

Bandits

L.M. Preston

Phenomenal One Press

Unknown (pp)

978-0-9841989-3-1

Daniel and his younger brother, Nickel, live with their father on Merwin, a planet largely populated by professional thieves called the Zukar. As one of the most successful Zukar, Daniel's father has proudly trained both of his sons to follow in his footsteps. Lately, however, he's been changing his attitude and turning down jobs, leaving Daniel to pick up the slack.

His father's sudden withdrawal from a life that Daniel looks forward to emulating leaves him confused and resentful. When he awakens one night to find his father murdered, he realizes that there is much more to the mystery surrounding the recent personality change. Sensing their own lives are now in danger as well, Daniel sets out with Nickel and their cousin, Faulk, on a quest to recover the treasure his father had hidden before the killers could get to it. A quirk of circumstance adds Daniel's best friend's sister, Jade, to the group, further shaking up Daniel's world as he tries to ignore the growing attraction between them.

From the first page through the exciting conclusion, the author takes readers on a nonstop adventure through an imaginative world of intriguing places and unusual creatures. As the foursome get ever closer to the truth surrounding the death of Daniel's father and the treasure he gave his life to protect, they need to evade the killer as well as the carnivorous flora and fauna that populate their world. A deceptively benign-looking tree is just one of the dangers: "The top of the willow expanded, and the waterfall of flowers sank within it. The pink round mouth of sharp, jagged black teeth snaked out of the hollow opening at the top of the tree, and the pretense of beauty disappeared...the acidic poison within its bark would instantly devour his brother." Their journey is jam-packed with such perilous moments, which serve to propel the plot forward at an exhilarating pace.

Preston, whose previous work includes *The Pack* and *Explorer X – Alpha*, has a remarkable talent for description and her vivid imagination brings the planet of Merwin to vibrant life. The detailed descriptions of most of the characters and places allow readers to readily accept the strange and fantastic world she's created for Daniel and his companions. Several of the supporting characters could have been fleshed out a bit more thoroughly, and there were some relatively minor proofreading errors (missing apostrophes, omitted words, etc.), but not enough to detract from the flow of the story.

Each of Preston's four main characters experience growth and change as they journey toward their destiny, particularly Daniel. Brave and heroic from the start, Daniel discovers that knocking down walls of resentment and changing his expectations requires a different kind of courage, and he is forced to examine his own feelings and come to terms with both his father and himself as he strives to protect the people he cares for and save the planet he loves.

Bandits is an appealing and imaginative take on a futuristic pirate story, complete with thrilling a treasure hunt, fantastic creatures and technology, and even a bit of romance. Readers will undoubtedly enjoy the trip to the fascinating planet of Merwin.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (July 19, 2011)

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