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Clarion Review

The Journey of Isle
Bowdoin
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An otherworldly sailor named Isle survives a shipwreck and ends up on the shore of a lake on Earth in The Journeys of Isle. He doesn't remember where he comes from or why he was in a crash. He tries to piece together clues about where he is, where he has come from and what his purpose is, but the Earthlings around him are hostile and offer little help.

Isle crash-lands on the outskirts of a rural American town, where his efforts to return to where he belongs are naturally met with incredulity. While some characters, such as the town prostitute and her grandmother, shelter Isle, offering him safety and friendly advice, the law enforcement does not believe a word of Isle's protestations. Indeed, the police think that Isle is responsible for a series of recent arsons. Isle, on the other hand, believes that the arsonist may hold clues about how to get back to his home world. With the help of his unlikely companions, his intermittently functioning memory, and a strange type of water-associated magic, Isle tries to elude law enforcement and get back to where he belongs.

In its favor, The Journeys of Isle has a rather charming hero. Smart enough not to spend all his time gazing in wonder at a foreign planet, Isle briskly gets down to the business of his quest, disarming and incapacitating police officers with skill accompanied by wisecracks.

Unfortunately, Isle's snarkiness keeps the story lightweight, rather than dramatic. Because the story is told from the viewpoint of a constantly joking character, nothing serious seems to be at stake here, which makes it difficult for readers to care what happens to the protagonist.

The Journeys of Isle is riddled with punctuation and capitalization errors and, more seriously, poor pacing. During the first half of the novel, Isle spends most of his time associating with the local color and, with the exception of a quick scene with a nutty pursuer and another with a magical note from another world, does not dwell much on the circumstances that led him to his present situation. While Isle's man-on-the-run adventures are somewhat amusing, due to his dry temperament, they drag on for too long and diminish interest in the main query of the story: How will Isle get home?

Even for a fantasy, The Journeys of Isle strains the suspension of disbelief. How does Isle, from another planet, communicate with Earthlings so fluently? How come everyone, including Isle, speaks mutually intelligible colloquial English? If Isle has no culture shock upon coming to Earth and seems to have an innate familiarity with current American culture, why was the character even made an extraterrestrial in the first place? These questions are inadequately addressed.

The Journeys of Isle would benefit from much tighter pacing, a reduction in meet-the-Earthlings adventures, and a careful proofreading.

Elizabeth A. Allen