

## The Witchstone

**Henry H. Neff**

Blackstone Publishing (Jun 18, 2024)

Hardcover \$26.99 (550pp)

979-821201554-7

*The Witchstone* is a humorous urban fantasy novel in which a smooth-talking demon helps to break a generational curse.

When the brutal bureaucrats of Hell give lackadaisical Laszlo an ultimatum—improve his performance as a Curse Keeper in one week or die—he whisks a tough teenager, Maggie, and her precocious brother, Lump, away on a globe-trotting journey to collect the artifacts that might save all their lives. Though the siblings don't know if they can trust this supernatural stranger, they're willing to risk it to escape lives of stigma and pain.

Featuring a plucky tone and imaginative worldbuilding, the story alternates between Laszlo's and Maggie's distinctive voices. Maggie grapples with existential questions and intense emotions, and her understandings of her world and herself shift. Meanwhile, wisecracking Laszlo drops cheeky pop culture references and goes on rakish tangents about his past misadventures.

But there are also mature depictions of sex and violence in this tale, whose quick pace reflects the urgency of the trio's quest. The international settings are evocative, capturing local culture with small but resonant details, as of the meticulous way that coffee is served in an Italian café. And each scene advances the plot by providing context about magic hidden within the human world or by developing the characters, whose relationships are heartfelt and compelling. There's fierce sibling love between Maggie and Lump, Maggie and Laszlo exchange sharp but affectionate banter, and a mischievous student-teacher dynamic develops between Laszlo and Lump. The emotional stakes become as high as the physical ones. New twists abound, and the chapters often end with cliffhangers.

*The Witchstone* is a raucous fantasy novel that centers otherworldly intrigue and the meaningful bonds formed between unlikely allies.

JENNA LEFKOWITZ (May / June 2024)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.*