockfighter," the final and longest of the pieces, in which a berserk local thug rules a town through violence and corruption. Young or old, male or female, all of Lapcharoensap's spirited narrators are engaging and credible. Anger, humor and longing are neatly balanced in these richly nuanced, sharply revelatory tales. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Adult/High School Seven short stories set in Thailand explore the intricacies of modern-day relationships. The overriding themes are not specific to that country, though: each tale focuses on family dynamics and dysfunction. The protagonists in five of the selections are male teens living in or around Bangkok. "Draft Day" addresses the question of loyalty as the narrator allows his parents to bribe an official to keep him from being conscripted. "Sightseeing" tells of a son whose mother is going blind and the ambivalence he feels about living his own life versus caring for her. The last two stories are also first-person narrations, but the voices are different. In "Don't Let Me Die in This Place," an elderly American tries to come to terms albeit none too gracefully with his relocation to Thailand to live with his son and Thai daughter-in-law and their "mongrel" children, and "Cockfighting" is told from the perspective of a teen who watches her father become so obsessed with raising roosters that he is blinded to the disintegration of his marriage. In each of the stories, Lapcharoensap offers readers a glimpse of Thailand that they will not find in guidebooks not only the beauty of this country but also the grit, the overcrowding, and the poverty. More than that, however, he shows with rare wit and insight that coming of age in the world today is a bittersweet and complicated experience regardless of nationality. Kim Dare, Fairfax County Public Library, VA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Having visited Thailand a few times now, I was eager to find a work of modern fiction that captures the Thai experience. This book is exactly what I was looking for. Having ties to both Thailand and the US, Lapcharoensap moves effortlessly between the two cultures and is strongest in stories where cultures intersect and often clash. All stories are presented in the first person, but the narrator varies considerably from story to story: men, women, young, old, Thai, American, interracial. All characters are portrayed convincingly and sympathetically with the author's great skill. To summarize each story: In *Farangs*, a teen-aged boy with a Thai mother, who caters to tourists, and an American absentee father searches for love among the tourists, despite his mother's stern warnings. In *At The Cafe Lovely*, a young boy learns important life lessons about class warfare in the new Thailand by shadowing his older brother. In *Draft Day*, the friendship of two teen-aged boys is tested when a corrupt system allows one boy's family to exploit the benefits of wealth while the other is not so lucky. In *Sightseeing*, a mother's developing blindness creates a rift between her and her teen-aged son. In *Priscilla The Cambodian*, two young boys learn hard lessons about poverty and xenophobia and the unexpected kindness of strangers. In *Don't Let Me Die In This Place*, an elderly man moves from the US to Bangkok to be with his son's family and has a hard time adjusting. In *Cockfighter*, the longest and most intense story in the collection, a Thai girl comes of age in a corrupt and brutal village and learns that she's not the only one in the village who is in pain.

May I just say that the new review option of having to click these pre-selected 'characterises' is utterly awful!? The book was great fun and I recommend it to anybody who is travelling to Thailand some time soon or who is already there or who just would like to dream themselves into another life somewhere else in the world. The writer breaks the stereotype images that people may or may not have of Thai people and we enjoyed reading the short stories and imagining ourselves into the lives of the range of protagonists in different life situations in Thailand. Read it if you would like to broaden your horizon without working too hard. The book is an easy read, pleasant and not demanding.

Forget the idea of that exotically oriental, tourist attracting society and take in the reality of what it really means to walk through Thailand. Though not an expert of Rattawut's work, I do manage to constantly find a book at my hands, restlessly flipping the pages at my fingertips, and thus, I must say that I have stumbled across a collection of colorfully written short stories that bring to life the

country that lies in the heart of Southeast Asia. Captivating readers, Rattawut implements Thailand's social class, culture, and community within the stories. It starts off with "Farangs," the telling of a young boy's failing attempts of finding love with foreign women. Then there's "Draft Day," informing readers of the corrupted military drafting system through the story of two best friends who are both brought to the "draft lottery," and the only question on their minds: Whose lucky day is it today? Another interesting story is "Priscilla the Cambodian," as Rattawut pulls in the refugee experience of Thailand's surrounding country, Cambodia, and the conflict the Thais have with Cambodians "invading" their space after fleeing from their own country. The book ends with "Cockfighter," a story about a father's dangerous obsession with cockfighting upon encountering the higher and more powerful class told in the perspective of his young daughter. It is the only story within the book that is told with a female voice, and although it is unfortunate female voices were lacking in the book as a whole, Rattawut definitely made up for it in "Cockfighter," crafting the storyline with vivid imagery, capturing horrific encounters, and leaving the ending open to questioning what will happen next. But that is probably the whole objective of Rattawut's work in this story as well as the other six: understanding that the future is never clear for this social class. Connecting readers to the characters in one way or another, Sightseeing provides an understanding for the rigorous and chaotic lifestyles of the working and lower classes in modern day Thailand told in seven short stories and from different age and backgrounds. Rattawut gives voice to the silenced lower class as he brings forth the struggles that they face in their daily lifestyles. Some stories end with a sense of sorrow and apathy whereas others leave us with some hope. Whichever one it may be, the book holds a new way of looking at Thailand, clearing up any blind spots about this society one may have had prior to reading. So go ahead. Grab a copy and indulge in contemporary Thailand and all the beauty it has left to offer.

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