

Rae Bridgman. *The Serpent's Spell*

Great Plains Pub. \$16.95 ISBN 978-1-894283-67-8 191 pg.

Reviewed by Lindsey, Age 14

SARAH'S STARS

*He turned to Jinzhen. "How did we do that?" he asked.*

*"Do what?"*

*"You know-go through that wall? And what's the house with the stars?"*

*It was obvious from Jinzhen's face that Wil's question was silly.*

*"That's the gate," said Jinzhen.*

*Wil must have looked puzzled, because Jinzhen repeated, "It's a gate. MiddleGate is like--" He paused. "--like a pocket ...a big pocket inside the city...it's secret."*

*"Oh, a secret city; but how come no one knows about it?"*

*"There's a repel charm."*

*"Are there other places like MiddleGate?"*

*But Jinzhen had already turned back to talking with his friends, and didn't answer.*

A fatal fire causing the death of Wil's grandmother forces the young boy to hop on a train and travel from Toronto all the way to Winnipeg, to live with two aunts and a cousin he never knew he had. His snake Esme keeps him company and an eventful train ride introduces him to one relative, and he meets his new best friend, cousin Sophie at the station. What Wil doesn't know though, is that his aunts and cousin are actually wizards and the resulting Harry Potter-esque adventure will change his life forever. Add in a mysterious medallion, a snake massacre, a little mystery, some exciting classes at his wizarding academy plus an ancient secret society and Wil has got himself a pretty darn interesting new life. But will he survive to enjoy it?

Although this book was pleasurable (I ploughed through it in a matter of hours), the numerous similarities to the wildly popular Harry Potter series were a little distracting. A teacher in disguise, a minister of magic, a wizarding school, both parents dead, an object that can create everlasting life and an annoying ghost are just a few to mention. But if you can get past that, *The Serpent's Spell* is a quaint little novel that is perfect for a rainy day. However, there are many differences from the Harry Potter series as well. The twist with all the snakes was quite enjoyable and the revealing of the antagonist behind the deaths of so many snakes took me by surprise. Reading the climax over again, I remembered all of the clues that the author dropped throughout the novel and was kind of mad at myself that I hadn't figured it out sooner. The ending hinted at more books to come (the second installment in the series, *Amber Ambrosia*, is sitting on my desk right now, waiting to be read) so fans will not be disappointed. This is a series to keep your eye on, and hopefully there will be many more books to come!

I give *The Serpent's Spell* four stars out of five.