



LAND OF ICE AND MAGIC

Winning a free trip is not always a good thing

by Perry Grosshans

Mystery, intrigue, and magic are all well and good, but not when you're planning a once in a lifetime trip to Iceland! Icelandic mysteries, folklore, and new unknown dangers are part of Rae Bridgman's fourth book in the MiddleGate series, *Kingdom of Trolls*.

Wil Wychwood and his cousin Sophie Isidor are just finishing up the school year when they get some strange news: their aunt Rue has won a trip to Iceland, a harsh and dangerous land of *galdur* (magic) and trolls. Before they can leave, however, Aunt Vi's fortune-telling shop is threatened by a competitor, kindly Mr. Bertram is arrested for treason over a missing manuscript from the MiddleGate library, and crazy Mrs. Oleander wants them to return some

old runestones to Iceland. And to make matters even worse, there are signs that the Serpent's Chain is up to no good once again!

Much of the focus in *Kingdom of Trolls* is on Icelandic folklore and culture.

"Iceland," Bridgman says, "has a long history of myth-making and Nordic storytelling about the magical and supernatural."

Bridgman first became interested in Iceland while researching her third MiddleGate book, *Fish & Sphinx*.

"I discovered Einar Jónsson's statue of the Icelandic statesman Jón Sigurðsson (1811-1879) on the grounds of the Legislative Building. It was unveiled in 1921 by the local Icelandic community to honour Sigurðsson's contributions to Icelanders."

From that first discovery, Bridgman continued to look into Icelandic culture, including the large population of Icelanders in Manitoba. "Approximately

20,000 Icelanders left their homeland between 1870 and 1915," says Bridgman, "due in large part to the eruption of the Mount Askja volcano in 1875."

Bridgman managed to make three trips to Iceland itself, twice as an artist-in-residence at Skriðuklaustur. "During those trips," she says, "I met a number of people who helped with the research, and I visited the Icelandic sites featured in the book. I also made contact with the Icelandic consulate here in Winnipeg."

"As well, I took a couple of Icelandic language classes at the Scandinavian Centre in Winnipeg and through the Department of Icelandic Studies at the University of Manitoba. And the Icelandic Reading Room at the University of Manitoba has an excellent collection of books."

As the fourth book in a series, Bridgman says that *Kingdom of Trolls* was both easier and harder to write. "Easier, because the characters do grow," she says, "As an author, you really enjoy

your friendships with them. MiddleGate is a very real, albeit fictive, place and it's great fun to explore its nooks and crannies. Harder, because there are countless details from the earlier books that carry forward."

When asked if the series would continue, Bridgman confirmed at least one more book is in the works. "I relish the intersections between the everyday and the fantastic, the ordinary and the mythical," she says. "I am interested in helping children (and others) appreciate just how 'magical' the places where they live can be." ❖

Kingdom of Trolls, a MiddleGate Book

Rae Bridgman

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