

Chris Mousdale's book *A Place of Stone and Darkness* had me hooked right from the start.

It is a stylishly produced hardback novel which crosses a mix of genres. There is fantasy, adventure and mystery all in a wonderfully imagined, dystopian underground world. Chris Mousdale also illustrates the book and includes maps of the Striggs world, a glossary of their language, and character portraits, as well as a number of gorgeous earthy illustrations.

Deep, deep down underground is the world of the flightless Striggs. They have lived there for thousands of years after being forced from the surface by savage humans. The Striggs have adapted to life underground but their world is threatened with pollution to its water and members of the flock are becoming ill and dying. While exploring in one of the tunnels Ellee Meddo, finds a human, a Toppa, as they are known, who has fallen through an old unused well. Toppas are known to be dangerous and feared at all costs but this Toppa is young and hurt and Ellee can't just leave him. With the help of her brother Sidfred, Ellee hides the boy but eventually he is discovered by other Striggs and that creates friction and more action. One Strigg in particular, Kass, wants to just kill the boy. The action is fast paced, even nail-bitingly at times, so that it was very hard to put the book down. I just wanted to keep reading.

In order for the community to work and survive, the Striggs believe in the mantra; "Be one, be all, be everything". When the group decide that they must return the boy, to the surface, this mantra becomes more important, especially when faced with danger from other humans. The world of the humans is violent and one of social decay. If the Striggs are discovered by humans it could mean the end of their world. I can tell you, their worlds do collide and the suspense built so quickly I was almost holding my breath wondering what was going to happen next.

I loved this novel for so many reasons. The fast-paced action, its total believability, its warmth, the friendships, the loyalties and even the subtle messages. Yes, there are messages about our environment, trust, human kindness and taking risks. This is a wonderful read and one that I predict will go far. Great for older readers and with its buff coloured pages is ideal for children with dyslexia. Loved it!