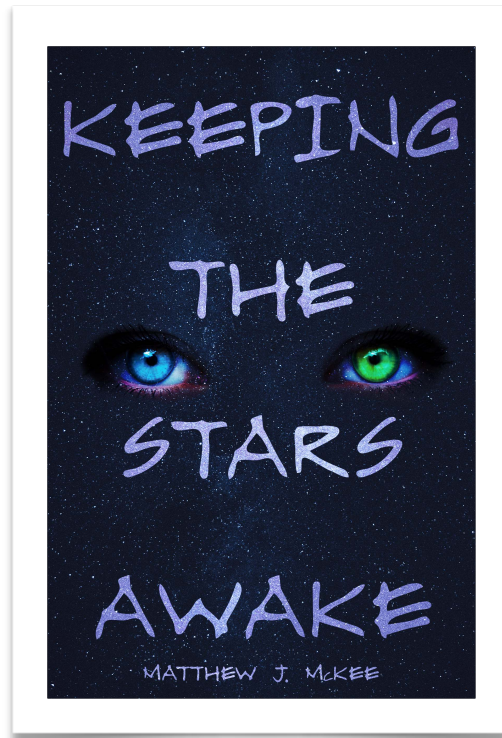




## **“Book Review: *Keeping the Stars Awake*”**

Reviewed by Audrey Davis



### **A dark and wild ride from start to finish**

Matthew McKee’s satirical novel *Keeping the Stars Awake* is undoubtedly unique. The main character, named “Oh, OK,” is just about as unreliable and unlikeable as narrators come, yet surprisingly down to Earth, with **“no idea how many lives have come and gone, [...] but [believes] none of them are any more important than any other life.”**



After awakening in his bedroom like any other unsuspecting protagonist, he suddenly finds himself on an inter-dimensional journey with only a mysterious girl and the scarce information he's given to find the answers to his questions—yet he may end up only finding more questions.

This entire book feels like a fast-paced, crazy dream. McKee pens dark yet vivid scenes and weaves in a plethora of interesting background characters. Occasionally they can get a little lost under a mountain of pop culture, anime, and TV show callbacks, but interesting all the same.

It is a little unclear how the narrator's journey begins, but this is intentional—the reader feels just as “lost” as the narrator throughout. The narrator is very aware of the “fourth wall,” speaking with the author on several occasions and learning that he *is* in fact, in a book being written, and other characters are able to read his narrations. This creates an odd atmosphere throughout the book—almost unnerving; if the narrator *and* author are characters, then by extension the reader is too.

The language in this novel is unique as well. It has a modern feel, and because the author is built into the story, McKee passes the literal task of writing the story to the narrator and supporting characters, who lean heavily into the pop culture references and jokes, and even assist him in finding the right words. This allows the diction to feel like a personal train of thought; a recognition and reminder of the fact that ***“society is always pressing its face up against the glass of everyone's individual life,”*** infused with enough sassy, snarky quips to last for years.

The imagery can be dark and graphic at times, but it lends itself fittingly to the hellish landscape and monstrous characters. Under the last layer of comedy, misfortune, gore, and wit is a plotline, one the narrator doesn't even know he is party to until it's upon him. This hidden gem propels the reader through the absurd, provides a welcome walking stick in the wilderness of weird and wacky.

This book has come to ask the reader if they enjoy being alone with themselves, to identify parts of their inner selves that they may not enjoy or may not have initially seen as problematic. Oh, OK is occasionally eyeroll-inducing, and at times leaves a good example of how not to behave, but the structure, characters, and language produce a story for



someone looking for... well, a story uniquely told. A ridiculous, bizarre tale with humor and horror, and without a specific message—this book wants to leave you with a yarn that's *“worthy of keeping the stars awake.”*