

Princess Lizzie and the Time Travelling Magic Cloak: Book 3

Dr. Van

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Advanced concepts and language pair with a unique heroine in this contemporary tale.

Made with a unique blend of ingredients, Dr. Van's Princess Lizzie series targets a young audience but attempts to keep parents engaged with references to the grown-up world. *Princess Lizzie and the Time Traveling Magic Cloak*, the third of the series, addresses social injustice with a challenging vocabulary and complicated circle of characters. It is an unapologetic juxtaposition of advanced concepts and language delivered in a package for children, which may be a refreshing change for some.

The book follows Princess Lizzie as she searches through time to find a potion to save her friend, Sir Hippo, who suffers from "a degenerative condition." Unbeknownst to Lizzie, her time-travel coordinates have been tampered with, and she is instead transported to the outskirts of the kingdom. There, she witnesses the deplorable living conditions of the "Dontgots," who have been banished to a life beyond the Great Big Wall. Lizzie has to figure out a way to reconcile these people with her father, the king.

The illustrations for this installment lack some of the richness of the two previous books. With a darker theme and more muted visual representations, the sparkle of the problem-solving princess is overshadowed by shrouded victims of famine and poverty. The backgrounds, previously jewel-toned and glowing, are more monochromatic, with all characters, besides Lizzie, represented with minimal detail and color. Even in triumph, when Lizzie convinces her father to bring the outlying Dontgots back into the kingdom, the pictures fail to capture the same liveliness of *Princess Lizzie and the Missing Magic Ball* and *Princess Lizzie and the Sabotaged Magic Bicycle*.

This book presents a role model who is admirable for her desire to help others, her bravery, and her generosity. However, despite the time travel, texting, and magic potions, the story fails to deliver the "whip-smart" heroine it promises. Princess Lizzie is a wonderful person but not "your favorite math, science, and technology whiz in a dazzling gown." She is, rather, a young humanitarian who uses a cell phone and tries to get her father to see things her way by "throwing herself onto the ground, pounding her fists, and screaming."

There are a lot of important lessons in Dr. Van's books, which build on each other in their complexity and age appropriateness. She has a quirky imagination and writes what she means to say without being overly concerned about kid-friendly delivery. Giving children and parents opportunities to talk about big concepts makes this a uniquely educational series that definitely steps outside the box.

SARA BUDZIK (May 5, 2014)

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