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Clarion Review

Young Adult Fiction

Skyriders
Vimbai Gore-Strachan
AuthorHouse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Fifteen-year-old Kai is understandably devastated by his mother's sudden death. Recently relocated, Kai's family now consists of himself and his aunt, and the future looks bleak and lonely. The arrival of a mysterious man who claims to have known his mother long ago proves a pivotal event, and Kai soon accepts this stranger's offer to join him at his mother's former school, embarking on a fantastic and incredible adventure.

Whisked away to the floating island of Keturah, one of several such mysterious islands hidden in the skies between Florida and Bermuda, Kai is amazed by the unexpected and extraordinary path his life has suddenly taken. As he becomes acclimated to his new surroundings, makes new friends, and learns to become a "rider" of the furry dragonlike creatures called Talites, he finds an opportunity to both challenge himself and discover more about his secretive mother and the legacy she left behind. When he learns about a group of rogue Talites called Dracaens—larger, stronger, and much more aggressive than the tame creatures that he and his friends have learned to ride—Kai becomes caught up in an effort to stop the Dracaens before their inevitable attack on Keturah. As he works alongside his new friends to defeat the Dracaens, Kai discovers his own hidden talents and abilities even as he comes to terms with his grief and the mysteries regarding his mother's past.

The sixteen-year-old author of *Skyriders*, Vimbai Gore-Strachan, shines as a storyteller, deftly crafting an appealing and imaginative novel that is sure to engage readers of young adult fiction from the very first line. While there is certainly a magical aspect to the tale, the author avoids the hackneyed vampire and sorcerer themes, choosing instead to enchant readers with the unique and extraordinary world of Keturah and its inhabitants.

Character development in *Skyriders* is thorough, resulting in a well-rounded cast of interesting characters, ranging from even-tempered Kai and his affable roommates to volatile

fellow rider Wave, whose brightly colored hair reflects her intense personality. The interactions between the characters are realistic and engaging, enriched by skillfully rendered, natural dialogue and a fast-paced plot. The story progresses smoothly toward a satisfying conclusion. A focus on the evolution of the main characters is maintained throughout, adding credibility to Kai's transformation from grief-stricken loner to confident leader.

While some aspects of daily life on Keturah remain unexplored, Gore-Strachan includes just enough vivid description to bring her vision of floating islands to life. Details such as the islands' location between Florida and Bermuda, commonly known as the Bermuda Triangle, give her story a clever edge, particularly when characters allude to a curious and "rather detrimental effect on electronics and machinery" in the area of Keturah.

Skyriders is an appealing fantasy and a stunning achievement for a new young writer. If Gore-Strachan can produce this caliber of writing at the age of sixteen, her future as an author is certainly bright. *Skyriders* is highly recommended.

Jeannine Chartier Hanscom