

The Black Elf of Seaward Isle

Joni Parker

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By its very nature, the fantasy novel embraces the incredible, limited only by an author's imagination and attention to detail. *The Black Elf of Seaward Isle* is rich with intriguing characters, interesting settings, and fast-paced action.

Daughter of a Water Elf and a mortal man, Lady Alex is bright, strong, and gifted with extraordinary fighting skills, as well as unusual powers. After losing her parents to the evil machinations of a wizard named Mylar, Alex is eventually adopted by Scout Nora, a warrior from an Amazon-like community called Scinthia. Scout Nora cares for her and continues her training. When Nora also becomes a victim of Mylar's evil, thirteen-year-old Alex steps up her training efforts in the hope of avenging her parents death and protecting the others she's come to care for, all of whom are now threatened by Mylar as well.

Alex's adventures are filled with excitement, and Parker's world of Seaward Isle is rife with magic and populated by elves, dwarves, wizards, and witches. The unique abilities some of the inhabitants possess are intriguing, such as silent Elfspeak and the dwarves' magical navigation system and intricate mines. Alex's training and fight scenes are well executed, and the entertaining storyline maintains reader interest.

Novice writing errors plague the novel, however, beginning with an initial overabundance of characters and poor transitions. Ten characters are introduced or alluded to on the first page alone, and scenes often shift point of view and setting from paragraph to paragraph. The constant shifts and the sheer number of characters bog down the action and hinder the progression of an otherwise fast-paced plot. While the transitions improve somewhat and new character introductions slow down later in the book, readers may lose patience with the overpopulated tale.

With such a large cast of characters, development is inconsistent, and protagonist Alex is likable but distant. Her thoughts and feelings are rarely explored with any true depth, beyond her motivation to avenge her parents and protect her companions. Readers may have difficulty engaging with a character whose resilience may be admirable, but whose emotions often seem vague.

The Black Elf is the first of a series which, according to Parker's website, will take nine books to complete. Such a massive undertaking requires meticulous attention to detail, consistent story progression, and character development. The storyline is imaginative and promising, but the author's inexperience is evident in the often muddled writing style, sudden shifts in point of view, and a multitude of misplaced commas and grammatical errors.

In order to engage the target audience of young adult readers, *The Black Elf* needs the skilled attention of an experienced editor and a better-developed main character to carry it along. Parker clearly has a fascinating and appealing story to tell, and it deserves the attention to detail necessary to make it approachable to her readers.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (March 1, 2011)

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