



## The Keeper of the Stones

*M.J. Webb*

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## **The Keeper of the Stones M.J. Webb**

Fifteen year old schoolboy, Jake West, and his best friend, Ben Brooker, have found an old chest in an attic. Hidden inside is an intricately carved wooden box which houses a set of five mysterious stones. When Jake passes his right hand over the crest on the top of the box, it opens. The stones suddenly erupt. A bright beam of light shoots up to the sky and life will never be the same again.

The light is a portal to dangerous and mysterious worlds. But, in activating it when it was thought lost forever, Jake has unwittingly revealed the continued existence and precise whereabouts of this secret weapon... As well as that of it's new guardian.

Jake West is a 'Keeper', as were his ancestors before him. Responsible for the stones' ultimate protection and bestowed with the powers he needs to fulfil his destiny, he will be hunted across worlds. In desperate times against a seemingly invincible foe, he will have to become more than he ever thought possible, for the future of our world and countless others is in his hands.

This is book one of a trilogy. It is easy reading aimed at those who are 12+.

## **The Keeper of the Stones Details**

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Author : M.J. Webb

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# **From Reader Review The Keeper of the Stones for online ebook**

## **Branwen Sedai \*of the White Ajah\* says**

I was provided with an ARC of this book from the author in return for my honest review. Thanks M.J!

Jake and Ben had no idea what they had in store for them when they found the ornately carved box in Jake's grandfather's attic. Jake learns that there is more to his grandfather than he ever knew, and a great destiny and powers in store for him; greater than he could have ever imagined. He and Ben find themselves stranded in Estia, a different world completely, one which is struggling in the middle of a war between good and evil. Jake must learn to control his newly bestowed gifts and join the right side of the war if he wants to survive.

As soon as I read the description for this book I got excited. Two unlikely heros? Check! Strange new powers and an exciting new world? Check! A rip-roaring action adventure fantasy with intriguing character? Double Check! So I was overjoyed when I was able to obtain a copy.

This book was excellent beyond my expectations. The writing was really good; it was very descriptive of pretty much everything, so I really got a feel for the various aspects of Estia. The character were exciting and fun, and really easy to relate to them. Even though they were experiencing conflicts that I have never experienced, the author brought them down to an empathetic level where the everyday person could relate to them easily. And of course the story was very interesting and action packed, which is always a plus. :) This was a very enjoyable, fun read which I would recommend to anyone who enjoys the fantasy genre.

Ps--> Princess Zephany is a kick-ass, drop dead awesome character! Zephany = lotsa love! <3

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## **Angel says**

This book has a great message. To me it's about following your destiny against all odds. I will not compare MJ Webb's writing style to anyone's simply because it is his own very unique style, just like any author has their own style. I always go into reading a book with an open mind throughout not expecting anything. I found this book to be true, honest and relatable characters, the book was very character driven and began very gradual and well thought out. Jake West the protagonist who is a typical teen is suddenly thrust into a wealth of responsibility. Harboring these precious stones reveals a philosophy within the plot of the story that things that seem so insignificant (like when Jake and his friend are going through the old attic) should not be taken for granted, that even the most seemingly insignificant things have a story to tell, a story that connects us all to one another.

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## **Marla says**

Beginning of book 1-2 stars, middle of book 3.5 stars, and end 3 stars. Not my cup of tea. Slow read for me, but I'm not a fan of epic tales. This book wasn't that long, but it took a while for me to get into it, but the middle was better.

The paragraphs of background information about the warring countries and the leaders and the history was

too much information and not interesting enough for me to care about. Also, the many different species and their different looks and strengths and weaknesses was again more than I cared about. The book reads like an epic, but it's too short to have the intricacies of plot and character of an epic. I got tired of keeping track of the vast cast of characters and the beginning didn't have enough action for me. I'm a bit impatient, when I read YA, I expect to have captivating characters and a swiftly moving plot line.

After a break, I will read the next book because I want to know what happens to these characters and largely, because I got review copies of the rest of the trilogy.

#### Likes:

- \* Heroic characters were likeable
- \* Jake and Ben's friendship
- \* Jake stepping up into his role as Keeper
- \* Harry, in our brief introduction to him
- \* King Artrex and his loyal commander and best friend, Knesch
- \* Escaped prisoner, Verastus

(view spoiler)

#### Dislikes:

- \* Rambling descriptions
- \* Sound effects. Every "Ra," "Raas," "Raar," Raarr," "Raaargh," "Rrr," "Hagghh," "Shaargh," "Yaargh," "Grar," "Cha," "Chaarr," "Char," "Srr," "Kah," "Kuh," "Kraarr," "Krraas," and a single "Craas" made me think of pirates saying, "Aarr" and why were there so many variations?
- \* Made up expressions and names caused me to stumble in my reading and were difficult to remember
- \* Even the stone incantation could've been simpler or less awkward or in English
- \* Day and Location at the beginning of each chapter was annoying, since it stayed the same day for several chapters. Find a different plot device to set the stage for each scene change
- \* Writing should convey feelings and reactions, not tell us about them
- \* IMO too much talk and not enough action
- \* Jake and Ben used "ya" 28 times and "you" at other times. They also used "ain't" four times that I noted. Why? I cringed every time I saw it and I didn't see a benefit to using the slang.
- \* Princess Zephany's role was not well developed. I liked the idea of a warrior princess, but was disappointed with her surly demeanor and one-dimensional character
- \* Princess Zephany would NOT have relinquished her leadership of the assault team to Jake. I was disappointed at the sexism of a tried female rebel leader deferring command to an unproven 15 year old male stranger.
- \* Romance was awkward and not very believable
- \* King Vantrax is a typical evil tyrant with no surprises or depth
- \* No explanation for why Jake and Ben understand people from all the different races and countries in an alternate dimension or whatever, and they all speak English
- \* Ben whined a bit and cracked tired jokes that no one but Jake understood
- \* Vantrax's and other's many tantrums

(view spoiler)

for-review:

Received a free copy for review from author for [David Estes Fans and YA Book Lovers Unite!] group R&R  
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## **Mirrani says**

Keeper of Stones is perhaps best for young readers who are looking for something to read to kill time than it is for anyone who is looking for a book that they can't put down. While the concept of traveling to another world and being a leader in that world is an interesting one, I found that there were many things that kept my mind from focusing on the task of completing my read, one of them being the slightly jumbled thought process of the characters and another being the somewhat repetitive nature of the storytelling.

Characters seem to be not very well thought out. It could be that I am approaching it with a more adult mindset, but I was disturbed that many of them seemed flighty, changing their minds, personalities, or having issues in not being able to find direction even though the person in question is a grown man leading an army. The secondary youth character was also this way, never paying attention to what was around him and always having to have people repeat things to him in conversation.

Descriptions, actions and plot points are also repeated to death, as if we were this secondary character, having trouble keeping up with the story so far. I often felt while reading that the author expected that the readers would need to be reminded of the point of an action, activity or conversation. There were also many times, especially toward the beginning of the book, where people would insist that they were in a hurry then continue to chat with other characters for pages at a time, all while not taking action on what it is that needs doing in such a rush.

The concept, however, is a good one. I imagine many young people will enjoy the idea of having a set of magical stones that take them to another world and give them the automatic knowledge of a seasoned warrior. Suddenly they aren't young teens any more, but acting and talking as adults, with all of the skills to equal the king's best warriors. There are several battle scenes that last a short while, but most of this book is about moving armies around in order to avoid attack or plotting the one major battle.

Something I found interesting was that the ending was not as most books are. The hero doesn't stay and see his fight through to the end, he retreats for reasons I can't explain here for fear of spoiling the final chapters. I found this concept to be somewhat refreshing, as you typically find that in books like these the plot is rather predictable at the end. The battle is over, the war is won by the good guys, the hero is made a champion or knighted or some such thing and life is all happy perfection from that point onward. As I reached the ending pages, I found myself curious to find out where the second book in the series would take me, which is the one reason that I will be continuing to the next book in the series.

Note: Though this book was a free gift from the author, the content of my review was in no way influenced by the gifting. The book speaks for itself and my review would have been worded just this way even if I'd gone out and bought it.

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**?????????? says**

★★ The Keeper of the Stones by M.J. Webb

This book was given to me in exchange for my honest opinion.

I liked the story. Harry the grandfather, was a caring man, just doing what he thought best, to protect his family. Jake, the grandson and his friend Ben, were adventurous, and had each others back. I liked the boys little exploration in the attic, rummaging through all the old stuff.

So you thinking okay, why the ★★, right? I had a hard time getting, into this story. Not that it's, not likeable, I just keep feeling like I've read it before. I would just start, stop, start, stop, so I decided to give it a day or two, and try again. I started putting in some reviews, and that's when it hit me.

(view spoiler)

There was some minor grammer/spelling errors, and a few spots of poor word usage. The main story plot, and subplots, were slightly confusing, since one would play for a bit, then another would play out for a bit, and so forth. Yet, they all took place at the same time. It was like taking one step forward, only to have to take two steps back.

So over all I thought the story had good potential, but a complete lack of originality. Which I, personally, could not over look. Was the story bad, no. I'm sure, if I hadn't have read the other book, I would have enjoyed this one. I am truly disappointed, that I could not enjoy this book as much as I was hoping, too. So, would I recommend this? Depends. Yes, if you have not read the other book. Thank you to the author, for giving me the chance to experience your book.

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**Lune Spark says**

I bought this book that I bought for my daughter and ended up reading myself first :) ... My daughter like it as well.

An ordinary day - Ben is generally hanging around in Jake's grandfather's attic when he finds a mysterious box hidden in a trunk. The trunk holds key to unimaginable powers that Jake inherits as the Keeper of the Stones. This starts an unforgettable journey for Jake and Ben as they find themselves in magical situations that are very demanding physically and mentally.

Mr. Webb has built a whole new world with this book that should to be explored by the readers of Fantasy Fiction. This is a book that teenagers would love!

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**M.J. Webb says**

Not fair to rate my own book but 32 ratings on amazon.co.uk and most are five star so I've taken the liberty of posting for one of those. :-)

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## **Becca Edney says**

I was given a free electronic copy of this book by the author, in accordance with the terms of For Love of a Book's Advance Reader Opportunity Program.

2.5 stars. This was a slightly frustrating book to read because I wanted to like it, and there kept being moments when I did like it. However, there were some pretty major problems that kept spoiling that.

The first thing was that this book was extremely infodump-heavy. Every few pages, it felt like the story came to a screeching halt for multiple paragraph of what appeared to be the author's character or worldbuilding notes. It made the book very slow to read, which was a shame because when the action started it moved at a pretty good rate and the pacing wasn't obviously bad. A more natural way of introducing information would have helped a lot. The infodump style of exposition also meant that it was difficult to remember a lot of the details - I ended up none the wiser about a lot of the facts and characters that had been introduced and just picking things up from context as if the exposition hadn't been there.

The second thing was that while Jake wasn't a bad character, the way that everyone so easily deferred to him and kept talking about him and keeping him centre-stage made the world and the characters feel a lot thinner. There were some moments, especially with Artex and the princess (whose name I never quite managed to remember because I had difficulty pronouncing it; I keep thinking of her as Jennifer even though her name's actually something like Zephany), when despite having been introduced as very experienced military leaders they act as if they have no idea what they're doing in order to make Jake and Ben look smarter. One particularly bad moment was when Jake asked Zephany what her plan was and she acted like it had never occurred to her to even have a plan.

It also, uh... didn't escape my attention that as soon as Jake was on the scene Zephany lost her position of command and when she did act alone she had the least success of the group. She was also the only important female character, so that didn't leave a great taste in my mouth.

The structure was overall fine, the stakes stayed fairly high all the way through with the exception of long chunks of exposition that made it feel like the characters didn't feel in the slightest bit threatened, and there were a lot of interesting ideas that I thought could have done with a lot more development, such as how weird and creepy it is that Jake sometimes seems to act and think like a grown man and sometimes like a teenage boy.

My final major comment is that I think the book would have been hugely improved by cutting all the scenes where the viewpoint cuts back to the villains. Not only would that have reduced the amount of time the reader spends being beaten over the head with how evil all these characters are, but it would have greatly improved the suspense, since we wouldn't then know for certain what all the villains were doing at all times.

Overall, though, it was fine. When it was good it was good, but the heavy exposition slowed it down a lot. I think it could have done with another major edit to smooth it out.

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## **Cats of Ulthar says**

Jake West Book One

Author Webb knows his dialogue and uses it wisely and well. Literally from the very first sentence, I could hear the characters speaking in my mind's ear, and because Mr. Webb chooses to begin the novel with dialogue, the reader is immediately hooked into the setting, the plot line, and into empathy elicited for the characters. Jake and his best buddy Ben are delightful boys, much more respectful of the older generations than many these days, and neither is afraid to be open about emotions, such as Jake's for his late grandmother, whom he never knew. The characters are simultaneously very much three-dimensional, and realistically true-to-life.

Mr. Webb also excels at descriptive setting and at plotting. Although I've not lived any similar situations, I felt as if I was a present observer in all of the scenes, because the setting is so clearly delineated. When it comes to plotting, Mr. Webb keeps that reader's hook fastened firmly, and speeds along the plot line so the reader neither wants to jump off this express, nor is able to turn aside from the story.

This one's for all those kids-and adults too-who've always yearned to discover that their heritage is much more exotic and amazing than they've been told; for the young girls who've always wanted to be princesses; for the young boys (and men) who dream of the Age of Chivalry. For all of us who wish that life meant more than it usually does, M. J. Webb's Jake West: Keeper of the Stones, is the book to dream by-and hope.

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## **Kelly Clare says**

Jake West - The Keeper of the Stones by M.J. Webb

I received a copy of this to review

There were many elements of this novel which I enjoyed. I thought the storyline was great. Especially the box and the stones. It was simple and believable, and the author gave enough history of the box to create the right amount of mystery and importance. Actually, I thought the plot was flawless. What really sold me on this was the explanation for Jake's abilities. There are so many books based around powers and fighting skills available at the moment, but this ranks as one of my favourite reasons behind the main character's capabilities. The world and its history was clearly explained, the setting was visual and I thought the suspense was well built.

I was told this book was for 12+ and I admit to being surprised about this as I continued through the book. I felt the age for this should be a little older, maybe 14-15. Just because of the amount of detail in the book and the strange names. Also the vocabulary was quite advanced in places. There was, at times, a lot of information to take in, especially when the setting was changed. Perhaps this could have been spread out throughout the book or simplified.

I had a few quibbles with the dialogue. I was fifteen not so long ago and the way Ben and Jake talked felt a bit old to me. The characters from the other world could get away with it because they were 'otherworldly'.

This book has plot twists, humour and I'm looking forward to the next instalment. The ending definitely took me by surprise.

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## **Anthony Jr. says**

### **Expectations:**

I had very high expectations for this book, due largely to a line in the book's blurb saying something like, "J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis have met their match!" Based on that alone I expected exceptional writing and an intriguing, fantastic story. The cover looked interesting, too.

### **Review:**

It turned out I had a tough time with this one. The book came close to being marked not-finished and unfortunately awarded one less star. A Goodreads friend told me it will pick up if I hang in there, and he was right. The story does indeed get more interesting in the last quarter. First, the bad though. I'll add this qualifier, a lot of the bad is only due to my particular writing style taste and was likely amplified by my high expectations from the gauntlet thrown down in the blurb. The book probably will come across better to most people.

### *Writing Style*

I could not get into the writing style. I wouldn't put in the same league as the authors mentioned in the blurb. The writing seemed over-narrated to me. Instead of using words, dialogue or subtlety to illustrate an effect, the book normally just flat out tells you. This style came across as if I were reading an author's outline that he intends to polish into a book later. Example, after one character tells a joke:

"Jake laughed at Ben's comments, breaking the tension slightly. Verastus shook his head, failing to see the humor in Ben's words and the conversation stopped a while."

Nearly the entire book is written this way. The writing also employs an abundance of cliché phrases. (You'll see some examples in the quotes below.) I can handle a few clichés, but after a while they disrupt me, and this book had way too many. Also, dialogue frequently didn't inform me of the tone. I often read through a line that sounded calm only to find out at the end the character was screaming or yelling. The "raaaagrhh!"s got old quick, too.

### *Story*

The first story problem appears in chapter two and I'll provide a bit of analysis of it to show exactly why I nearly stopped reading. A character hears the explosive sound of a magic box being opened. The sound "scares him to death." He immediately deduces his grandson has found the box in his attic and opened it. This fact fills him with fear and is "his worst nightmare." At this point I concluded that opening the box was an incredibly dangerous thing to do. Why then, I wondered, did he leave the thing out in the open in his attic and let his grandson go up to explore the place? Shouldn't he have destroyed the box, or put it in a vault, buried it underground or at least put it in a personal safe?

The problems for me got worse from there. He begins "screaming" and "crying out in dismay" and "shouting 'I should have foreseen this!'" These lines and others similar put me on the cusp of checking out completely. I was awaiting a good explanation for the turn of events, but I didn't receive one. Instead the dramatization

shot up to satiric levels. There was a bunch of "the world will never be the same now" language. "They're coming. And he would have to prepare his grandson for the fight of his life."

So at that point I was to understand that he just left this cataclysmic tool sitting around to be found and flicked on by a couple of kids? He then literally "rages" and "despairs" that they turned it on, among other melodramatic expressions. That's when I put the book down and asked a friend where he was in it and what did he make of it. He was further along, and said it improves. So I continued.

### *Characters*

I didn't find the characters to have depth or layers. Unfortunately their behavior and story-logic issues repeatedly took me out of the story. I'll try to avoid writing any examples that are spoilers. The following analysis is taken largely from the first couple chapters anyway and shouldn't reveal too much.

Main antagonist Vantrax has conquered most of his known world. But he shows no intelligence to back up this fact. He sends the same generals on missions they have repeatedly failed and says things like, "This time, do not fail me." The greatest of his generals, Saladin apparently isn't any smarter. When he's about to go personally attend to the most important mission of his life and allowed to take two soldiers with him, I would expect he bring the very best, top two heroes from the all wars he's won. He doesn't. He chooses two incompetent cowards, both afraid to even go and who make noise like amateurs, giving away their position when they should be in stealth. His failure to put together a team fit for the task aside, it turns out the mission looks to me like something he should've been able to do on his own anyway. He fails. Renowned as one of the greatest warriors alive, having slain hundreds in countless battles – he cannot complete a task against an old grandpa and two teenage boys? And this general was heretofore undefeated and played a critical role in conquering the world? This crossed into the realm of unbelievable for me.

### *The Good*

Once you get past a certain point, the story moves at a good pace. Battles and strategies play out across the land and in different terrains and settings. In the last quarter I wanted to know what was going to happen. The situation of the king is interesting, and the reality of the situation places out well. People that have been living on the run are tired and have low morale. The movements of armies and the issues that arise with them is also interesting. In some ways a lot of the characters have a John Carter-ish, ultra-noble mentality. Once I adjusted my expectations, I enjoyed the latter parts of the book.

### **Conclusion**

The big problem for me was I went in expecting Narnia and Middle Earth. It's more like Dragonball Z. If you go in with that expectation from the start, you will likely have a better experience. For example, here is a line describing the behavior of primary antagonist Vantrax, who is both a wizard and a king:

"Vantrax began shouting and bawling so loud that he woke many of the sleeping soldiers on the plains below the ridge, all of whom now came out of their tents to see what all the commotion was."

Shouting and bawling? Sounds much more like a large baby in a tantrum than a fearsome wizard-king that has conquered nearly all of the known world. For the first half of the book I was thinking one-star, but to its credit it improves and I have to give it two.

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## **Chris Parker says**

A review by Adrian, my 13 year-old son, so I guess the target market!

"This is a very good book that i am sure to reccomend to all my friends (which is not something i do often). The plot is very engaging and will make you want to buy the sequel as soon as you have finished the first book. The characters are also very easy to connect with as they are just normal kids thrown into a very abnormal situation. Overall this is a good book that has the potential to become a bestselling hit like artemis fowl, H.I.V.E, skullduggery Pleasant and The wardstone chronicles ( 2 of which i read and identified as bestsellers before they were massive hits!) Overall, i know a good book when i read one and this is nothing short of a good book."

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## **Michael Long says**

I received this book for free in exchange for an honest review.

The Keeper of the Stones sees a young boy (Jake West) thrust into another land called Rhuaddan in which an evil sorcerer plots to take over the country from the rightful king Artrex (who is on the run with his rebel army). As Keeper, Jake is part of a chosen family from Earth who keep and protect a set of stones which have immense power...these stones can teleport between worlds, give the bearer fighting skills, strike down enemies, etc.

Story-wise, I enjoyed the characters and plot. Some of the characters are slightly one-dimensional, but that is often common in young adult fiction. For example, the evil psychopath sorcerer Vantrax is essentially a mentally-unstable, emotionally-stunted immature wacko. He is constantly throwing temper tantrums and being obsessed with killing his brother King Artrex. You're really not going to see any change with him (at least in this first book). One thing that was abrupt for me was the overnight transformation of Jake and Ben from boys into heroes (due to the stones' power). I would have preferred a more gradual transition and growth curve for these two.

This book is geared towards the young adult genre, and thus it may not be appealing to all adults. For example, many words are emphasized and italicized and there are a lot of sentences with exclamation points. In addition, the characters are always making sounds and expressions that are written down like "rrarr!" and "aarrghhhhhhhh!" and "aarghhhh!" and "krar" and "ra!". I also felt there was a bit too much description and not enough action. Sometimes there would be an action and then paragraphs of descriptive text. Here is an example: Sawdon is talking to two of his warriors. Then we are told which one was taller, where he came from, what his name was, how he looked, what he was wearing, how his hair looked, how often he washed his hair, how his hair was tied back, etc. This could help paint a picture for someone, but for me, I prefer moving on with the story.

Overall, I found the story satisfying, and I think for a child or teen it is great (although I would caution about reading this to young children due to the violence and graphic battle scenes, etc.). For an adult, some of the above mentioned issues may be a turn off..it really depends on the person. Regardless, the story has much potential and I am very interested to see where it leads in the future books.

## Shelby says

I was given this book in exchange for an honest review. Thank you Mr. Webb for offering up your story.

Jake West and his best friend Ben have all the enthusiasm and curiosity of any 15 year old boy. One day while digging around in Jake's grandfather's attic Ben stumbles over a strange box buried in an old war trunk. The opening of the box leads Jake to discover his destiny as the Keeper of the Stones.

As Keeper the box imbues Jake with powers beyond his imagination. Powers that could help those in need or hurt them if it fell into the wrong hands. Traveling via the box into an unfamiliar land, Ben and Jake find themselves unwittingly thrust into a battle for the fate of a world. Bound and determined to help the dethroned king rebuild his rebel army and rescue an impoverished land from an evil tyrants' rule the two boys have a lot to discover about themselves, and a world full of magic.

Sounds like the great start to a wonderful story of magic and adventure. Unfortunately the writing does not live up to the beauty of the pitch. From the first page the writer's style began to bug me. Now, while I may have adapted to the boys use of a strong British dialect over time, if it had remained consistent, it doesn't. As an American I'm not sure what dialect the author was originally going for, but the phonetic misspellings of words just bothered me when shortly there after all traces of the dialect were gone. Mr. Webb does try to reintroduce it at times throughout the novel, but there is no consistency to when or how it is used. The boys themselves don't always use it in their conversations, even with each other.

I probably wouldn't even have noticed this derivation if it wasn't for the fact that Mr. Webb introduces the idea the Rhuddan people have their own language. He writes entire spells in an ancient version of this language that for all intents and purposes are gibberish to an English speaker reading them. He introduces terminology specific to this world, "They were all steadfastly loyal to their King and, led brilliantly by their maverick Gerada (the Ruddite word for General), Kneshe Corian." Which, ignoring the strange use of a parenthetical when phrasing such as 'The were all steadfastly loyal to their King and, led brilliantly by their maverick Gerada Kneshe Corian, the Ruddite general' gives the same meaning, continues the theme that there is another language in play here. Yet, upon Jake and Ben's arrival both sides understand each other perfectly indicating a full understanding of the English language. And while at times different characters from Rhuddan might question a colloquialism used by either Jake or Ben, neither of the boys are ever thrown by terminology used by their new friends in Rhuddan. The author never gives us any explanation for how this is possible. I'm fully accepting of the idea that this magic box gives Jake special powers and can imbue him with an understanding/use of this ancient language later in the book, but that doesn't explain how they all can understand each other to start off, nor does it explain how Ben understands anything at all. He has no connection to the box, so even if it magically gave Jake the entirety of this new language to speak and understand, Ben would have no such help.

Language aside, the author has done nothing to endear these characters to me. Most of the book is told from what feels like a lecturing point of view. Take for example Harry's explanation to his grandson and Ben about the box's history and Jake's new role. In seven pages we have maybe ten minor responses from the boys. At one point during his rant Harry lights into the boys saying, "I know you like to laugh at things when you can, and that's great...But, with these stones comes great responsibility. Promise me you'll take this seriously, Jake?" Yet, nowhere in the previous four paragraphs have we seen any reaction from the boys other than one brief line claiming Harry could see the fear growing in their eyes. If that's the case than why

bring up the laughing? Either the boys are currently laughing and need to be brought back to the gravity of the situation or they're the scared boys of the previous description. Everything I've read, from the few times I'm told the boys' perspective, has them taking things seriously.

Mr. Webb manages to go on for paragraphs at times about seemingly inconsequential things. I get page long treaties on the different types of warriors in King Vantrax's army, full of details about the strengths and weakness' of each one, all of which could be condensed to one or two lines each and I'd have gotten the key point that ultimately mattered. Of all of it, the only part I remember, is that the serpent type warrior, while having a very tough skin, has a susceptible underbelly. All of this extra information ultimately does nothing but bore me, as the thing I lose is what these characters are feeling! At times it's even difficult to delineate what a character "thinks" vs what they actually say out loud. Mr. Webb will often in the middle of a conversation have a character think something marking it with '...' instead of with "... " and using the word thought instead of said.

When I should be cheering and rooting for my characters instead I'm left with a great feeling of antipathy. Let's take them all individually.

Harry: He's supposed to be this loving grandfather, except as previously stated he does nothing but lecture Jake in the short time we see him. While I understand his reason for trying to hide the box, having been through all of this before I want to see him cheering his grandson on. I want him to be scared for his grandson sure, but I want him trying in the little time he has to explain helping, not lecturing.

King Vantrax: For this all-powerful evil warlock king, Vantrax comes across as a supremely whiny baby. Everything is all screaming tantrums and pounding things. Sure, he zaps a few people to dust, but for being the current winner of this war he knows nothing about strategy or leading an army. I would have said the character was a manic-depressive reading this. One minute he's in a towering rage and the next he's accepting some bland excuse as a reason to not kill someone whose head he almost ripped off. Nowhere, in any description, did I see the evil genius who could have pulled off this coup.

Sawdon: If all the random rarr's and growls and such that pepper this writing aren't annoying enough Sawdon has nothing interesting about his character. He's all "Hulk smash!" without the charm of Bruce Banner. There is no intelligent plotting or scheming to make up for his witless leader. And to believe that someone who has failed this often and miserably has managed to basically win a war, I find difficult to believe.

King Artrex: As the rightful king of this land, I want to see someone who deserves that title. Instead I'm given a king who's lost all hope, is barely able to think the battle is worth fighting anymore. Yet, his people still follow him, after decades? This is a man, who tells us that all of his victories are because of his fabulous Gerada Kneshe Corian. But, when this man tells him that they should move their camp because they've been in one place too long and King Vantrax could spy them out, he ignores him. I'm not even given a strong relationship with his daughter Princess Zephany to grasp onto. She's been trained by Kneshe, he has the more fatherly relationship with her. When things do start to turn around and King Artrex is once again hopeful and a rightful leader, his relationship with his daughter is fixed in a paragraph and she just goes along with it. All contention is gone and they're wonderful and have a great relationship.

Princess Zephany: Here's the character I expected to love. She's been trained to fight, to lead, to be the fearless warrior. Yet, she's vulnerable wanting her father's love and attention. Instead as soon as our hero arrives and is discovered to be the Keeper she passes over all control and thought to him. Immediately believing he's the answer to their prayers. I loved her skepticism and strength when she first meets the boys.

Taking them back to her father as prisoners. I don't want to watch her give all that up, and to quickly become the only slight failure in a string of successes. Hers is the only raid that goes even a little wrong. She immediately forgives her father, follows after Jake like a puppy, and doesn't question a thing. I don't mind her being intrigued by Jake and starting to fall for him, but such quick capitulation is unworthy of the character she could be.

Knesh/Verastus: Both these characters were the least offensive to me. They suited their purpose within the story line well and are good support characters for both Ben and Jake. Knesh arc was sad, while fitting, and I would normally be curious to see where Verastus' story takes him.

Onto our two main boys, Jake and Ben. Before I get into the boys individually I want to say one thing about the two of them. For two normal boys from Earth, they certainly take all these strange fur and scale covered creatures on Rhuddan in stride. Never once blinking at the strangeness of it all. Nope this is just another day for them, a walk in the park.

Jake: He's too perfect. I want to see my hero struggle, to overcome things, to learn. Instead with Jake I'm given a hero that goes from being a 15 year old boy one minute, to a 30 year old man the next. He doesn't have to work for anything. I'm fine with the box imbuing him with magical powers, with suddenly having the ability to fight at an elite level, to understand languages. But to just as quickly be this amazing strategist, leader, and all out genius in a world where he doesn't know the rules is too much. To have every person he comes into contact with immediately jump to follow his every thought is beyond ridiculous. I want to see a hero who's fallible; someone who is gifted with great power, but is learning as he goes. Take a character like Percy Jackson from Rick Riordan's series "Percy Jackson and the Olympians." Percy is the son of a god and suddenly finds himself with all these incredible powers, but he still a 15 year old boy. He stumbles and makes mistakes and isn't always sure of himself. He grows as he learns and we love him for it. Jake has nothing to learn. He takes his new powers as his due and doesn't question why everything works out for him. It's destiny, he's special. That's not good enough for me.

Ben: By far my favorite character. Ben at least is given a little bit of development and a little bit of real human emotion. He's scared at times and chooses to overcome it and be brave. He's loyal and would do anything for his friend. He's not perfect, he doesn't always do things right, but he's going to try. Even his comedy is welcome, lightening the mood. Ben is the breath of fresh air in this book. He's the hero I wish Jake was. He's fallible. He's honest. He's loyal and true. But then he's given a few abilities that are unbelievable. I've done sword fighting. You don't pick up a sword and immediately be able to kill someone, even with the element of surprise. I wouldn't have minded his battle at the end if anywhere in the book he'd been attempting to learn. He spent all this time with Knesh as a mentor, with the army, if he'd been attempting to train with them I would have loved his fight at the end. He still wouldn't have had to be great, but there'd be some believability to him fighting trained soldiers. Altogether he's the only character that made this book even a little bearable.

In the end the authors writing never matches the potential for this book. I love the premise and the story is there. The events as they unfold work. Thus why this book gets 2 stars from me. It's not that there are a ton of grammatical errors there either. It's just that the writing itself is just plain BAD. I can't even trust my narrator. Often I'm told on one page that a character has no abilities with a sword or something and on the next that same character is holding their own in a fight with trained soldiers. There are so many redundant paragraphs and so much repeated information that the story is bogged down. It doesn't move along and I struggled to get through to the end.

The illogical parts of this book overwhelm the believable. Something as simple as the fact that apparently in

a county that you can cross in less than a day on foot/horseback you can hide an entire army for decades. Time and distance are not dealt with in a believable manner and to add that on top of a perfect hero just puts me off. There's no reason to read further.

In the blurb I was given for this book the author was compared to other young adult/fantasy giants like C.S. Lewis, J.R.R Tolkien, and J.K. Rowling. While he may share the same use of initials, M.J. Webb doesn't even come close to their abilities with the written word. The dexterity and incredible ability those authors have to bring their world to life for the reader, to make you love and care about their characters, is sadly lacking in this novel. As much as I like knowing the end to a story I doubt I will read the rest of this series.

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## **Sam says**

This is the first installment of an epic fantasy tale that vibrates with the influences of Tolkien whilst developing its own identity, characters and worlds. The story sucks you in from the start as you explore Harry's attic with Jake, his grandson, and his best friend Ben where they discover an ancient box that contains five powerful stones, which, being the curious teenagers they are, they open and trigger a series of events that take them and you on an incredible journey to another world and brings that other world to our own.

Webb has created a world with just enough echoes of Middle Earth to pay homage to the origins of this genre and keep the reader in mildly familiar territory and enough originality and unique attributes to keep you guessing. The races found in this other world are vivid in their appearances and cultures with characters that suit each perfectly. Jake and Ben's relationship is brilliantly balanced and written with a familiarity that all readers will be able to connect with (unless you were raised in complete isolation, but even then you should still enjoy it) and it adds a certain lightness and realism to the story that will bring a smile to your face even in the most dire circumstances (and, I should warn you, there are one or two).

My only minor (and very personal) gripe is the inner monologues that appear every so often, which came across more detailed than necessary, although it could just be that I speak to myself in a abnormally simplistic manner. This is only a small gripe and one that doesn't detract from the superb story and vivid worlds that Webb has created. Can't wait to get stuck into the next installment.

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