



The Bark of the Bog Owl

Jonathan Rogers , Abe Goolsby (Illustrator) , Kristi Smith (Illustrator)

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Twelve-year-old Aidan Errolson comes from a long line of adventurers. His grandparents were among the first settlers of Corenwald's Eastern Frontier. His father had been one of the kingdom's greatest warriors. Aidan, on the other hand, lives the quiet, comfortable life of a nobleman's son. He never has any real adventures, and that, he believes, is the one great injustice of his otherwise happy life. All that will change the day he first hears the bark of the bog owl and meets Dobro Turtlebane. Dobro is one of the feechiefolk—a tribe of half-civilized swamp dwellers who fight too much, laugh too loud, cry too easily, and smell just terrible. But another meeting on that remarkable day may change Aidan's life even more profoundly. Bayard the Truthspeaker arrives with a startling pronouncement: Aidan Errolson will grow to be the Wilderking—the long-prophesied wild man who will come out of Corenwald's forests and swamps to lead the kingdom back to its former glory. There's just one question: Is Bayard the Truthspeaker a prophet or a madman? This initial installment in The Wilderking Trilogy is sure to capture the hearts of young and old, boys and girls alike. Written in the same fashion as The Lord of the Rings or The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, The Bark of the Bog Owl, as the author says, will help "direct a God-fearing boy's sense of adventure and warrior spirit – his God-given wildness."

The Bark of the Bog Owl Details

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Author : Jonathan Rogers , Abe Goolsby (Illustrator) , Kristi Smith (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review The Bark of the Bog Owl for online ebook

Ethan Smith says

It was so simple it was inspiring!

I have mixed feelings with this book. It couldn't have started much worse. 'Aiden's life changed the moment he heard the bark of the bog owl!' Okay. It's hard not to like the retelling of young David, but through the life of a new character Aiden. Israel=Corenwald Pythren=Phillistines. It felt a bit strange seeing a different character rising from a shepherd boy to defeat a giant, and then having the so called 'feechiefolk' added in. I did enjoy this book, but it could have been better

Kelly Barker says

"If I am defeated tomorrow, I want to die as I have lived - a shepherd boy, with the sun on my forehead and the breeze in my hair. But if I overcome, everyone must know that the One God, and not Aidan Errolson, is the Champion of Corenwald. Neither arms nor armor can deliver Corenwald - only the arm of the One God."

Erin Hendrian says

This book is geared towards younger readers, and I might have enjoyed it more at a younger age, but didn't C.S. Lewis say: "A children's story that can only be enjoyed by children isn't a good children's story in the slightest"? The story draws heavily from the Biblical account of David and Goliath (if it was set in a frontier swampland), which is a fun idea, but it makes the story pretty predictable and the characters aren't given much depth. With so many excellent children's books out there, this series isn't one I'll be finishing.

Sara says

In several interviews I have heard Jonathan Rogers describe his Wilderking books as: "swampy adventure fiction," "kind of a retelling of the David story," and "a place that looks suspiciously like South Georgia." The Wilderking Trilogy is swampy. It is full of adventure. It is a bit like King David. It might look a lot like South Georgia. But, this trilogy is a lot more than that as well.

While the landscape may be South Georgia, I think it could just as easily be Sherwood Forest if not for the alligators. (In the next book, however, it is all South Georgia swamp.) Because of the elegance of the writing and the creativity of the story, I wasn't surprised to learn that Rogers' PhD in seventeenth-century literature from Vanderbilt University. It is clear to me that this living author knows his craft and respects the great writers who came before him. I think it is fair to say that Rogers has something meaningful to contribute to the great canon of children's literature.

Even though there is nothing on the book cover to indicate it, this story is a medieval reimagining of David and Goliath. Once you know that, the already intriguing story becomes magical. Our minds get to play in two worlds: the real world of biblical history and a world of medieval fantasy that provokes wonder and awe.

Most authors would not be able to convince me that this is both King David's story and something else worthy at the same time, but Rogers is inspired. Our knowledge of David, his God, and his story allows us to know Aidan well before Aidan knows himself. When the story opens, Aidan "felt himself to be the person he had always hoped he was: not a shepherd boy who wished he were a soldier, but a soldier who happened to be playing the part of a shepherd boy."

In this first book of three books, we meet twelve year old Aidan Errolson, the sixth son of a great and worthy noble of Corenwald. Aidan's small island nation was founded on a dream of freedom, free worship of the one true God, and a love for wholesome living. Corenwald, a bit like early America, was settled by pilgrims, freedom fighters, and adventurers.

When fear of God left the land,
To be replaced by fear of man;
When Corenwalders free and true
Enslave themselves and others too,
When mercy and justice disappear,
When life is cheap and gold is dear,
When freedom's flame has burned to ember
And Corenwalders can't remember
What are truths and what are lies,
Then will the Wilderking arise.

Reminiscent of 1 Samuel 16:6-13, the second chapter of Bark of the Bog Owl introduces us to the Corenwald prophet Bayard The Truthspeaker. When Bayard arrives at Longleaf Manor, Errol greets the prophet with profound respect and offers him welcome. Bayard explains his task and asks to see Errol's sons. As each of Aidan's strong and capable brothers are rejected by Bayard, the brothers grow incredulous. When Bayard acknowledges Aidan as the prophesied Wilderking, Errol's skepticism turns into anger. Despite his sincere respect for the Lord's messenger, Errol is deeply loyal to King Darrow and will not allow any seeds of treachery to be planted in his home.

"Though he was a shepherd boy, Aidan's was the heart of a warrior."

Before Bayard leaves, he and Aidan have a private conversation in which Aidan confesses his anxiety about this prophecy. Bayard explains to Aidan that he should do as he has always done, "live the life that unfolds before you. Love goodness more than you fear evil." Bayard encourages Aidan to remain loyal to the king. He insists that Aidan continue being a good shepherd. He admonishes Aidan to let life unfold naturally and, when called upon, to respond to all things with courage, faith, and love.

"You will fight one day for Corenwald – and sooner than you think. You will fight because you love Corenwald, because you love the freedom to live and worship as you see fit, because you love your family and your fellow soldiers. But you must never fight because you love the battle. You must never love the battle."

When Corenwald was founded, it was a place of refuge. A new world. A land consecrated to the one true God. The first Corenwalders left their homeland of Pryth in defiance against evil rulers who worshipped gold instead of God. Unwilling to see their power and authority challenged, the Prythen armies attacked Corenwald many times in the hopes of conquering them and stomping out freedom everywhere.

"Our very existence is an act of defiance against the Prythen Empire. Four times they've invaded this island.

And four times the stout men of Corenwald sent them home in disgrace... they've swallowed up a whole continent, but people who have a taste for freedom aren't easily conquered."

Errol, was one of the four and twenty nobles who supported King Darrow in battle and in court. Like Saul, however, Darrow is growing forgetful.

"We overcame because the One God fought on our behalf – the God who asks only that we act justly, love mercy, walk humbly... In our comfort, we have forgotten that virtue is hard. In our wealth, we have forgotten that freedom is expensive."

When King Darrow remembers what it is to be a Corenwalder, he goes to war again with Pryth. But, his heart is not in it. The Prythens have a giant, and like Goliath, Greidawl is willing to fight one man in exchange for the freedom of an entire people. For weeks, no one is willing to meet the giant in the field. Like David, Aidan is sent by his father to check on his brothers at the front. When Aidan arrives at the camp, he is astonished at the dejected army and the cowardly king.

"But isn't this a kind of death?" Aidan's terror at the sight of Greidawl had given way to indignation. He was ashamed at the cowardice of his brothers and countrymen. 'You die every day you hear that beast insult our armies, mock our King, and blaspheme the One God. You die everyday you submit to a slavery that has been imposed on you without a fight.'

While we know how this situation resolves itself, I can assure you that Rogers makes the reading worthwhile. His description of the next twenty-four hours, Aidan's conversations with key characters, and the actual battle scene are all very entertaining.

Before Aidan arrived at the camp, however, Rogers sent him deep into the swamp. What Aidan finds there, or rather who he discovers, is a sample of pretty fantastic storytelling. Drawing from what he knows, Rogers created a race of people who sound like Southerners, live in the swamps, and would probably make Flannery O'Connor belly laugh. The Feechies have a rich culture and tradition, and their race adds a deeply interesting layer to this story.

When Aidan defeats the giant, things do not resolve automatically. Prythens have no honor. And so, the defeat of Greidawl is just the first act in a 3 part symphony of war. The cunning Prythens have some military advantages that are a complete shock to the Corenwalders. The need to rethink their battle plan allows for another fascinating twist in this story.

Oh, the miners brave of Greasy Cave,
They did not think it odd
To make their way beneath the clay
Where human foot has never trod.

Fol de rol de rol de fol de rol de rol
De fol de rol de fiddely fol de rol.

Oh, the miners brave of Greasy Cave,
Come out the other side.
They braved the gloom, they challenged doom.
They made an end to Prythen pride.

Fol de rol de rol de fol de rol de rol
De fol de rol de fiddely fol de rol.

One of the things that I most appreciate about this series of stories is how vividly Rogers has drawn the landscape of Corenwald. This island is a place of astounding beauty. A little bit like Tolkien's Middle Earth, the medieval cities are familiar, the pastoral farms feel like the Shire, the lush swamp and river areas remind you of a hot and sticky August camping trip, the battlefield seems to be right out of Arthurian legend, and the underground mines had me looking for goblins and Curdie. While Rogers probably drew this landscape from the gorgeous examples he lives with in Georgia, the beauty and complexity of the land are palpable to all of us, thanks to his elegant descriptions.

As I was writing this review, I had a conversation with Doug McKelvey. I mentioned how hard it was to write this one because of how much I appreciate it. He wisely said that there is a law of inverse at work in this kind of writing. The closer we feel ourselves to something, the harder it is to capture what we most appreciate and then communicate that to others. I mention this because I want you to know that I think this modern book has true classic quality. I am buying the trilogy for everyone I know in the hopes that it will make their family libraries richer.

This story is high adventure, has complex heroes, is written beautifully, contains songs and poetry, and is steeped in biblical wisdom. We are reading this series aloud as a family. My children are 6, almost 8, and 10. There is nothing in this story that is inappropriate for young children. If being read independently, however, the language and sentence structure is sufficiently complex to make this most suitable for confident readers. Warning: you may end up with some good natured Feechie brawls and little boys who simply must learn how to tree-walk.

Lindsay B says

Great book. Definitely on the top ten favorite list. To me, it seemed like the story of David, like from the bible.

Elizabeth says

Did you ever long for the story of a pre-king King David to be translated as a middle-grade adventure fantasy with strong flavors of the American South? No? Well, Jonathan Rogers wrote it anyway. And, yeah... it works.

Brandon Miller says

1 Samuel: the Message Bible translation.

I'm going to keep this short lest I regret something I say. This was a one-star read for me, but I know that I dislike allegory so I'm going to give it benefit of the doubt and bump it up a star. The problem with this story is that it follows the life of Totally Not David, a shepherd boy youngest of many chosen by a prophet to be king, as he quests through his pre-teens and ends up killing Totally Not Goliath, a literal giant who

challenges a champion of Totally Not Israel to fight him to decide which army will be enslaved to another. Also, when Totally Not David comes out to kill him *with a stone and sling* he literally uses the "Am I a dog that you come out to me with sticks" line. Literally. This "allegory" is beat for beat how it actually happened. I knew how this was going to end from page 1, and I was not wrong.

Melanie says

Great fun.

Brenda says

I just read a little gem of a book by Jonathan Rogers. Although the cover doesn't say it, it's based loosely on the Bible story of David. It's called *The Bark of the Bog Owl*

This is one of those books that would be fantastic to read to your kids. Or if you have older boys who like to read, I think they'd love it. The hero of the story is a young boy, just twelve years old, who does incredible things with the help of God.

The Christian message is there, but it didn't feel preachy at all. It was just a fun adventure story. This may be one that I would purchase, just so I could read it with my kids and have it in my book collection. I'm looking forward to the rest of the series.

Tessa says

This was recommended by one of my students. He has read nearly every book I've recommended to him and usually finishes a book in a matter of days. When he said this was one of his favorite books and asked if I would please read it, I couldn't say no. Turns out, this is a fantasy retelling of the boyhood of King David.

Things I liked about this book:

- Instead of generic and overdone fantasy medieval Europe, this book presents a medieval swampland. Yay for something different and new.
- There is a distinctly Southern flavor to the writing, something I don't see very often.
- There were were really clever turns of phrase here and there.

Things I didn't care for

- I noticed a single named female character. In the entire book. I remember women being mentioned in a total of two group shots. Pretty much everyone both important and unimportant to the story is a man or boy. Even in a biblical retelling, that's just poor world building. Women exist in the world. They don't have to be the main focus of every story, but they should at least be present in your world.
- How one-to-one the David allegory was. Maybe this is an unfair criticism. C.S. Lewis isn't exactly subtle with his allegory, and I've read and loved plenty of fairytale and Austen retellings that don't change much at all from the source material. But this book just didn't work for me. And as one-to-one as the allegory was, the Goliath fight still felt shoehorned in.

--I'm not super comfortable with the dynamic between the frontiersmen Corenwalders, who are literally called civilizers, and the indigenous feechiefolk who are portrayed as little more than quaint but backwards savages. It strays too close to a Manifest Destiny, cowboys and Indians vibe at some times and a white savior vibe at otheres.

--The specific brand of American Christianity the book espoused. There's a lot I like about Christianity, but not the kind that pushes unquestioning patriotism as a necessary religious value along with self-sufficiency to the point of isolationism and protectionism and shunning global cooperation.

Maybe what's bugging me the most is that I love when religion is done well in books. When faith and devotion are explored rather than taken as givens. When religion authentically motivates a character's actions. When a character has to examine their own faith and doubts, whether they end up abandoning that faith or recommitting all the stronger. This felt like a poorly disguised Sunday School lesson. That's not what I'm looking for when I read a book, even when the topic is religion.

Ava says

This book is so good! It's funny... So funny. But it's also a good story, very Christian and some parts are strongly based off the bible.

Amy says

My oldest really enjoyed this! A retelling of sorts of Saul and David from the Bible. She is excited to read the others...

Aaron Wurgler says

This is my new all time favorite book. I don't often write reviews but this book deserves one. This is a book for all but I think it is especially good for boys. Reading this with my family we talked about the good character traits of the main character, Aiden: he is loyal to his family, his king and his God, he displays great courage in times of fear, he shows compassion and kindness, he is a trusting person who is a good friend. These are all the things I want my boys to grow up to be; these are things I want to be. At times he wrestles with difficult things he cannot understand and doubts (he's 12 years old after all), but these are also part of what makes a man.

A wise prophet told him, "Live the life that unfolds before you. Love goodness more than you fear evil." This has been the new motto my young kids have been pondering. I am eager to read the second book in the trilogy. Thankful for such a great book.

Trace says

This book was so much FUN as a read-aloud!! Lots of excitement and lots of unique voices...

Its a retelling of the story of King David and its really well done!

Lots of boyish adventures that kept my son on the edge of his seat during this entire read-aloud! We are anxiously awaiting the second book in the trilogy from the library.

I personally found the rough and tumble friendship between Aidan and Dobro to be very charming, even if, as a woman, I could not relate to their extreme boy-ishness...

Luann says

"Who knows what the future holds? Only the One God," explained Aidan. "You just live the little bit of life that you can see in front of you. You live it well. And that gets you ready for whatever unfolds next" (p. 189). Those are good thoughts for a young, budding hero and his aging mother alike. What a wonderful adventure to read aloud together! Very highly recommended!
