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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ SCIENCE FICTION

The Oracle of Y'alan

A.A. Powley
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Eons ago when the emperor Eldoran Kalridge Y'Alan cast a powerful spell to save his lands from a devastating storm he exhausted every ounce of his energy. All that remained after his incantation had run its course was an arm-length crystal statue of his image that some say retained a fragment of his soul locked inside. This statue would offer counsel from time to time becoming known as the Oracle of Y'alan.

This all took place when humans were new to the world and magic was everywhere and accessible to everyone. A group of powerful vir or mages became adept at manipulating these unseen forces and using them to their own ends. Anti-magical econtravir on the other hand were able to suck magic out of their surroundings preventing others from accessing the source of magical power.

Around 7000 years ago a great cataclysm sundered magic from the world leaving a barrier that cut off the earth and everyone on it from all but a trickle of magical forces that continued to seep through. While the surviving vir gathered together to hoard these last traces of magic oftentimes storing energy in valuable gemstones the econtravir formed an organization known as Terra Protectra dedicated to wiping it out. While no one living knows for sure what triggered the cataclysm many feel that the Oracle was involved and could be the key to undoing the damage.

Fast forward to present day: The last remnants of the vir led by Vaughinlus Stormbaur (Vaughn) are on the run from Terra Protectra when they stumble across Andy Cache a Canadian youth with enormous yet untapped magical ability. As Andy begins training to unlock his potential the group discovers that the econtravir have recovered the lost Oracle. They must recapture it before it can be misused or destroyed.

Powley is an imaginative storyteller and maintains the reader's attention throughout. Unfortunately while the story is well-organized and moves along at a good pace the characterization is spotty at best. Motivations are hard to ascertain. The bad guys in general—and Mark in particular—are unconvincingly shallow.

The Oracle of Y'alan is an interesting tale but it falls far short of its potential. For example Vaughn has been creeping around for seven millennia keeping himself healthy and vital by absorbing the souls of hapless victims while simultaneously shepherding the last remnants of the magi. Near the beginning of the book he kills an innocent child who was out looking for his lost dog. This vignette could have led to an exploration of a larger and more meaningful topic. How does an otherwise good and moral person deal with resorting to murder in order to continue his existence?

There are numerous opportunities throughout the book to address substantive issues that the author unfortunately chose to pass over. This makes the book easy to read but sadly forgettable.

LAWRENCE KANE (April 3, 2008)

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