



Max Xylander and the Island of Zumuruud

Jon Thomason

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Max Xylander feels she has plenty of reasons to be angry. After surviving a serious illness, she still has to tolerate her obnoxious sister, parents who don't understand her, and ignorant kids like the boy who just insulted her best friends. Justified or not, she never expects her anger to explode quite so literally, causing mayhem all around her and nearly killing the kid who incurred her wrath.

Shocked at the violent results of her anger, Max feels a fierce desire to find out just how powerful she is. As she discovers more about her unusual gifts, she befriends the new boy in town, Aaron, who happens to have the answers to a lot of her questions about the source of her new power. Aaron and his family bring Max to the island of Zumuruud, a secret and magical place where she learns the ways of the jinn and begins to discover the depth of her increasing powers and her possible role in an ancient prophecy.

As Max begins her journey, Philip Stylus is about to begin his own. Following years of exile, he is free and has recovered his ring, the master key to his powers as a jinni. Though grateful to be liberated, Philip also feels a good deal of resentment about his lot in life. When circumstances offer him the possibility for a different kind of future, he doesn't hesitate to take advantage. Both Max and Philip struggle with adherence to the ethical rules that the jinn are expected to live by, and the way their paths cross as they learn what their futures will hold is at the heart of *Max Xylander and the Island of Zumuruud*.

Author Jon Thomason's debut novel is impressively inventive and enjoyable, and it serves as the first installment of a planned trilogy featuring Max. Readers will be swept right into Max's world thanks to Thomason's vivid storytelling and exceptional characterization. While all characters are developed with detail, Max and Philip are particularly well realized. Max's personality is layered and complex, and her rebellious nature and struggle to find her place in the world are conveyed flawlessly. Philip's character is afforded the same level of meticulous detail. While he is at first simply arrogant and mischievous, his behavior becomes more questionable as the story progresses, keeping readers intrigued and engaged.

Thomason's writing style is smooth, and a subtle sense of humor comes through in several scenes. The story is well written, and the vivid depiction of the island of Zumuruud is captivating, as are the descriptions of the unique powers and lifestyle of the jinn. As Max learns to focus and control her powers, readers will be enthralled by the details of each of her lessons and activities and the magic of the world she is discovering. The narrative tension builds at a good pace and easily flows toward a satisfying and exciting conclusion.

Max Xylander and the Island of Zumuruud is appropriate for middle-grade readers, and parents are likely to both approve of the story and enjoy reading it themselves. Although it stands on its own as an engaging fantasy adventure, the novel also offers a great deal of material for possible family conversations about right and wrong as well as the consequences of breaking rules. Jon Thomason is a talented writer whose appealing first novel is sure to find an appreciative audience that will eagerly anticipate the next book in the series.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (February 15, 2013)

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