

The Promise of Christmas: The Sleighmaker

Dana A. Lagmay

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Dana A. Lagmay linked the story of Jesus with the myth of Santa Claus in *The First Christmas*, the introductory volume in his *The Promise of Christmas* series. The second installment, *The Sleighmaker*, continues these threads. The new novel offers just enough background so that either story can be read independently, though more enjoyment will likely be garnered through reading the books together.

Twelve years after Jesus's birth, Prince Ezra—protagonist of both novels and son of King Caspar of Arabia, one of the Magi—is now married to Hannah, the beautiful Siberian Princess. They have two children together, a son and a daughter, Nikko and Dasha.

Near Jerusalem, Prince Ezra, King Caspar, Nikko, and their entourage come across Mary and Joseph, who are trying to find their son. Nikko and the others join the search for the boy and, in doing so, stumble upon thieves who want to kidnap them and hold them for ransom. Jesus comes to their rescue. He then presents a special gift to Prince Ezra and reminds him of a promise that was made a long time ago and still needs to be fulfilled.

Later, Ivan, former enemy of Prince Ezra and now a blacksmith in Siberia, builds a special sleigh that becomes instrumental in an unexpected, magical way. The sleigh, pulled by reindeer, is used as part of a rescue effort when Dasha and her Aunt Vera are kidnapped by the same thieves Prince Ezra encountered earlier.

Some of Lagmay's characters are one-dimensional and are moved around like chess pieces on the board of the narrative. Fortunately, other characters are strong and unforgettable, like Prince Ezra, Princess Hannah, Nikko, and Dasha. The relationship among these characters, like an engine of unconditional love, forms the heart of the novel. Such a strong core may allow some readers to overlook the typos, misspellings, and awkward sentence structure that are all abundant in the book.

The factor that most significantly affects the quality of the novel is that it is written in an inconsistent and clumsy present tense. Lagmay writes, "Jesus then handed the box with the carpenter tools to Ezra and offers him more to think about." In another example, he writes, "Prince Ezra cannot dismiss what Nikko has last said." Numerous instances of faulty syntax slow the pace of the narrative.

Additionally, it can be difficult to determine when scenes are transitioning. Weighty exposition at these points often creates a too-obvious sense of authorial intrusion. Many scenes in the book would be stronger had they been incorporated into the narrative as pieces of the story that show, rather than tell, what happens.

Lagmay's writing has sincerity and conveys a sense of spirituality and innocence that is similar to Helen Taylor's work in *Little Pilgrim's Progress*, an adaptation of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The love and respect Lagmay clearly has for his characters is endearing to the extent that readers may be able to turn a blind eye to the novel's shortcomings.

A third volume in the series, *The Promise of Christmas: The Promise Kept*, is expected*.*

LEE GOODEN (April 4, 2013)

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