



IODE CANADA PRESS RELEASE

The Blackthorn Key

Winner of the 2016 IODE Violet Downey Book Award
for children's literature

Kevin Sands, author of *The Blackthorn Key*, has been awarded The National Chapter of Canada IODE Violet Downey Book Award for 2016. The \$5,000 prize was presented at the time of the 116th National Annual Meeting of IODE Canada on 27 May 2016 at Lambton Golf and Country Club in Toronto, ON. Published by Simon and Schuster, this book is suitable for children ages ten to 14.

"Fourteen-year-old Christopher is luckier than most. The apothecary Master Benedict Blackthorn is both intelligent and kind, forgiving both Christopher's mistakes as well as ill-planned pranks. But when the Cult of the Archangel kills his master, Christopher is determined to complete his master's work and bring the killers to justice. However, all he has for help are his friend, baker's son Tom, and a hastily scribbled coded message from his master. This stunning and smart mystery is made even better by well-researched historical detail, intriguing characters and genuinely funny moments. Whether accidentally shooting the shop's taxidermied bear with his homemade gun powder or outsmarting a ruthless cult of killers, Christopher makes a terrific protagonist, but it's his love for his friends and master as well as his fearless intellectual curiosity that make him a true hero. An epigraph sagely, if unnecessarily, warns against employing the many 17th-Century remedies. While many readers will love the story, it is unlikely they will try a recipe for saltpeter that involves marinating pigeon droppings in urine—but they will revel in reciting it at dinnertime."

"Toronto author Kevin Sands holds two degrees in theoretical physics, so naturally his first novel is about ... 17th-Century alchemy. Not just alchemy, but also dark conspiracies, political intrigue, mysterious codes, murder and early treatments for asthma. Instead of writing, say, the kiddit version of *Interstellar*, Sands plunks readers down amid the sights and smells of 1667 London, less than a decade after the death of Oliver Cromwell and the restoration to the throne of Charles II. The charged political atmosphere helps drive the plot, but as with most of the other historical elements in this speedy and often graphically violent historical thriller, the veracity of the details is less important than the push to deliver big payouts on both sides of that genre label."



Kirkus Review called Kevin Sands' book, *The Blackthorn Key*, "a spectacular debut novel". Newberry Honour winner and best selling author Ingrid Law calls it, "Captivating! A masterful page-turner brimming with secrets, traps, friendship, intrigue, pigeons, potions, loyalty and explosions."

For a complete list of past winners of the IODE Violet Downey Book Award, visit www.IODE.ca

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