FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Picture Books

Arthur: Time Soldiers Book 4
Kathleen Duey
Eugene Epstein, illustrator
Robert Gould, photographer
Big Guy Books
978-1-929945-05-4
(February 29, 2004)

The legend of King Arthur, though told many times, still evokes strong feelings about destiny, virtue, and doing what's right. These qualities are embodied by the Time Soldiers, a group of kids who've found a secret portal to other times and places. In the first three books of this engaging series, the original group of six met dinosaurs and pirates. In this story, two new kids join them as they accompany a young Arthur in his reluctant quest to pull the sword from the stone.

Though the focus is helping Arthur to fulfill his destiny, the story is really about the Time Soldiers and the mystery of the time portal. They're a committed team, as Jon reminds when they enter the swirling light: "Remember, it's sort of like being a family. You take care of each other."

They never know when the doorway will open or where it leads, so the boys and girls focus on preparing—they study hard, train daily, and practice diligently. Each offers different strengths—Caitlin is a history wiz, Bernardo a quick thinker, and Rob an eternal optimist. Using snappy dialogue to keep the story moving along with excitement, the kids face Arthur's powerful enemy, Sir Edward, along with a vicious dragon whom they cleverly outwit.

The kids are aware that men in dark suits are following them. The men spy on the kids with high-tech gadgets, another detail modern kids will love. The men's agenda is unclear and unresolved at the story's end, leaving the way for many more stories about the Time Soldiers. Book Five is already in the works.

The author has previously published two historical novel series: *American Diaries* and *Survival*, and is currently working on more historical novels and fantasy stories. The illustrators worked together at a design firm in California. Epstein was trained at the Russian Academy of

Arts; Gould is a photographer. They combine their traditional arts with digital technology to create a new style of children's illustration.

This team approaches book making with a fresh eye and an astute understanding of their readers. Kids who prefer video games to books will enjoy the movie-like scenes and the fast-paced story. It's laid out as a picture book, with visuals that are a memorable mix of live-action photographs of real people and detail-rich illustrations.

The *Time Soldiers* series is especially appealing to kids who like adventure stories and are visual learners. Even emerging readers will want to work through the dialogue-rich text to see what happens next. *Arthur* reads like a first-class adventure film, filled with intrigue, daring, and a cast of regular kids on an adventure of a lifetime.

Anna Stewart