



Alex and the Druids' Eclipse

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Alex and the Druids' Eclipse is an engrossing Arthurian fantasy that addresses themes of independence and self-reliance in age-appropriate and considerate ways.

Alex and the Druids' Eclipse is a well-paced and entertaining young adult fantasy that involves time travel and King Arthur.

Ten-year-old Alex and his father Jory are separated at the end of a total solar eclipse viewing on the downs above the village of Penmellyn on the Cornish coast. As law enforcement and townsfolk mount a desperate search for Alex, he finds himself alone in the countryside, discovering that home is no longer the safe and sleepy village he knew.

Alex is descended from King Arthur and has been summoned by ancient druids in the age of Merlin to undertake a dangerous journey. He must retrieve a magical cauldron on a lost island; it will revive the prematurely dead King Arthur.

With knowledge from Merlin and Tanguistl the witch, Alex sets off with Blythe the wolf as traveling companion. He is on the lookout for witches, mischievous faeries, a terrible giant, and menacing hobgoblins; all threaten to turn the quest into a nightmare and prevent Alex from ever returning home again.

Descriptions of time and place are among the story's strongest elements, painting vivid pictures of the Cornish countryside and its coast. Historical and linguistic details provide additional context and set the scene for the displacement Alex feels in the alternate time.

Alex is strongly developed. The narrative follows a hero's journey line, handling Alex's emotional growth and maturity in a logical and age-appropriate fashion. The fact that Alex must rely on his education and scholarly knowledge to bridge the gap between the past and present lends a well-rounded resourcefulness to his character. Instinct and knowledge guide him through tough situations.

Minor characters are given fresh takes from expected portrayals. Merlin possesses less wizardry and relies more on intellect and experience to effect his magic. Stereotypical characterizations of faeries and giants are given makeovers to make them more compelling and more integral to the plot.

The subplot, centered around the search for Alex in the present day, is less developed. Jory searches for his son in underground tunnels, establishing more tension but arriving nowhere. The search gives a clearer picture of the setting and provides background on Cornwall's past as a city of smugglers but does not advance the plot. This story line is dropped abruptly midway through the novel to concentrate on Alex's quest and is not returned to until just before the end of the book.

The story unfolds at a deliberate pace. Bursts of action are juxtaposed to quieter moments of self-reflection. The balance between moments of dialogue and exposition adds to the story's momentum, ensuring a smooth read from

start to finish.

Addressing themes of independence and self-reliance in age-appropriate and considerate ways, *Alex and the Druids' Eclipse* accomplishes what any good Arthurian fantasy should do—establishing a world and characters that are believable, imaginative, and thoroughly engrossing.

NANCY POWELL (December 1, 2017)

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