

Bennett Prince of Ziemia

David Kucera

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With strong leads, fantasy, and adventure, Bennett Prince of Ziemia promises to be an enjoyable story for middle-grade readers.

David Kucera's *Bennett Prince of Ziemia* is a fast-paced fantasy adventure geared toward middle-grade readers. The young prince matches wits with personable bandits committed to harassing his country and the evil Edu that want to eat him. With the help of his new friend Melissa, Bennett's quest to rescue her young cousins just may succeed.

Young Bennett aches to break out of the palace nest and protect his father's peaceful kingdom the way a knight does—with his sword. Fortunately for the prince, an outbreak of bandits in the north means his wish may come true. Although Bennett persuades his reluctant parents to let him go with his uncle and the army, he remains surrounded by bodyguards and denied his chance at battle.

A chance meeting with a daring and enterprising young woman named Melissa captures his interest. Bennett spends hours with Melissa, enjoying, for the first time, the company of one person not intimidated by his station. When Melissa's young cousins disappear in search of the stolen Zoldox, a sacred talisman that keeps the Edu at bay, she is determined to find them despite Bennett's misgivings. When they come face to face with the bandit king, will they need rescuing too?

Overall, the story moves quickly. Soon after the introduction, the prince is on the expedition to eradicate the bandits and meets Melissa instead. The pace continues to build momentum throughout, keeping interest level high. Short chapters allow younger readers natural breathing points and feelings of accomplishment for completing chapters. Especially appealing is the prince's reliance on logical thinking and his wits, rather than violence, to get himself and Melissa out of predicaments. Bennett spends hours thinking through all of the possible solutions to his problem, judging each on their merits. Even with his years of training with the weapons of war, Bennett has to use imagination and cunning to overcome obstacles and defeat his foes.

The fast pace does, however, interfere with character development. The prince is the only character that seems fully developed. He is aware of the responsibilities of his position and wishes to treat his subjects fairly. While Melissa is also shown to have intelligence and wit, there is very little background information for her character, other than that she is a merchant's daughter who does not stand in awe of a prince. Other characters serve as plot devices and do not stand on their own.

The ending arrives abruptly. No sooner has the couple returned from their quest than the book ends upon several questions posed by the prince. It is unclear if this is foreshadowing for a sequel or the end of Bennett and Melissa's adventures.

With strong leads, fantasy, and adventure, *Bennett Prince of Ziemia* promises to be an enjoyable story for middle-grade readers ready for short chapters.

KELLY DEPIN (November 19, 2016)

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