

Bridgman delivers *Amber Ambrosia*

Books by University Staff

BY DALE BARBOUR
The Bulletin

Rae Bridgman has returned to the hidden city of MiddleGate.

The city planning professor and associate dean (research) with the Faculty of Architecture has just released *Amber Ambrosia*, a follow up to *The Serpent's Spell*. This time the two young protagonists Wil Wychwood and Sophie Isidor are trying to discover why MiddleGate's honeybees are falling sick. Along the way, they find themselves transported into the Great Nest and get a bee's eye view of the world.

Bridgman said it was a pleasure to pick up the series where she left off in *The Serpent's Spell* – with the Serpent's Chain, a secret magical society, showing signs that it was about to return. Of course, in her own mind, she's never really left MiddleGate, a magical realm, that's accessed through a hidden gateway in Winnipeg's exchange district.

"Wil, Sophie and the others really have become living people in my mind," Bridgman said. "They inspire me. I'm a structured writer and I like to plot everything out in detail but there are times when a character will do something I didn't anticipate."

True to the fantasy genre, Bridgman's characters dabble in magic, solve mysteries while still fretting about getting their chores done around the house.

In the case of Wil and Sophie, the list of activities includes taking in a Dragonfly festival – complete with a gourmet meal of insects – and trying a sample of buckwheat honey.

"Life is going on here, but life is also going on in MiddleGate. It becomes that real for me," Bridgman said. "But then, that's the challenge for an author, you have to bring the characters to life for others to enjoy."

Bridgman wrote and illustrated *Amber Ambrosia* during a nine-month sabbatical from the U of M.

Research for the university took centre stage



Photo by Dale Barbour

Architecture associate dean (research) Rae Bridgman returns to the world of MiddleGate with her latest book, *Amber Ambrosia*.

during the sabbatical as she spent time documenting a housing project in Toronto. Detailing the hidden city of MiddleGate was a pleasure snatched in the moments of free time between work and family.

"I really write in the nooks and crannies of the day, finding time in the early morning, and dreaming on the bus," Bridgman said. "These books are so much fun. They reach out to kids in a different way and they're a different form of communicating the same ideas I explore in my scholarly research. I think it makes for a well-rounded academic, because writing these books

takes every ounce of my ingenuity."

The anthropologist in Bridgman shines through in *Amber Ambrosia* when she speculates about what a world of honeybees (or a city of wax) might look like and how the language of bees might be articulated.

And while the notion of eating insects – entomophagy to be exact – will have some North American kids cringing, Bridgman said in many parts of the rest of the world, insects are a regular part of the diet.

So along the way, readers have a chance to learn with the characters.

"It's fun writing a book following people's lives," Bridgman added. In this book Wil and Sophie celebrate their 11th birthday. As the series goes along, Bridgman said they'll grow into their teens and go through all the pains and joys that go along with growing up.

"I'm not treating this like a Nancy Drew series where it's static and the characters are eternally 18-years-old. It's a great deal of fun to watch them grow and see where they'll go."

Bridgman has already written and illustrated the third book in the series and she does have a vision of where she wants to take the MiddleGate story arc.

"I've plotted out nine books," Bridgman said. She even dropped a hint about the number of books in the first installment. "Why nine? I like the number nine. It's the only number that holds all the other numbers (1 + 8, 2 + 7, 3 + 6...they all add up to 9)."

Of course, the nature of the publishing business is that sales determine which books get published. Great Plains Publications liked the response enough to *The Serpent's Spell* to offer Bridgman a contract for *Amber Ambrosia*, but the series will have to pay its own way on a book by book basis.

"It's a little hard on the one hand, because you think 'What if they don't want to publish the books? But on the other hand if you don't have a contract your writing isn't tied down to a deadline for when the next books need to be done," Bridgman said. "So far, Great Plains seems to be pleased with the series. And the French language rights for the first book have been sold, so I'm looking forward to reading *The Serpent's Spell* en français!"

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