

### ***The Blackthorn Key* by Kevin Sands**

Christopher Rowe is an orphan apprenticed to the apothecary, Benedict Blackthorn. Blackthorn is a kind master, but very thorough and strict, and he's teaching Christopher everything he knows with a firm hand so that one day Christopher can be a Master Apothecary himself. Part of Christopher's training is learning to decipher codes and crack puzzles so that he can keep Master Benedict's and his own recipes safe and secret.

However a mysterious cult starts preying on the Apothecaries of London, and the murders are growing ever closer to Blackthorn's shop. Suddenly, Christopher finds himself alone, torn from his home with only a cryptic warning from his Master: "Tell no one what I've given you."

Now, helped by his best friend, Tom, Christopher will need to put all of his knowledge of the apothecary arts *and* his code and puzzle cracking skills to good use in order to decipher the answer to his master's message and stop the cult before they murder every apothecary in London. But there could be even more at stake... Master Benedict's message hints at an ancient and deadly secret with the power to rip the whole world apart, and it seems that this power is exactly what the cult is looking for. Christopher will need to keep all his wits about him in order to find this secret power before the cult, and bring about justice to all those the cult murdered in the process.

This book was a ride from the very get-go! I loved every minute of it! The writing is colorful and descriptive and keeps you on the edge of your seat throughout the whole book. It's definitely historical fiction, and I loved the fact that the mystery was so strong and compelling while the story itself mixed in historical elements of the medieval ages with such grace that you felt like you were right there with Christopher and his friends, trying to solve the puzzles and answer the riddles. The characters are well fleshed out, in my opinion, with both virtues and vices that move them along at a steady pace along with the plot. I loved it! And don't take anything you read for granted because (as I'm finding out) certain elements noted in one book might carry more significance in the next. *The Blackthorn Key* is the first in a six book series that will thrill fans of *The Ranger's Apprentice*, *The False Prince*, and *The Septimus Heap* series. If you like adventure and mystery, it's definitely the right series for you!