

Gemja: The Message

K. M. Messina

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In the science fiction universe of Gemja, worlds of unexpected wonder and danger abound.

In K. M. Messina's imaginative interplanetary adventure novel *Gemja*, a witch's personal trajectory is changed on an unwanted planet.

Seventeen-year-old Resa, who is a witch, and her family are a pioneering family on Wandelsta, a "garbage" planet where the air is both toxic and material, like kinetic sand. Even here, though, Resa is troubled by a recurrent dream that she first had on Earth, of a shrouded woman offering her a cryptic message. Now, the physical symptoms that accompany the dreams begin to drain Resa's health.

Resa, compelled by the red sand dunes around her, draws them in her journal. She also meets a stranger who becomes important in her life, even though his origins are obscure. And then the dream messenger leads Resa to a glowing crystal of great power and shares an origin story of even greater significance. In her waking life, Resa is now in danger—as are those around her. Secrets related to her family, the twenty-six known planets, and the world as it is now known loom.

Wandelsta is wrought in fine detail, with notes about the crimson crystalline sand and the tangerine sky. The inherent dangers of trash sticking up from the ground and thick air make it forbidding, and yet the planet is also fascinating. Other beings share space with Resa's family too, including Slopee, who resembles a mole who assembles odd outfits, and the rotund Ploompies, who come from a planet composed most of sugar. In the book's universe, worlds of unexpected wonder and danger abound.

Resa and her twin brother Dakota have an often adversarial yet close relationship that changes over the course of the novel; their chemistry and animosity are genuine, and they aggravate then protect each other. However, Resa's best friend Sarah and would-be friend Luna are drawn in inconsistent terms, including when it comes to how they relate to beings from other planets. Sarah is open to outsiders at first but has one bombastic reaction with rippling effects, and Luna and her boyfriend's villainous behavior, while it does move the plot forward, is underexplained. Still, climactic moments and powerful revelations are plentiful. And as the book progresses, its various elements weave together, leading toward the next series title—and Resa's continuing fight to ensure that her quest does not destroy her family.

In the fantastical science fiction novel *Gemja*, a universe is born from a fractured paradise; a teenage witch is tasked with bringing it back together, one magical crystal at a time.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (July 28, 2023)

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