

The Iron Boys

By David Baumann

September 13, 2005

491 words

Posted on the Galloping Ghost message board

A few months ago, an email correspondent suggested that I try the Iron Boys series, also known as the “Boys of Steel series”. This correspondent had contacted me because he had found my X Bar X Boys website. After a few exchanges I’m afraid I lost contact with him, don’t remember his name, and can’t find his email address.

Too bad, since I’d like to give him credit for suggesting a worthy series. The Iron Boys by James R. Mears appeared in four volumes, published by the Henry Altemus Co., 1912-1913. The titles are

The Iron Boys in the Mines

The Iron Boys as Foremen

The Iron Boys on the Ore Boats

The Iron Boys in the Steel Mills

My correspondent said that they were fairly easy to find in reader’s condition. He was right. I did find all four volumes easily, but none of them in good condition. George Beatty provided laser dust jackets, so they don’t look bad on my shelf.

I’ve only read the first book, but enjoyed it thoroughly. My correspondent wrote, “The plotting is some of the best I’ve encountered short of the Rick Brant series: original, varied, and in exciting settings. The nostalgia factor is present but it’s not even needed to rivet the reader’s interest.”

I agree with his assessment. The Iron Boys are two lads who work in a mine, where they become friends. Our hero is Steve Rush. His friend is Bob Jarvis. They are honest, plucky, hard working, strong, and desirous of starting at the bottom to build a good career in the steel business. The moral of the first book is that honesty and hard work pay off, but the tale unfolds in an exciting story about how they foil sabotage against the company.

It’s a well-told tale with plenty of excitement. My favorite scene was the one in which Steve is lured to the bottom of the mine, over a quarter of a mile below the surface and below seventeen levels of shafts, where he is pushed over the edge of a pit into the chill waters. Water flows down from the mine workings into the bottom from which it is pumped up to the surface. The episode of how Steve survives the plunge and is located and rescued comprise a powerful few chapters, the first part of which take place in the utter darkness and silence of the mine. Plenty of series books have scenes of danger and adventure in caves and mines, but none I’ve ever read surpasses this one for a gripping narrative. And this is only one fine scene among many in the book.

Although not a high profile series—I'd never heard of it until my correspondence recommended it--the Iron Boys series deserves a fan base. Fortunately the books are easy to find and inexpensive. I give this first entry a solid 9 and look forward to reading the rest of the series.