



Fish & Sphinx

by Rae Bridgman

Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 2008, ISBN 978-1-894283-81-6, 194 pp., \$14.95, paper. (YA Fantasy)

Fish & Sphinx is Rae Bridgman's third book in the Middlegate/Serpent's Chain fantasy series for young adult readers. As in the previous books, the main characters are two cousins, William Wychwood (Wil) and Sophie Isidor, eleven years old in this volume. The cousins are both orphans and live with their two aunts in MiddleGate, a magical city with a special affinity for snakes, which is hidden in Winnipeg's Exchange district. They attend a magical school called Gruffud's Academy (somewhat reminiscent of the Harry Potter series), and in the previous books became involved in several adventures.

In the first book, *The Serpent's Spell*, the pair travelled to the Narcisse snake pits and learned about an ancient secret society called the Serpent's Chain. The second book, *Amber Ambrosia*, brought further mysteries and an incident where the children were transformed into honeybees.

Fish & Sphinx begins immediately after that adventure. It is the start of a new school term at Gruffud's, and the cousins are beginning grade six. This time the children learn of a secret plot by the Serpent's Chain against the Palace of the Blazing Star (the MiddleGate name for the Manitoba legislative building). Wil is also warned by his grandmother's ghost that there is great danger and he must keep safe the black medallion and gold ring that she had entrusted to him shortly before her death. "It is your turn to right the wrongs of those who have gone before you" (46) the ghost tells him. As the plot develops, Wil and Sophie meet an unusual woman /fish called Catfysh who appears out of the river, and they discover that they themselves must transform into channel catfish in order to solve the mystery and save the Palace of the Blazing Star.

I enjoy the many unusual characters of Bridgman's books, such as Mage Terpsy, who reverses the initial letters of words when speaking (e.g., *parely bossible*); Aunt Violet, who dyes her hair a brilliant red for a Valentine's Day party; Peeping Peerslie, the resident ghost of the school library; and the strange homeless Catfysh, with her strong fishy smell and long whispers. The author also manages to include many interesting

factual details in her story, such as the tale of the Golden Boy atop the legislative building, and the description of the bison statues at the entrance.

Although Bridgman works in an explanation of the previous adventures and characters, readers would be advised to read the books in order, as the explanations might be confusing if they haven't, and the number of characters could seem somewhat overwhelming. (The explanations do work well, though, as a reminder for those who have read the other books.)

Author Rae Bridgman, who also illustrates these books, is a professor in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba. She has plotted out a nine-book series, so watch for future adventures. Hints in the epilogue suggest that the next book may take the children to Iceland, and that "much, much more remains to be told. . ." (194)

Donna Gamache is the author of *Spruce Woods Adventure* (Compascore Manitoba) as well as many short stories for both children and adults.

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