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**Abstract:** A review of the book "Kingdom of Trolls: A Middlegate Book," by Rae Bridgman is presented.

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## Kingdom of Trolls: A Middlegate Book

Kingdom of Trolls: A Middlegate Book.

Rae Bridgman.

Sackville, NB: Sybertooth, 011.

88 pp., pbk., \$15.00.

ISBN 978-0-9864974-1-4.

Grades 5-9 / Ages 10-14

excerpt:

"So, here's the latest little drama unfolding in MiddleGate's Midst. A priceless, utterly, gutterly irreplaceable, snaky little manuscript has been stolen. And right from the Fisher Rare Book Collection in our very own MiddleGate Library. Bartholomew Bertram, the Head Librarian, has been charged in connection with its disappearance and is being detained in Puzzle Palace. Poor Mr. Bertram ..."

Aunt Rue gasped and Aunt Violet exclaimed, "Serpent's blood!"

Wil had only heard Aunt Violet swear once or twice before. And serpent's blood was one of the most serious curses anyone could say, far worse even than saying snake's blood.

"Occupational hazard, it appears," continued Elvis Moxley's poisonous voice. "MiddleGate's librarians certainly have had their troubles over the last decade. Bad news for would be's. Miss Heese, you turned out to be Rufus Crookshank, one of this century's polyonymous criminal nasties, now in custody. Oswald Persimmons, you, poor man, were murdered almost twelve years ago. Charges were laid against Cyril Isidor, he was arrested, but vanished a scant two days later. Case still unsolved." You could almost see

Elvis Moxley licking his lips with pleasure.

"What do the Firecatchers have to say about the latest fiasco? Scuttlebutt has it, the ex text was the property of an ancient secret society. It was in a private collection for decades, then donated to MiddleGate Library years ago. Current whereabouts? Unknown. Until now. The ripped script, that piece of smellum vellum, was right here in MiddleGate under our very noses.

"There are serious, and I mean serious allegations Magical Charter principles have been violated ... and violated by none other than our own justly judicial guardians, the Firecatchers themselves. And all because of the rumoured return of the Serpent's Chain. Who knew?"

Bridgman's fourth MiddleGate novel continues the adventures of 11 year olds Wil Wychwood and Sophie Isidor, orphans who live with Aunt Rue and Aunt Violet Isidor in magical MiddleGate, a secret city hidden in Winnipeg's Exchange District. Aunt Violet has just won an all expense paid trip for four to Iceland from Perfect Products, the source of her favourite BUZZZ crystal ball that she uses regularly at Auntie Vi's Fortune Telling Shop. Initially, Wil and Sophie resist the trip, having received some biased information from a so called scholar who spoke to their cartology class; however, after conducting their own research with the help of their friends and the library ghost, they eagerly anticipate the upcoming adventure. Mr. Bertram's imprisonment, their neighbour, Mrs. Oleander 's hospitalization, and a competitor for Aunt Violet's fortune telling business dampen their enthusiasm somewhat, but a few weeks after the end of the school term, Wil, Sophie, and Aunt Violet prepare to depart for Iceland, Aunt Rue having chosen to stay home and monitor Mr. Bertram. In hospital and very ill, Mrs. Oleander had begged Wil and Sophie to find a special box at her house and return its contents to Iceland. Inside the box, they find a "red velvet drawstring pouch" with a "bunch of old stones," runes, that, when Wil holds his black medallion near, cause a new symbol, "a small, sparking stone," to join the snake, bee, and fish symbols that appeared during their adventures in The Serpent's Spell, Amber Ambrosia, and Fish and Sphinx respectively.

After the trio passes through a portal at the statue of a famous Icelandic statesman, they board the Hrafnhulda, a Viking ship complete with dragon prow on its maiden voyage. Both Wil and Sophie experience strange dreams during the trip aboard the magical ship, but only Wil sees the guardian eagle, Gammur, inspect the passengers and the dragon roar to life. Arriving safely in Reykjavik, the capital city, the trio eventually finds its way to Hotel Galdur that boasts a surprisingly spacious magical interior that belies the tiny, dull exterior. Perfect Products keeps the trio very busy on excursions to introduce "Icelandic hospitality, history and happenings" with a highlight trip to the Perfect Products factory. Their takki, a transport key, whisks them to each day's activities.

Bridgman presents quite an Icelandic travelogue rich in mythology and history. During the week, Wil, Sophie, and Aunt Violet visit the Culture House with its Scriptorium, The Sage Museum that features the Viking Age, the Icelandic Museum of Witchcraft and Sorcery with its Sorcerer's Hut, and the Museum of Icelandic Wonders, "elves and trolls, Iceland's huldafolk, the hidden folk." On day five, their takki malfunctions so that, instead of arriving at the Perfect Products factory, they land in the Namafjall, "a high temperature geothermal area with fumaroles and mudpots." Trying the takki again, the trio transfers to the Icelandic Phallological Museum in the north of Iceland and views amazing specimens before the Perfect Products technical people find them and transport them safely to join the factory tour. During the tour, Wil and Sophie overhear two women talking about sabotaging the crystal balls, and they decide to take the

information to the president who promises to look into the issue and rewards them with special Icelandic chocolates.

At each of the museums, Wil and Sophie experience unique experiences not shared by their fellow tourists and learn new tidbits about the Serpent's Chain Society as well as about the history and mythology of Iceland. However, the most interesting of the secret trips occurs at the Museum of Icelandic Wonders where they meet the troll people in TRoLLHeLLiR, the Kingdom of the Trolls, learn that 500 years earlier another keeper of a black medallion visited the trolls, receive a troll history lesson, return the runes Mrs. Oleander had stolen, and meet the SCRYR who contributes some enigmatic prophecies and gives them two special stones, a wishing stone and a healing stone that will prove extremely valuable when they return home. Their Icelandic adventure over, the trio returns to MiddleGate only to find conditions have deteriorated further and Aunt Rue in despair. However, resourceful Wil and Sophie, with the help of Peeping Peerslie, manage to solve several mysteries, help Mrs. Oleander heal, and free Mr. Bertrand from prison so life returns to MiddleGate normal.

Bridgman packs the fantasy with a remarkable amount of information about Iceland, all the while maintaining the magical theme and retaining elements that characterized the first three novels of the series, things like the serpentine symbolism, talking statues, the black medallion, quirky characters, and the ever present menace of the mysterious Serpent's Chain Society. Obviously, Bridgman conducted an impressive level of research in preparation for writing the story of the Icelandic adventure and has fun showcasing the children at various venues, most notably The Phallogological Museum. A comprehensive guide at the outset, *Dramatis Personae et Creaturae*, provides readers, especially those who have not met the characters in previous novels, with an overview. An Appendix, entitled "Runes and Icelandic," explains the runic alphabet and marks, magical run staves, the Icelandic alphabet and resources that include website addresses to museums. A Glossary clarifies Icelandic and English terminology. Each chapter opens with a Latin phrase accompanied by an English translation, plus an illustration, while pen and ink drawings appear throughout the novel showcasing Bridgman's considerable talent and creativity. The most difficult section of the novel to read occurs in the secret trip to the Kingdom of Trolls section where Bridgman elects to print the troll dialogue using consonants in all caps mixed with vowels in lower case, but her positive portrait of the troll world might dispel some of the negative reputation trolls have garnered in literature. A Professor in the Department of City Planning, Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba, Bridgman, the consummate academic and educator, successfully combines adventure, travel, magic, mystery, mythology, and history in Kingdom of Trolls to enthrall, educate, and entertain young readers.

Recommended.

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Review by Darleen Golke

Darleen Golke writes from her home in Abbotsford, BC.

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