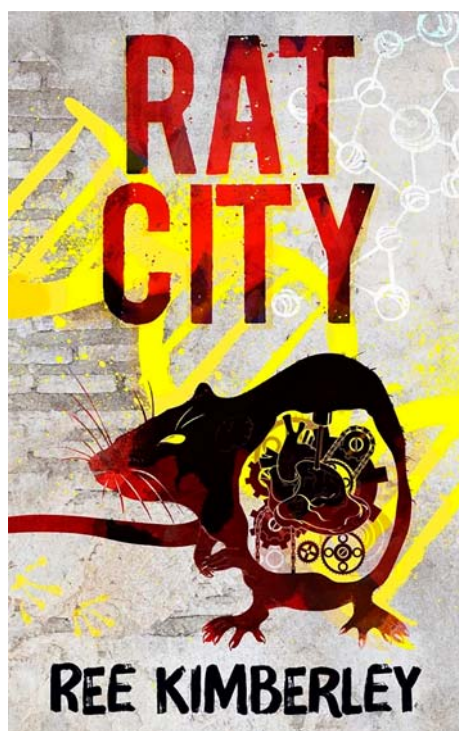


Don't Play With DNA



Rat City

Ree Kimberley

ISBN: 9780995387003

\$3.99 (e-book)

Published by [Maree Kimberley](#), 2016

Teens and adults inhabit different realities, 'created' from within – they see the world differently and react to it accordingly. These worlds often don't meet, which makes it hard for adults to understand their teen children and vice versa. When these worlds intersect, there is some possibility of communication but that possibility is often hindered by walls of expectations and preconceptions. The adults have a longer lifetime of experience than the teens and use this to make themselves right. Sometimes it takes an 'outside' adult to help parents understand that what their teen child is telling them s/he is experiencing is a valid take on the world.

In *Rat City*, Ree Kimberley explores all of this in a refreshing way. While so many YA novels create a post-apocalyptic world and have the teen protagonists on a quest to save that world – or at least the potential decency in it – this novel has the teens inhabit a world we can all recognise:

the here and now. And the teens behave much the way we would expect them to. Many of the adults, however ... But the adult behaviour is being viewed through teen eyes, so it rings true.

Shannon, the fifteen-year-old narrator, could be the boy next door. He has all the insecurities and fears and hopes and aspirations of a 'normal' young person growing up in the modern world. He is awkward around girls, feels insecure, doesn't share much with his parents and is trying to reinvent his world to not include the repercussions of a shocking experience he had some years ago. He is pulled into Ally's world – "I was just going to ask if you could give something to my brother Felix." – at the very start of the novel. Felix is the axle on which the unfolding events pivot.

And right from the start we know Shannon is carrying around the burden of that earlier event, about which he is extremely defensive.

Shannon tries very hard to stay out of the world that Ally wants him to be part of, but he eventually becomes completely immersed in it. He cannot tell his parents what is happening because they would not understand. He already has trouble with his teachers, but one, in particular, he sees as evil. He falls for Ally, but that road is also rocky. Typical teen experience.

Ree Kimberley does not shy away from exploring real issues, such as teen drug use, bad language, disobeying of parents, being out when they shouldn't be, rave partying, emerging sexuality. This makes the core of the novel believable and helps us understand Shannon's and Ally's behaviour as they try to solve the puzzle of a world that seems to be imploding.

Like in many YA novels, however, it is a number of the adults who are truly behaving badly. This can be read as a metaphor for the way the world is now for young people – the major problems in the world are of the adults' making and it will be the younger generation that has to find solutions, if any are to be found; with, perhaps, the involvement of some of the 'saner' adults.

The best speculative fiction and science fiction creates a world that is not too far removed from ours and populates it with recognisable people – it holds a mirror up to our society. In *Rat City*'s fictional world it is DNA manipulation that threatens humanity – there is extreme danger when a megalomaniacal, delusional scientist runs amok. It is something that could happen at any time with the research being done in our 'real' world. You have been warned. Shannon's and Ally's persistence

is finally helped by some of the adults stepping out of their comfort zones – the help comes from surprising quarters.

At this stage, *Rat City* is only available as an e-book, but it is a page-turner, or, more accurately, a screen-swiper. Ree writes assuredly and leaves us with a cliff-hanger at the end. She has indicated that it has taken her thirteen years to write this book, with many edits and re-writes. It has been worth it, as her craft shows. The writer Nancy Christie quotes Peter de Vries: “I love being a writer. What I can’t stand is the paperwork.” Nancy explains:

“The ‘paperwork’ might be the actual act of writing – the ‘putting the seat in the chair and the hands to the task’ part. The writing, deleting, rewriting, revising. The outlining, note-taking, researching, proofreading. We would love it more if it wasn’t so repetitious, so time-intensive, so damned hard.”

Ree Kimberley has certainly put her hands, and her mind, to the task. She is currently working on the second novel in the *Rat* trilogy, expecting to publish it in 2017. I am impatient to read it.