



The Test

J.Z. Colby, Amanda Herman (illustrator)

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NEBADOR - the incredible journey of five young adults from poverty and oppression to respected citizenship in the wide universe...

This epic young-adult science fiction adventure begins as a strange young man arrives in a medieval kingdom. Openly seeking a crew for a mysterious ship no one has seen, it is soon clear he is looking for something other than salty old sailors.

THE TEST is the first book in the NEBADOR series of twelve or more novels. These stories are filled with wit-sharpening and skill-honing challenges - mental, emotional, and spiritual - for both the characters and the reader. It is truly a grand adventure in which the characters come to understand a beloved saying of the Nebador Transport Service: "Personal power is the ability to stand on your own two feet, with a smile on your face, in the middle of a universe that contains a million ways to crush you."

The Test Details

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Author : J.Z. Colby , Amanda Herman (illustrator)

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From Reader Review The Test for online ebook

Lubna says

I got the book: The Test (Nebador,#1) as a giveaway on GoodReads.

This book is set in the medieval times when slaves were brought and sold at street corners. In walks Ilika from a land far away, Nebador to be precise. He is a captain of a ship which needs a worthy crew, a crew which is smart, ethical and trustworthy - not necessarily strong in the physical sense. Do the noblemen qualify to be his crew? Or the high priests? The answer his no.

Ilika's search leads him to the slaves and after having subjected a group of them to various tests he selects nine. Oh yes, the inn-keepers daughter is the tenth member - after having qualified in the same tests. Of these ten, five will qualify for his crew, the rest will be richly rewarded so that they can start their lives comfortably.

I loved this book. Even as it is set in an entirely different setting and not a business setting, it brought across the basic concepts of ethics, leadership – more importantly situational leadership and the importance of trust within a team.

It is also a book where the value of freedom echoes strongly. The nine slaves selected by Ilika are no longer slaves. There are many poignant moments in this book, such as when their bonds are first cut to their getting their “freedom document”.

The quaint description of the streets in this era, which brought out the stark difference in lifestyle between the rich and the poor, the power of the church made of interesting reading. It also made me think: Has that much really changed?

Aren't we slaves to our lifestyle today? Or to our jobs? Are holy men above foul deeds? Isn't politics influenced by religion? You only have to look up newspapers, including Indian newspapers to realize, not much has changed.

Coming back to the book, it is a lovely, interesting read and I hope to read Book 2, someday soon

Anne says

The Nebador Trilogy are mindfully entertaining!!! Worth savoring (rereading when you need to feel.) For young adults, as well as young-at-heart adults. The author paints the story with vitality, each of the characters come alive, with energy and enthusiasm as they make the decision to "Seize the Day" opening the possibilities to better their lives. Feeling their anxieties they struggle with personal baggage, all the while exploring the unknowns around them. Each in their own way and time learning to shoulder responsibilities; developing true and sometimes harsh understanding of the consequences and actions, adjusting to life's circumstances that seem to be constancies that are constantly changing as their trials increase in difficulty. The trilogy: {The Test, Journey and Selection}, fills you with anticipation as you watch the characters move forward into a fascinating and complex universe filled with wondrous and magical new things to explore and discover. Jonathan's skill in weaving a story will leave the readers eager for more in the Nebador Saga.

Angela says

Received from the Goodreads Firstreads program:

A visitor comes looking for five people to be crew on his ship. Ilika quickly runs into problems finding them, and spends many days acclimating himself to the city he's in and the people around him.

Finally he tests a group of young people, and narrows it down to ten students. Unable to narrow it to the five he needs, he decides to teach all of them, giving them lessons to take into their life if they don't join him and him time to get to know them better.

But these people he's chosen to teach are former slaves, and his treatment of them, as people instead of property, as well as his strange-to-this-land ideologies have brought unwanted attention to him and the High Priest of one of the orders has got a personal score to settle.

Ilika must teach his students, and keep them safe so he can eventually finish his final test and chose his crew.

This book started out very rocky. The sentences were short and blocky with no flow. It had a lot of tell and very little show. This was for the first several chapters, and I still firmly believe that this book could have started much later, and much differently. Added to that the pacing throughout a good portion of the book was very slow.

Some examples of telling and not showing - former slaves that have never before been able to shop and be in the city without rope around their wrists are sent out to get some supplies - do I get to see them out shopping? No, I stay with Ilika and hear about what happened when they get back.

The students Ilika chose are almost all former slaves, and they almost immediately jump feet first into this life, with no fighting or qualms breaking out between them. It seems far too simplistic.

Actually the whole book seemed a bit 'dumbed down' for it's audience, which frustrated me because I think that the age group this is aimed at could handle a bit less heavy-handedness.

I did like how Ilika took every opportunity to make lessons out of normal occurrences in life. It made it seem much more natural. But the lessons themselves got a bit annoying. I don't need to be taught, nor do I think most readers need to be, so it would have been nice for the focus to have been on the characters and their reactions/emotions.

The other thing that bothered me was the almost preaching to me about ideals that Ilika held. I felt like the author was trying to pound ideas into my head (like not eating red meat because it's not healthy, or not chewing on lead pencils because it's poisonous - note it's not that I don't agree with these things, but that I don't think I need to be beat over and over with them). The book very often draws very clear lines between good and bad - the 'good' children are smart and quick to pick up on things and are always rewarded, the 'bad' children are mean, not smart and are punished quite severely.

By the last 45 pages the story started picking up pace and I felt it was finally going to start getting really interesting. It was still a lot of tell, and not quite enough show, but it was improving.

Then it ended. Literally, quite abruptly. I know there's supposed to be several more books in this series, but this felt more like a prologue to an epic story, not a story in and of itself.

I would be interested in seeing where the author takes the story.

Shanna says

I'll admit, when I read this book was to be a sci-fi young adult novel in a medieval kingdom, I was both skeptical and intrigued, but mainly skeptical. However, having found interest in all three of those genres in the past, I figured what the heck and went for it.

And am I glad I did! This was exactly what I was hoping for in a medieval sci-fi young adult novel!

This was another one of those single-serving novels for me, where I curl up in bed and don't put it down until the story is finished. Except, horror of horrors, the story isn't finished! There's plenty of serial novels out there which are short, complete stories of their own, which leave you satisfied, perfectly happy to never get your hands on the next story in the series, but this is not one of them! It leaves you with so many questions! Who is Ilika? Where is he from? WHEN is he from? You get hints in the novel that he's probably not from our planet, or at least he hasn't been since he was at a very young age, but on top of that he's also probably a time traveler! On top of that, this entire book of the series is about him choosing five students out of thirty-one to work on "ship," and the book leaves with nine of them still in tow! Who will be the lucky chosen?

I'm sure before long I'll have the entire series on my already-crowded bookshelf, and when my kids are old enough to understand them, they'll be introduced to the world of Nebador. I'm hoping the series will take a My Teacher Is An Alien-style turn in the future, though I do love the medieval setting as well.

If I were to have any major criticisms it would be on two points. One, the lessons did go a bit too in-depth for most young adult readers, which while I didn't mind as a twenty-something year old, may leave the average fourteen year old confused and frustrated. Two, a lot of the morals the novel is attempting to teach the reader are a bit too in your face. Yet again, I personally don't mind such a factor, but I can imagine many readers and their mentors finding it grating, especially if they don't agree with the morals being presented to them. At the age of rebellion the young adult genre can produce, being told they should be disgusted by red meat may put off the average reader.

Kereesa says

First of, before I begin my review, I would like to thank Goodreads' Firstreads program as well as the author, J. Z. Colby, for allowing me to win this book and getting me to read something I might not have on my own! Thank you!!

The Test by J. Z. Colby is a fun-filled adventure that resonates well with children and young adults as well. As this is the first out of a six book series, most of this unsurprisingly is background and set-up for the next five books. Nevertheless, Colby kept me hooked and interested for the entire book and left me wondering what was going to happen next.

Characters? There are a lot of characters in this one and because of this, it makes it difficult to resonate with many of them since there are so many and they all have names with about four letters each. I never got really confused but it made the reading a bit more difficult to try and keep track of them all. However, because this is all set-up for the rest of the series, I didn't really worry about it since it's clear there's plenty of time for me to get to know these characters and to see them develop fully with the next five books. I did have a few favorites though, Kibi being one of them. :)

Plot? Again, as this is pretty much all set-up, nothing really happens in this one, (besides the end). Colby, however, knows how to keep a reader hooked and kept me entertained even during scenes, had I read them in

other books, would have killed any love I had for them. I especially enjoyed many of the lessons and tests the potential crew had to go through, it was fun trying to figure them all out!

Writing? The characters in here learned math and I was still utterly entertained. That in of itself should tell you that J. Z. Colby can write and he can write good.

All in all? The test was a fun read. It kept me entertained, taught me a few things and made me laugh. I'd love to check out the rest of the series and see where all my favorite characters end up. :) Thanks again Goodreads and J. Z. Colby! 4/5

Steven says

Nebador The Test was an entertaining read full of great characters and a storyline that kept me intrigued. The setting of this story brought to mind the video games Fable and Oblivion added with a group that made me think of The Goonies. This title also had scenes in it that not only put the characters to a test but the readers as well, giving them things to think about within their own lives. With all these great messages to younger readers, I highly recommend this title and I look forward to reading more of the titles in this series myself.

Shane Knysh says

I enjoyed The Test and will likely read the next instalment before I judge the entire series. I found the last third of the book a little less entertaining than the first two-thirds. The characters were well defined the only complaint I had was the names were too similar so I ended up backtracking in some cases to double check who had done or said something in earlier chapters.

While the story took some unexpected twists that I did not always see coming many young adult adventures memes are also present. This is not really a surprise and I was expecting this and as a forty year old I also realize I am not the main target audience for the book. In the closing chapters I found some of the characters became a bit predictable.

I thoroughly enjoyed the mix of quasi-fantasy and science fiction with the sometimes subtle and some times obvious hints as to the technology level and focus of later chapters (and potentially later books). I think some of the references would be more magical and fantastic if I were in the target age range for the book. I would imagine that some of the scenes involving lessons and the teacher student relationship would also be better received by my daughter than by me.

To me the ultimate judgement comes down to this; I can't wait to pass this book onto my daughter. I think she will enjoy the book and I hope she will want to read the entire series.

My last comment is on the illustrations. I thought that the 'hand-drawn' style illustrations in the book were great. They added to the story far more than a photo or map might have in the same place.

Congratulations to goodreads author J.Z. Colby on the start of what looks to be a good young adult adventure series. I'll be picking up the next volume and I suspect my daughter will be devouring the series as fast as they can be published.

full disclosure: I won the book as a give away on goodreads.

Sam says

As a series opener this book is pretty good, there is a bit of story set up which isn't amazing but the concept it hints at looks likely to be thoroughly engrossing. The characters did seem a little flat, especially in the first half of the book, but as the story progressed they developed a bit better and again have the potential to be really interesting and diverse. As the lead character Ilika is kept a little in the background as the reader finds out more about his new crew and the semi-medieval world he found them in rather than his own back story, but I imagine that will come later with the rest of the series. The story itself was really well paced and I imagine for younger readers would also be quite educational (possibly without them even knowing it too). At times it did feel a little dumbed down but since this is a book for younger readers I'm not going to hold that against it. I think I'll be keeping an eye out for this one in future.

Julie says

I won a copy on first reads.

I'm noticing that the other reviewers seem to love it or only give 2 stars. I think I would give 2 1/2 if that were possible.

Overall: good premise, weak plot, characters and especially setting, the story still struggles through and actually isn't too bad in the end (especially the last quarter of the book), but it isn't particularly engaging.

The premise was quite interesting, but was barely developed (if at all): the summary/blurb on the website tells you everything you really ever know about the main character, though there are continuous (though rather blatant and repetitive) hints about his background (he's obviously not from there, but likes to spend money and play Santa and gets teary-eyed at the site of injustice and red meat). There's never any new information .

Some have called it a page turner and a quick read, I was turning pages more because I kept expecting something to happen rather than because anything interesting was. I also thought the book was artificially shortened: it was a rather slim volume but was fine print, and gave the feeling of being of being chopped off rather than coming to any resolution. If he's honestly planning on a 12 book series I'd personally recommend a good editing condensing it into 3 or so. The pace picked up about 3/4 through and actually got interesting, though there was still something a little odd and unconvincing about the plot progression.

Character development was also rather sketchy (improving dramatically 3/4 through, perhaps because the characters actually started doing something), but it was still done in a way rather lacking any subtlety and sophistication. Everyone (except the main character) randomly lays out their life story at different points, but all the supporting details, feeling, and actions that would make them seem like realistic people are missing. There's plenty of emotion (probably too much) but it all seems painted on.

Possibly the younger audiences this is targeted to won't mind. The book is supposedly targeted to "young adults", I would think the upper grades of elementary but he seems to be straining for teenagers (possibly

that was why the random cuss word was thrown in?).

The setting was likewise shallow and unconvincing. Supposedly the story takes place in a "medieval walled city", though if that wasn't stated outright I'd have no idea. The details and culture of the place seem shallow, illogical and inconsistent, certainly it's no walled city that's ever existed on our planet, and though the possibility remains open that it's actually on some other planet it still seems unlikely that a society could develop with such an incongruous combination of cultural elements and social practices.

Just a sample: At one point the main character decides he needs a disguise, so buys a new outfit and walks into a hairdresser and gets his hair dyed. This apparently makes him almost unrecognizable to the other characters, even the ones that know him. To me, if anybody off the street can get their hair dyed so easily at a hair dresser, it wouldn't be any more remarkable to do so than it is in our current culture and would hardly make a useful disguise. To be able to walk in off the street and get your hair dyed at a hairdresser in a "medieval walled city" seems particularly incongruous.

The main point of the book seems to be to push a particular set of modern morals and value judgments. The setting, plot and characters all seem secondary to and driven by this goal, though it seems odd to do it by plunking the character with the desired morals into a supposedly less developed society. I imagine in future volumes he continues to play Santa and a Wise Mentor (even though he's supposedly only a little older than the group of teens he's trying to train) and manages to reform all of their savage tendencies and elevate their moral standards, though it almost seems as though this has magically already happened (except for the poor irredeemable kid who ran off and became a bad guy instead because he couldn't handle it).

I don't mean to rag on the book too much, it was ok but I was trying to put my finger on why it didn't do much for me in spite of the great premise and elements that had a lot of promise.

Jenne says

Having won "The Test" through Goodreads giveaways I was very excited to find the book in my mail box yesterday afternoon. I put off all the things I had to do and sat down to read.

"The Test" was a quick read and a real page turner, so much so that I read it through in one sitting. The story's concept was well thought out and if I was just judging the book on that I would give the book 4 1/2 stars. And despite everything else I would read the next book.

However, it felt to me as if this book had been "dumbed down" for a younger audience. The characters come across as flat and unfeeling, for example, the main character, Ilika, doesn't eat red meat but at one point in the story he finds it necessary to go against his beliefs and body needs and do just that. There is no inner turmoil, no disgust at himself and no ill effects from the meat. Later, each of the characters tells his or her story, but there is no lead up of emotion, they just blurt them out as if they were telling events that happened to others.

I was a little confused by the introduction of the main character's name. In the first chapters of the book he isn't named, which is fine. When he finally reaches the inn, the character is suddenly referred to by name, in a random way with no introduction to the reader.

The characters are happy all the time, the only interesting one was got rid of for not working with the group.

I got a good sense of their disorientation at the new found freedom but there is no way a group of slaves, newly freed would not test their boundaries. These are teenagers who have never met before and they all act like old friends. Where is the compleutive spirit? Where is the jealousy? There are just the right number of boys and girls in the group to create couples, but they paired up early on, so there is no mystery of who might end up with who and no rivalries to sort out, no realizations of falling in love.

I love the way Ilika uses ever situation as an opportunity to teach and I liked the inclusion of the test questions in the book, but felt the later teaching to be pushed way too much. As a reader I already know how vowels and concences work. I don't need it spelled out to me.

I was also disappointed by the role of the "villain". We are hardly given a reason for his persecution of Ilika. He pops in and out of the story so rarely that he seems like an after thought. I would have loved to have read more of his thinking, his evil ingenuity to force the outcome he desires.

Over all the book felt like it wasn't a finished work. I would gladly have read 200 more pages and have got to know the characters better.

Debbie Smith says

As a teacher of middle school students I am constantly reading books (an average of 2 to 3 books a week) aimed at the Young Adult market. I am especially focused on finding books for reluctant readers. When I received the news that I was awarded one of the available copies of "The Test" by J.Z. Colby through GoodReads, I was psyched because I hoped that my first impressions would be validated as I read it. Good Science Fiction that is also acceptable to put on my shelves at school is kind of hard to come by so I really hoped that this book would fit the parameters. I felt the book started well and hooked the reader quickly with the air of mystery that surrounds Ilika, the central character. As the story unfolded and he began learning about the society he was interacting with and then started to choose his students I was sold. This book combined so many wonderful elements that reluctant readers like such as action, adventure, a little mystery and likeable but sometimes troubled characters their own age. I also appreciated the educational tidbits that were entwined in the story and the life lessons that were taught subltly throughout the novel. After finishing this book I found I would really like to read the next books in the series to find out what happens to these characters. I would recommend this book to most young adult AND adult readers, even if they think they don't like science fiction, because after reading "The Test" they just might change their minds.

Sally says

I won this book in First Reads and I wasn't sure how much I'd like it given that I'm not really a huge sci-fi person, however the mention of a "medieval kingdom" in the blurb was enough to sway me that it might be good.

OMG. SERIOUSLY YOU GUYS THIS BOOK IS AMAZING!! I could barely stand to put it down once I'd begun. I loved it and now absolutely can't wait for the second in the series!

Summary and SPOILERS below:

Basically, Ilika is a guy from another place (and possibly another time too) who's sent to this medieval kingdom to find a crew for his "ship". He comes there not knowing the customs and barely knowing the language as well, but he manages to get in and get around and meets some awesome characters as he settles in and begins his search. After a few failed visits to religious orders and guilds and the college, he's told that the sort of people he seems to be after... are slaves. He ends up with thirty specially selected slaves for the day (well, 29 plus the inn-keeper's daughter) and he's meant to cull that thirty down to five through a series of tests - intelligence and ethics and personality etc. But he can't get it lower than ten so he decides to take those ten and educate them further, and take them out and about, and from that group he'll pick five and the other five will be given handsom payment for all their time.

I loved the testing and educating process because the book actually includes diagrams and stuff so the reader can figure out the answers too, or learn alongside the pupils. It was funny to see what we called MAB blocks pop up as well, memories of primary school maths! I'd totally forgotten about them until now. :P

I loved, loved, LOVED this book for so many reasons. The story is fascinating and really well told, it's engrossing and exciting without being heavy-going. And the characters are brought to life so much, you really get to meet them.

My only gripe is that by the end of the book, Ilika and his nine pupils (one got booted, deservedly so) have only just managed to leave the city walls... I'm dying to know which five he's going to pick! My guesses are he will pick Sata and Mati and Kibi, he won't pick Buna or Toli... but then I don't know. Neti and Miko can't be split up and I have no idea if Ilika would choose them, or Rini and Boro. Argh, want to knooooow. :P

I love how there were maps of the city, and also how we got to learn about their customs and language and currency as he and the pupils did - the monetary system, how girls' names end in -a or -i and boys' ones end in -o or -i, and all names are four letters long. My only *real* gripe is that sometimes, the spoken language of the pupils started to sound too modern, out of place in their medieval kingdom. Things like "guys" and someone mentioning a "cattle ranch" - I don't know, it just didn't seem to fit. But that's all, and it's really nothing. I totally recommend this to everyone - it doesn't matter if you don't like sci-fi like me because it's NOT enormously sci-fi at all, there's just that slight air about it. And now I am going to sit and go crazy until I can get my hands on book two. ;)

Danielle says

Got from one of the giveaways.

The book has a rather amateurish presentation that didn't give me high hopes. The cover, especially the back, is busy with too many colors and fonts. The drawings inside are incredibly crude, and it doesn't seem like there's an excuse in the text for why they're so horrible.

The text is all right, but I think part of it was that the book is aimed at much younger children than I would consider "young adult." I'm torn at how to review it, since I truly like young adult literature, but this is a better book than many of the abysmal examples of pre-young-adult literature out there.

The relationships between the characters seemed poorly fleshed out especially in the beginning. For

example, Ilika is romantically interested in a girl after seeing her once even though he hasn't seemed like an especially romantic or sexual character before this point. It's somewhat pointless. The payoff with a donkey's point of view doesn't come in this book, in fact, very little comes of Ilika's ability to talk to animals. The book is long enough that it could have been trimmed to make these exchanges more sensible instead of feeling random. Kids might tolerate this, and a lot of the moral and educational lectures in the book better as well since that genre is more prone to such things.

It was okay. I'd think it'd be better marketed as "for children" rather than a young adult epic. It doesn't make me want to read any more of the series.

Mayara Arend says

I won this book on Goodreads First Reads program.

Ilika is a captain in need of a crew. He was sent to this place, this world, to find his crew. He's not from here, probably from another planet, although we are never really told where he is from. This is a semi-medieval world, where there are slaves and horses and all.

Ilika tries to find young people who want and are willing to learn, who also would like to travel far away. He seeks for them among the educated and the smart, but they all are a "kind" of smart he doesn't actually want... So the solution comes up, in a conversation with the baker: slaves. He needs people who are willing to fight for their survival and yet, are free thinkers and are eager to learn and take whatever they can, also improving their lives.

After a while paying for people to hunt down the proper kind of slaves for him, the ones that seem to question or to be uneasy for the slave-like work, he decides that he can't possibly take them all or without some sort of knowledge and inclination and decides that they must pass a test, both of logical thinking and personality, so he can get to know them and choose the ones that will fit best what he needs.

The tests were entertaining, I tried to solve them myself and it wasn't easy but it wasn't hard either, logically, we are all much more educated than the poor slaves, so it has to be easier for us. The personality tests obviously got no right answer, but then again, they're not meant to have.

Ilika eventually chooses some students, but's more than he can take or even needs to take on his ship, so he decides to take them all, teach them and then choose the most fit ones to his ship crew, the others, he would give enough gold and knowledge as for them to be able to live a very comfortable life.

I don't want to tell you more of the story, as I feel like I already fell into some spoilery, although nothing serious in my opinion. The one thing that I disliked the book was the names. All of the characters have similar names: Ilika, Kibi, Sata, Boro, Mati, Rini, Miko, Neti, Buna, Kodi and Misa. So that makes things a bit hard, you have to keep going back and try to remember who is that one and what did they do. Also I mixed up boys and girls more than once - with names like that you can't be too sure...

The positive points, though, are much more interesting than the bad - the educational part is very interesting for any young adult out there, the stories of the slaves are very interesting for us to understand them and the world around them and Ilika is also so raw, so fresh, he isn't sure about himself or others, he must learn as he goes, as well, like the students.

I'm looking forward to the day I'll be able to buy the rest of the series, unfortunately it won't be happening anytime soon - even though I'm dying to buy more books, my list is long and I have to wait a few months.
