

Season's Christmas Quest: The Dog's Story

Tara Pollard

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Here's a thrilling new twist on the heart-warming story of a dog's odyssey to reunite with his human family.

The story of a dog on a journey to find his human family is one that has been told before, but Tara Pollard creates a dark fantasy of good versus evil for the golden mixed-breed dog, Season. With layered references to traditional folklore, Christian symbolism, and an apocalyptic setting, Pollard's *Season's Christmas Quest* is not the sweet and expected tale of a domestic dog alone in the wild. It is a fast-paced adventure.

Season is on a quest to save his master's daughter, Melissa, from something—we're never really told what—but instead finds that he must save the whole world. He does this by trying to remember snippets of a poem he heard Melissa reciting. As completely strange as the story sounds, it does work. Pollard keeps the message of following one's heart and discovering a sense of spiritual grace at the center, and the pieces fall into place.

From the cover image of the sweet-faced yellow dog in the gentle snow, the title itself, and the friendly snowflakes that open each chapter, the book appears to be marketed as a different kind of story. Who would know that the entire action of the plot takes place in a dark and violent version of our world, where volcanic eruptions have blackened the sky, soured the air, and sickened the humans?

The writing tends to rush through action and description and then stall a bit with redundant dialogue. Creative fantasy can overwhelm the story, such as the chapter involving Season and a mule he has befriended climbing out of an underground cavern, through rooms, and up staircases and ramps. Though rich with descriptions of a phosphorescent substance lighting the way and a nest of snakes close behind them, the pair emerges atop a mountain, faced with a sky full of stars, or "orbs," that swirl around them and then retreat and twinkle "as stars tend to do." It is a bombardment of thoughts and ideas—exciting but impatiently overlapped. Pollard is full of ideas but could illustrate the action better with more complete descriptions.

This story is a modern take on an old theme, combining the lesson-learning of Aesop's Fables with the illogical and often unnerving scenery of a C. S. Lewis tale. Season is "an innocent" as described by his mule friend. His innocence and loyalty make him the quiet hero who never seeks recognition or reward but simply wants to help his friends.

Pollard's writing has the sincerity and excitement to appeal to a broad audience of young readers. While *Season's Christmas Quest* may not be what is expected of a holiday story, it taps into the mystery and magic of faith and love and, ultimately, does warm the heart.

SARA BUDZIK (January 14, 2014)

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