



## Solstice Magic (A Calgary Stampede Adventure, #1)

*Jean Stringam*

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Read about the magical world of cowboys, rabbits, and Ukrainian goddesses that unfolds when Zo's gruff baba from Ukraine arrives with her savage Caucasian Ovchorka dog. The ensuing chaos of clashing cultures catapults the characters into the extreme sport of rodeo at the Calgary Stampede. There, Vince Lapin, bull-rider extraordinaire, meets up with Susie Lago, protégé of Zo, and the outcome for the other rodeo contestants as well as the animal athletes changes stampede history. Good thing Zo has a best friend with an attractive older brother to soften the trauma. Solstice Magic is magical realism for everybody who ever wished to be more than they are. You'll love this first-in-a-series tale of the Calgary Stampede.

## **Solstice Magic (A Calgary Stampede Adventure, #1) Details**

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Author : Jean Stringam

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## From Reader Review Solstice Magic (A Calgary Stampede Adventure, #1) for online ebook

### Will Muir says

Before I start this review there is something I must confess. I am in no way a country boy, nor am I fascinated with the South. I know, being from a small town in southern Indiana that might come as a shock. I just have two things to say, first to all my fellow citizen of southern Indiana you are not part of the South, so stop acting like you are. The second thing I would like to say is that I am a city boy at heart.

I have been on a few farms in my time, and some of them were lovely place. It just wasn't for me though. There is nothing there that holds my interest. Instead of opening up a window and hearing the sounds of barn yard animal and farm equipment, I need to hear the sound of traffic going by, people yelling at each other from half a block away, and the ever present sirens or car alarms going off.

Don't get me wrong, I do love the small town I live in. It is close enough to the Louisville Metro area that I can get all those things, but still be able to get away from them at the end of the day.

I bring this up because the book I am about to review is about the rodeo. You really can't get any more southern than the rodeo. Well maybe if you are line dancing in a yard with at least one car up on cinder blocks. Having said all of this, I have to admit that I really enjoyed Solstice Magic by Jean Stringam. But that is probably because the book is set in Canada.

I have to plead ignorance here, I was not aware that the rodeo existed anywhere outside the United States. I thought this was a sport that was solely practiced in America. I had no idea that other countries would find value in the rodeo. To be fair though my only knowledge of Canada are from shows like You Can't Do That On Television, SCTV, The Red Green Show and The Kids In The Hall. Unless you know those shows were produced in Canada you would think they were American shows.

So I guess I shouldn't be surprised that the rodeo exist above the US/Canadian boarder.

Before I go any farther I must say this book is not solely focused on the rodeo. Things outside the world of the rodeo take place in this book as well. As the title of this book suggest the major plot developments in the book revolve around the solstice (summer) and involves magic. Yes this is a fantasy novel. Solstice Magic is a low fantasy novel.

For those that don't know high fantasy is set in an imaginary world very different from our own and the characters in those types of stories are caught in an epic struggle. Example of high fantasy would include The Lord Of The Rings and A Game Of Thrones. Low fantasy novels are those that set in the real world or fictional albeit rational version of the real world. Low fantasy would be Buffy The Vampire Slayer and Twilight.

So what is Solstice Magic about if not all rodeo? The first chapter is about the rodeo. Here we meet Vince Lapin and two other characters that will play a significant role later on in the book. Vince is one of the rodeo cowboys, a bull rider. For several years now, between the solstice and the Calgary Stampede he works the Canadian rodeo circuit. We are also introduced to Grant Rollins and his foster daughter Cleo. Mr. Rollins is CEO of Upstart Oil and a member of the Calgary Stampede board.

It has come to the boards attention that the high quality of cowboys performing at the Calgary Stampede has caused many of the fans to believe the event is too polished, that it might be scripted. Someone suggest that they bring back the Old-Time Rodeo Clowns to bring back some excitement, give the fans something to laugh about. Grant Rollins took to the idea and help push it through the board. He wouldn't take no for an answer.

During the last ride of the day we meet contestant #33, who is not your normal rodeo clown. In that she is female. We learn later on in the book just how unusual she really is. None of that matters now cause clown #33 does a hell of a job entertaining the crowd. And this catches the eye of Vince who has a feeling he knows just who she might be.

It is in the next couple chapters that we are introduced to the characters that will play a major role throughout the rest of the book.

Zo (Zorian) Luki is a Canadian born teenage girl who is of Ukraine descent. She is your average teenage girl who wants more than anything to own a rabbit of her own, just like her best friend Jaki Turchin, so that she can join the jumping club. She just needs to find a way to get her parents to let her have one.

A rabbit is not only thing that Jaki has that Zo wants, there is also her older brother Ivan. Being life long friends with Jaki, Zo has always known Ivan as well. Both families having neighboring farms meant the three of them rode the same bus school together. And now that Zo has entered high school her feeling for her best friend's brother have started to change. This is not something see feels she can share with Jaki.

Life for Zo and her parents is about to change. The dynamic of their three member family is going to be disrupted with the addition to their home. Zo Ukrainian grandmother, Baba (grandmother) Dolia, is moving to Canada to be with her only remaining relatives, her son and his family. Baba Dolia is not a very nice person. As a young mother she decided to remain in the Ukraine rather than move to Canada with her husband and infant son.

Because Baba Dolia believes the old Ukrainian ways are the best, nothing about Canada or the way Zo is being raised or the way she acts is ever good enough for her. She sets out to remake Zo into a proper person by trying to teach her the Ukrainian ways. This ends up just making Zo's life miserable.

But Baba Dolia did not come alone. She brought her pet along, Perun, a Caucasian Ovcharka. At a 180 pounds of muscle, Perun is beast of a dog. On top of that he has a bad attitude and only cares for one person in this world, and that is his mistress Baba Dolia. Anybody else that gets in his way or threatens Baba Dolia, Lord help them.

Zo doesn't care much Perun. As it happens, to help Zo with the changes that were about to occur, her mother gives in and allows her to get a rabbit. What Zo thought would only bring her joy turns out to bring conflict within the home. Baba Dolia is not to fond of animals living in the house. She thinks Zo's new rabbit is vermin and will only bring sickness with it.

Here is where the fantasy elements come into the book. A good portion of the book is seen through the eyes of Susie. We get a look into what is going on in the world of the animals. I have to say I didn't mind this at all, I thought the author handled this very well. It was a little anthropomorphizing the animals, but not to such a degree that they loose all aspect of being animals. There was the right balance between having the insight into the animal world with emotions we would associate with humans but still keeping their world separate from that of humans.

That is until the second half of the book. You remember this book is suppose to be about the rodeo, well here we finally get back to it. But not before an incident that involves Baba Dolia, Susie, and Zo. An incident that left Zo injured after she was chased down by Perun. After being sat on by Zo's grandmother Susie finds herself in a barrel with a raging bull bearing down on her. All she can do is hope to hang on for dear life.

If you haven't guessed what is going on, Susie has been turned into a human. And just not any human at that, it turns out she is contestant #33 from earlier in the book. That's right, she is the Old-Time Rodeo Clown. And Vince spots this right a way.

How can that be you might be asking? Well because he too is a rabbit turned human. It seems like for several years now that his "friend" Cleo has been using the magic of the summer Solstice to change Vince into a human. And it just so happens that whatever powers she was using caused Susie to be drawn into the human world as well.

With Vince's help Susie learns how to act human, like not standing to close to another person or that she needs to bath and wear fresh clothes everyday. Or else she runs the risk of losing her new job as a rodeo clown. Vince warns her that she can't let anybody know that she is a lady, people who work the rodeo circuit are extremely superstitious. If they were to find out that she was female, it could end very badly for her.

That seems like a good enough place to stop right there. You can guess what comes next, Susie must somehow become a rabbit again and find a way back home to her Zo.

I thought Solstice Magic was an excellent read. The target audience for this book is the Young Adult market. I do believe that this book is interesting enough to hold any teenagers attention. Whether they be a kid from the country or a city kid, the personal connection between the characters are familiar enough for anybody to relate with. Who hasn't had an older family member that disapprove of who they are and what they do.

Let us not forget what it felt like to have your very first crush on somebody.

Do give this book a try, and head on over to Jean Stingam website were you can listen to an original song she has composed for this book, you can also download the sheet music as well.

I give this book a thumbs up.

<http://www.bitemybook.com/2013/06/wil...>

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### **Elaine Walton says**

I thoroughly enjoyed Solstice Magic and am happy to give it five stars. As a harsh academic critic, I immediately noticed the quality of the writing. The well-crafted sentences provide deft descriptions of people, places, and events. The real pleasure for me came, however, when I couldn't help laying aside my professorial screening lens and became totally immersed in a fascinating story. I concur with the comments of critique, Roderick McGillis: "The book is inventive, witty, thoughtful, and surprising."

The setting in rural Alberta, Canada, with a focus on the Calgary Stampede, supplies an interesting backdrop, but the plot involves much more than rodeos. Magical rabbits, who become human and have a poetic language all their own, prompt endless imaginative possibilities, but the story extends far beyond the charm

and attraction of magic. The central characters, who have roots in the Ukraine, give the reader an interesting glimpse into a piece of Canadian immigrant culture and demonstrate the Author's dedication to appropriate background research. However, the unraveling of the characters provides much more than a history lesson.

Solstice Magic is a story about a real family struggling with real challenges and enjoying real successes with the possibility even of real romance. Stringam captures both the human and animal experiences and feelings in a way that make the story almost believable. Along the way, she uses her characters to teach valuable lessons, such as survival techniques when faced with a strange new existence or how to tolerate and even become endeared to a grumpy grandmother.

The reader is left with curiosity as to the true identify of Vince's friend, Cloe, which could be a flaw in the plot were it not for the fact that Solstice Magic is the first in a series. I suspect Stringam's readers are eagerly looking forward to the next book. I know I am.

The book is enjoyable and compelling from beginning to end. I highly recommend it to young adult readers as well as a general audience.

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### **Susan says**

"Solstice Magic: A Calgary Stampede Adventure" is the first book in the author's new series. Jean pens her plot around the Calgary Stampede, teenage romance, family, relationships and rabbits. Her characters are strong and well developed interweaving them between the human and animal world. A true work of art that kept me captive and should be on every fantasy lovers TBR list.

This review is based on a complimentary copy from the author which was provided for an honest review.

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### **Kathy Dickinson says**

This was a delightful & fun story about rodeo life, & solstice magic. I enjoyed this book very much. Though this book was meant for a younger crowd I thoroughly enjoyed it. I was lucky enough to win this book at Goodreads.com & advise every one to read it from young people to older people such as myself. Thank you Mrs. Stringam for picking me.

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### **Courtney says**

Zo Luki and her family live on a farm in Alberta. Zo is a rabbit hopping competition enthusiast (think agility trials for dogs), and is anxiously awaiting the day when she will be able to get a rabbit of her own. Her chance comes on a trip to town with her mother, when it's decided that a pet will help Zo adjust to the impending arrival of her Grandmother, Baba Dolya. Baby Dolya is coming from the Ukraine to Canada to live with them.

Dolya arrives with an unexpected companion, her dog (a Caucasian Ovchorka) Perun, much to the dismay of Zo's father who is alarmed by the dogs' aggressiveness.

Conflicts soon arise between family members as they adjust to each others' presences and different cultural backgrounds, one of the main conflicts between Baba Dolya and Zo being the presence of her pet 'rodent', Suzie.

Added alongside all the human drama are the adventures of Suzie the English Angora rabbit herself as she adjust to life with a human family and aspires to become a great Easter Bunny.

*There are English Angoras on the image page with less fluff, but this is what comes to mind when I picture Zo trying to train Suzie to go over the hurdles... haha.*

After a terrifying encounter with Baba Dolya's broom, Suzie is miraculously transformed into a human for the length of the summer solstice. But if Suzie doesn't find a way to save herself after the solstice ends, it could cost her her life.

It's a sweet story, and it was fun to read. The writing is easy to read and keeps the reader interested in the story. However, I wasn't sure what to think of this book at first. I was expecting some kind of (adult-geared) paranormal romance from the cover, and the small hints of plot that the summary gave out, so when I started reading the book the story came as a bit of a surprise. I wasn't really sure what age group this book was aimed towards.

A lot of the text is your typical realist-fiction about a family trying to learn to live with each other. If you focus on this bit, it could easily be a YA book. One of the fantasy elements, (view spoiler) threw me for a loop though, and made me wonder if I hadn't been off in my estimation by a few years. Now that I'm finished however, I'll go with my second impression, that is a novel that would work well for teen readers (not that that need stop any adults from reading it - personally I like teen books. They can be a lot less pretentious than some adult novels seem to be.).

There were a lot of point about the book that I thought were interesting - one day I'll have to find time to look into some Ukrainian folklore. The mentions we're teased with in the novel sound quite interesting. I love the incorporation about the Pysanky as well, it would be interesting to learn more about the superstitions about them (like Baba Dolya being upset about the yolk being removed).

One thing I found as a neutral point was Perun. At first I was put off a bit by the vet's comments. They made it sound like the breed is vicious by nature, and it drives me nuts when people talk about dogs (like bulldogs) that way because generally, it's simply not true. A lot depends on socialization and training of the dog. However.

I think Ms. Stingam did a good job of handling things in this story. I read up on the dog breed on a breeder's site, and they ARE quite aggressive to 'adult intruders' (anyone past puberty, including teenagers, who aren't part of their 'pack' and on their pack's territory). From what I could tell from the story, Perun was probably:

- a) not socialized correctly - it was likely just him and Baba Dolya much of the time, so he wouldn't be used to dealing with lots of people and animals all the time.

- b) He's been allowed to get away with being aggressive. (view spoiler)

When he's taken to the farm, the family is scared of him. Not a good way first impression, so they aren't going to be able to behave calmly around him, and will send him all the wrong signals. When the (total failure of a) dog run is being set up (bad choice for a breed that needs exercise, and a dog that is used to patrolling the area), the dad handles the food and water dishes with BBQ tongs. Seriously?

And when putting Perun inside and closing the door, he turns and RUNS to beat the dog to the exit, which

frankly is just stupid. You run, a dog will chase, whether it's because they think you're playing, or you're prey, or whatever. It's instinct. Even the author points this out: "Perun absolutely could not resist fleeing prey, and pounded after him."

One well-handled point is that Baby Dolya takes each family member to introduce them to Perun.

Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to work. The parents were too scared to get close, even with him locked up, so they don't let him catch their scent. It doesn't say if Zo got close enough, but if so it didn't seem to work (view spoiler)

Anyway, the breed is interesting (and cute, though I don't think it's one I'd get). If you want to read up, this is the page I was looking at: ThunderHawk Caucasians.

Of the things I didn't like... We're introduced to the rabbit proverbs early on, and I'm not sure I found a single one that made any sense to me. Maybe an intentional species-barrier type of thing, but still.

None of the magical events are explained either, which is annoying. (view spoiler) The magical events seem to just randomly occur, with no explanation. They might be explained in future books, at least. \*fingers crossed\*.

The author was kind enough to include a glossary, and some interesting information about the spellings used (I like language stuff, okay? Hush.). She also added a bonus song in the back, with the music notation and lyrics. It's also available to listen to on her website (and on youtube, I believe). It's kind of more along the lines of older country music from what I can tell, so it won't be to everyone's taste. (The singer's type of singing - her intonation? - reminded me of mom's old Hank Williams and Gene Autry stuff.)

**I received this book from the author through Goodreads Giveaways in exchange for an honest review.**

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### **Zoe Brooks says**

This review first appeared on the Magic Realism blog - <http://magic-realism-books.blogspot.com>

This is a book for young adults, and I would probably put it at the lower end of that age range. Zo is at senior school but, despite a bit of a crush on her friend's brother, is mostly interested in training her rabbit to compete in hopping courses. I also think therefore that it is unlikely to appeal to boys.

I suppose it should be said here that I am not a young adult and haven't been one for a very long time, so long in fact that my son isn't one either. But I do get the impression that this is a book which isn't being properly targeted at its core readership. The cover (above) speaks of cowboy adventure to me, not of a tale predominantly about a girl, her magical rabbit, and a fierce Ukrainian grandmother.

So laying aside these quibbles let me say this is an enjoyable read suited to the market I outline above. It opens with the arrival of a rodeo "clown" at the Calgary rodeo and then shifts back several months to give the build-up to that arrival. Most of the story concerns Zo's family and the arrival of a grandmother from the Ukraine who doesn't want to be there and who refuses to fit in. Grandmother Dolia arrives complete with enormous fierce dog and a hatred of rabbits, which she refers to as vermin. The point of view in the story is mostly that of Zo or of her rabbit. I would have liked more about why Dolia is the way she is. She does come over as rather two-dimensional, although that might be because she is seen through Zo's eyes.

I am sure many of the book's young readers will enjoy the portrayal of animals in the book. There is rabbit training, sheepdog trials and of course the rodeo. As a Brit I am unfamiliar with the latter and found the

descriptions fascinating. All the animals are presented as conversing with each other.

But is the book magic realism? Well almost. The book is based around Ukrainian beliefs and mysticism. Zo's grandmother brings with her from the Ukraine fierce fundamentalist views on these and she clashes with the family over their more "modern" take on them. Personally I would have liked more about what the book is based on in some sort of postscript - after all the book comes with a glossary of Ukrainian terms. In some magic realist books it doesn't matter that you do not know, maybe because they are written from the point of view of someone who believes in the magic. But Zo is as at sea about what her grandmother believes as we are. Perhaps if Zo had learned more during the story, we could too. As this book is the first in a series, perhaps this will happen in the subsequent volumes.

This book was given to me by the publisher in return for a fair review

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### **Linda Peters says**

This was an informative book about rural life in Alberta. Love the fact that the Ukrainian culture was profiled and explained so well. Have recommended this to friends to read as it was very enjoyable.

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### **Roderick McGillis says**

Solstice Magic is the first in a series of books by Jean Stringam set during and around the Calgary Stampede. The book is inventive, witty, thoughtful, and surprising. Just imagine a teenage girl living in rural Alberta; she has a pet rabbit that she trains for hopping competitions. Her paternal grandmother, newly arrived from the Ukraine, is sour and mean; she also dislikes the pet rabbit, a creature she dubs "vermin." Granny (Baba Dolia) has a huge dog, a Caucasian Ovcharka (a truly huge breed of dog) that threatens to gobble up the pet rabbit. In a strange bit of summer solstice magic and domestic dysfunction, Granny emits a curse and the rabbit finds itself trapped inside a pysanka, an intricately decorated goose egg. From here things turn even more weird, or ought I to say uncanny? Somehow the trapped rabbit finds itself transformed into a human who is in the midst of performing as a clown at a small Alberta rodeo, dodging Brahma bulls. The rodeo clown has the name Susie Lago, but because rodeo clowns are always men, Susie disguises herself as Swayze Lago. She meets a bull rider by the name of Vince Lapin. The names of these two should indicate what they have in common. What is to happen to a transformed rabbit, a metamorphosis worthy of an anti-Ovid, once the solstice has passed and the Stampede is over? This is the question that hovers over the action giving this novel something of the feel of a Young Adult work by William Steig (one of my favourite picture book artists). I know, William Steig did not write YA books, but his picture books have the kind of magic realism that appears in Solstice Magic.

And so we have a realistic story about life in rural Alberta with a deft recreation of the Ukrainian culture. Clearly Jean Stringam has done her research well. This realistic story then has its overlay of fantasy as Susie the pet rabbit, in a reversal of what happens to Gregor Samsa, becomes human. Setting the plot out this way strikes me as rather crazy, but Stringam pulls it off splendidly. The transformation from animal to human achieves its wiling suspension of disbelief in this reader. And the shifting point of view from human to animal throughout the book also works, and works to reinforce the book's theme of integration. In other words, this is a book that cares about both the animal and the human worlds and argues that these worlds are not separate, but rather symbiotic.

Much is going on in Solstice Magic. The book is about immigrant culture, specifically Ukrainian culture,

about teenage romance, about sheep dog handling, about bull riding, about animal and human relations, about friendships and family. The characters are strong and the writing lyrical, especially when we get what the book terms “rabbit-lip,” a form of prose expression that combines the lyricism of poetry with the mystery of unexpected expression. When a character speaks in rabbit-lip, we are disarmed by the novelty of the prose and drawn in by the desire to understand this strange lingo. The rabbit-lip is perhaps an indication of this book’s uniqueness, its imaginative originality. What Stringam has created is a daring mixture of not only genres, but also reading levels. The plot with its intermittent brutal reality will appeal to readers both young and not so young. I suspect this book fits the classification “crossover fiction.” It is, finally, a triumph of imagination.

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