Clarion Review

Fantasy

The Ancient Ash: The AllLand Chronicles, Volume One
Max Washington
CreateSpace
978-1-4818-6780-1
Three Stars (out of Five)

A marriage of spells and demons, science-fiction gadgetry, talking animals, and majestic chimeras, this series offers creative fantasy adventures.

The window for fantasy is wide open between childhood and adulthood. Max Washington takes full advantage of this age when the imagination is most free in his story about four twelve-year-old friends wielding magical powers against demonic "Envy-Lords" in a parallel universe. *The AllLand Chronicles, Volume One: The Ancient Ash* is a furious burst of characters and enchantments that feels like a sprint from start to finish.

Washington writes with energy, creativity, and economy. Written in a style that is easy to read, his story has a lot of traction, but it also has quite a few holes to navigate. Early in the adventure to save the Ancient Ash, heroes Maggie, Eric, Tim, and Felix encounter a "Death-Wheel," which is not described until it begins to break into pieces that "melted off of the main-frame and floated. The cars floated, weaving back and forth slowly." What any of these parts are or what they are doing is difficult to understand. Similarly, in the final battle of the book, the demons arrive and, "just then, a rattling sound was heard. It became a buzzing sound, and then a crashing sound." With so much opportunity for description, this climactic moment deserves more.

A magical winged creature named "Featherlight" is, for a few confusing pages, called "Featherglide." There are other similar errors throughout the book. Character development doesn't seem to be a priority, although the protagonists are sincere, and their interactions can be unexpectedly nuanced, as one of the four is tempted to join the demons, testing their faith and friendship. *The Ancient Ash* is like a graphic novel, but without graphics—hugely engaging and imaginative but leaving half of the story untold.

Washington is an author with a boundless storytelling ability. His imagination, exciting scenes, and diverse cast of characters make *The Ancient Ash* just plain fun to read. A marriage of spells and demons, science-fiction gadgetry, talking animals, and majestic chimeras, this series promises a lot of action and adventure and has the potential to make science-fiction fans of young readers. If Washington takes his time to flesh out some of the details while still keeping pace with magic that he has introduced in this volume, there will be a lot to look forward to in future installments.

Sara Budzik