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Song Hawkins is a beautiful, tough, but lonely New York City businesswoman who thinks she's met the man of her dreams in Cable Jordan, the superintendent of a West Virginia coal mine. But soon after they impulsively marry, Song realizes they're in big trouble. She can't imagine life outside of New York, and Cable has no intention of leaving his beloved town of Highcoal.

Song's visit to the little mining community only makes things worse. It looks like the marriage is over. But in a shocking turn of events, Song realizes it's up to her to put on the red helmet of the new coal miner and descend into the deep darkness. There she faces her greatest challenge with choices and courage that will forever impact the life of Cable and the entire town.

Red Helmet Details

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Author : Homer Hickam

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From Reader Review Red Helmet for online ebook

Jerry says

This book was supposed to be Christian fiction, but...it had were at least six outright profanities and some rather bawdy references to sex. Even beyond that, the character of Song was just not all that likable. Like many fictional protagonists, she realizes the error of her ways by the book's end, but it's not all that believable; she goes from being strong-willed to a complete pushover for her husband. Even the opening sequence--a woman answering a business call at her wedding--is just plain ridiculous. I know that Mr. Hickam can do better than this; not too long ago, I read a sci-fi adventure of his that was great, rollicking fun. Unless you have a strange penchant for literature about mining, I can't recommend this one.

JOHN WEIR says

Homesick

Loved it made homesick for West Virginia and the little town i lived in Thurmond down on the New river.

Steve says

I related to this book which captured my interest in a number of ways. First, I was born in a small coal mining town in Eastern Pennsylvania, after bigger and better things I returned to this backward little minded town with a NYC wife who happened to be of Latin decent. I experienced first hand the prejudices, differences, of a small minded town who's biggest venture was probably a 2 hour trip to Atlantic City. The book depicted many ways of "coal-crackers" who to someone from NYC or any other big city, were one step above cavemen. Set in their ways. There was a clean sort of romantic interlude which added to the story. With consideration to the above is why perhaps I gave the book a 4-star rating. And there were some interesting facts about coal mining, the people, the town(s), their ways and differences of a majority of immigrants.

Emily Michelle says

I read this book because when I picked it up at the library and read the blurb--"Her helmet says she's clueless about coal mining. She knows even less about love."--I thought that surely it had to be a joke. Turns out it's not.

The novel is set in the hills of West Virginia and deals with the romantic entanglements of a tough-as-nails New York businesswoman and a ruggedly handsome mine superintendent. It's a fairly implausible premise,

unless it's for a dime-store romance novel, but I don't think it's completely hopeless. I just think that Hickam never managed to make it work. A huge problem is the main character, Song, who for the first part of the novel is completely and gratingly horrible--she shrieks (the author's own word) at someone for dirtying her expensive blouse, she tells a neighbor who has just driven several miles up a mountain to bring her dinner that she doesn't want it because it's fattening--and then suddenly decides to become a coal miner and falls in love with small-town West Virginia life. I never felt like Hickam had enough of a grasp on her character to make me believe in her transformation or care about her character. The love interest, Cable, doesn't have much of a character either, but at least you like him most of the time. And a number of the events that occur are thoroughly improbable; if I'd had to sit through one more moment of Song announcing that she had killed the villain, only to have him pop up a few pages later YET AGAIN, I was going to give up on the book entirely.

The saving grace of the book is the second part, which discusses in depth the work that coal miners do and what life is like in a small mining town. It's an occupation and way of life about which I knew nothing, and Hickam managed to dispense details without sounding like an encyclopedia. If only the rest of the book had fared as well.

Young Empress says

This is sooo fantastic book, I repeated it more than twice. This is so entertaining. I will assured you that you will enjoy this.

Alice says

I loved this book! I think it would be a good book club book.

Monica says

The idea to write a book about mining was great, but this book is a romantic novel, so totally predictable, that even young teenagers would not have the patience to finish it.

I had forced myself to finish it, just to make sure that my first impression was accurate.

The characters are, to some extent, interesting if you could add some "spice" into them. I like the miners' personalities, with their no nonsense attitude.

Overall, not worth to spend time trying to like this novel.

Valerie Patterson says

This is an excellent book! I had it sitting on my "to-be-read" shelf for more than a year before I finally began reading it. Once I started, I couldn't put it down, and in fact read it in one sitting!

Hickman does a superb job pulling the reader right into the thick of things. His characters are so well crafted, you want to meet them!

Hickman's knowledge of mining and the plight of the miner seals the deal, making this a book of a collaborative effort of both fact and fiction.

Song--the heroine--is a very driven individual who's certain she'll never have the type of marriage she desires with her husband--Cable. They're from two different worlds. Hers is one of high finance and business dealings. His is one of mining and the hills of West Virginia. They try keeping homes in two states, but life--and business--get in the way. Neither's willing to give a little in order to gain a lot until Song's father buys the company that owns the mine where Cable is the boss.

Song retreats to West Virginia at her father's request. Her job? To figure out why the mine is not meeting quota and to fix it or fire her husband. Song becomes a red cap, a miner in training. Her first day underground just about kills her, but she's one very determined woman. Despite the work conditions, the atrocious behavior of some of her male co-workers, and the fact her husband's spending time with the hot female governor, Song finds the answers she's there to discover.

An explosion inside the mine traps Song and Cable underground with a killer. Taut writing, vivid imagery, and fact commingled with fiction provide for an unforgettable read!

Christina says

I saw this book in a store in my recent vacation in West Virginia and was looking forward to it -- a story set in a modern West Virginia coal mining town. I'd read about historic coal mining and was curious what it's like today. Unfortunately, this turned out to be one of the worst books I've encountered in a long time, to the point that I wonder how and why it was published, especially by a well-regarded author. The premise of the story is that a coal mining superintendent meets and has a whirlwind romance with a wealthy and powerful New York City business woman, and obviously they have some cultural conflicts re: West Virginia v. NYC. I still think this is a premise that *could* have gone somewhere, but in this book it was so over the top absurd and poorly executed that several times I threw the book across the room. I don't believe adults -- intelligent people who have achieved a lot in their careers and presumably have had some life experiences along the way -- would get randomly get married without ever having talked about whether they'd live in small town West Virginia or NYC. But that's what happened here: they have a fight on their honeymoon when they decide to finally talk about this. ??? And that, basically, was my primary problem with this book: the two main characters were so poorly thought-out they didn't seem in any way real. I might as well have been reading about cardboard cutouts.

The New York businesswoman was especially offensive to me because she made no sense at all. She was supposedly beautiful and brilliant, but had the maturity of a 12 year old and I just didn't believe anything about her. This was the worst characterization I've read in years. Very shallow and filled with stereotypes, like a really cheap sit-com or a crappy made-for-TV movie. Even the attempts to give her some backstory and motivations felt false.

I'd read some reviews of this book that claimed that the ending of the book got better, and I agree with that -- the focus turns more to the workings of a modern coal mine, which was why I'd been curious about this book in the first place. The intrigue at the mine that formed the basis for the mine-related plot was okay -- enough to hold my interest and keep me reading -- and I did appreciate the depiction of the various residents of the coal mining town -- but those features couldn't save this book from the terrible first third that focused on the relationship between the two main characters. I'm giving this book two stars instead of one because I was

interested in the details of the mining stuff, like the training new miners go through, routine operations, and rescue procedures.

Katherine says

I read quite a lot of fiction, most I like, but once in a while there's a story that I love. Red Helmet is one of them.

I grew up in an area where strip mines were an eyesore. Hills were scraped away to get at coal.

For much of the time when the coal ran out, the mess was left just as it was. (Later the government required the land to be put back as close to the way it was originally.)

I chose the book because I had read a book by Hickam years ago and had really enjoyed it. This story is about the coal miners of West Virginia who work far underground. Not only does it follow the miners, but it is also the story of a New York girl and a West Virginia coal miner. It also explains and describes much of the work the miners do.

I was surprised to learn that the miners generally like their work. It is not an easy way to earn a living. Even when things go badly, they are ready to work the next day. The story is interesting, sometimes funny, and sometimes sad. Many times it was difficult to put down. A very good read.

Jon Abbott says

If you like stories about women to push the boundaries set for them by society / custom, I recommend:

Red Helmet by Homer Hickham. Hickham grew up in the coal fields of West Virginia. Although he went away and learned rocket science, he has become the unofficial author in residence for the state of WV. His books about the war (WWII) in the South Pacific, Alaska and the East Coast from the eyes of a Coast Guard officer, are all excellent, albeit with a male MC.

I have read Red Helmet three times just to savor again the story of Song, a tough Asian-American woman who, as her father's right hand woman, "fixes" troubled companies he has purchased.

She, a New Yorker, meets and (too) quickly marries the manager of a WV coal mine. Neither wants to move. Through a chain of circumstances, she assigns herself the task of going to WV and learning to be a coal miner ... in order to find out why the mine is under-producing. Her almost-ex-by-this-time is about to be fired.

It is the details of how to mine coal, details that reek of authenticity, and which are mixed with the stubborn will of Song to master a man's trade, that sing. She is definitely a woman of agency. And action.

If you don't relish the first part (their brief trip to an altar), or the 2nd quarter of the book - why they need to sign divorce papers - skip lightly through them, but pause on the descriptions of the supporting cast as you do. You will want to know about those characters for the second half of the book, Song's effort to earn her Red Helmet as a newbie miner. By the way, there is a mystery to solve, a mystery with a killer.

H Gibson says

This is the first novel by Homer Hickam I've ever read. It's clear he is passionate about his home state of West Virginia and coal mining. For this, I commend him. My mother was born and raised in WV, and I've been there many times. It is every bit as wild and wonderful as claimed to be. With that being said, I have never read a novel quite so saccharine, cliched, and predictable. I'm not a feminist, and even I thought the story was sexist. The portions about coal mining were actually quite good, obviously well-researched and experienced. The story in between those portions, well, Mr. Hickam should stick to writing the technical stuff.

Angela Cyrus says

I loved this book. I usually read mystery/suspense books, but the reviews on this book were very good and my dad and husband work in the coal mines so I bought it. I think that anyone who has a husband or family member who works in the coal mines should read this. I didn't realize what my husband goes through everyday when he leaves the house to go to work, but reading this book made me realize how hard he works to take care of us and that when he leaves for work each day there is a possibility that he may not come home. I can't imagine going down into a mine let alone going there everyday and working for 9 to 15 hours. On top of that he drives over an hour to and from work. I thought it was rough when I worked 8 years at an insurance office!!!

AngelaGay Kinhead says

Again, I love reading books set in places I've lived. This is a 100% WV story with a huge nod to the 2006 Sago mine disaster that was oh, so close to Buckhannon, where I lived at the time. Homer Hickam rocks. A deviation from his amazing "Rocket Boys", it's a great story. Lots of WV, coal mining, and a little bit of love story (not too much.) The audio book ends with Homer Hickam delivering comments at the Sago Memorial Service in Wesley Chapel, WV Wesleyan College. I had something to do with that event, so it warmed my heart to hear the recording of it.

Fantastic says

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Song's visit to the little mining community only makes things worse. It looks like the marriage is over. But in a shocking turn of events, Song realizes it's up to her to put on the red helmet of the new coal miner and descend into the deep darkness. There she faces her greatest challenge with choices and courage that will forever impact the life of Cable and the entire town.

