



The Book of Names

D. Barkley Briggs

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It's Thanksgiving Break and chores are being handed out. Hadyn, nearly 16 and the oldest of the four Barlow brothers, is told by his father to clear the back acres of their new farm. Hadyn resents life. After losing his mother to cancer and relocating away from the only home he's ever known, he misses his friends and his Mom. While hacking through a briar patch, a strange rock formation arouses his curiosity. After four mysterious black birds deliver a strange summons, Hadyn and his brother Ewan realize the stone is really a magic Viking runestone. Through this portal, they cross into the ancient world of Karac Tor.

Crisis looms. In the Five Dominions of Karac Tor, names are being stolen from the young—literally erased from the sacred Book of Names. Meanwhile, the sorceress Nemesia is spreading darkness from her Tower of Ravens. While Hadyn and Ewan are immediately hailed as Champions sent to help rescue the land, the brothers have a far more simple goal: find their way home—and stay alive! As the seductive call of Nemesia lures them towards despair, the Barlows must discover power and courage they never knew they possessed. Yet even if they survive, will anyone know how to send them back to our world? Or will they be lost forever?

The Book of Names Details

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Lorry says

This was alright. Some of the characters were pretty well written, while the others I knew almost nothing about (even some of the main characters, and not like in a good mysterious way. Just in a way that felt like the author couldn't care less about them.).

A lot of it was really wordy, and it took a long time for anything to happen. While I do occasionally like books with a lot of descriptions so I can visualize places (for example, Rangers Apprentice) it needs a good amount of dialogue and action along with the descriptions. The Book Of Names was way too much describing and words with not much action or interesting dialogue.

Might read again but highly unlikely.

Kristy says

Really cool!!! I was definitely surprised by this one. I bought it on sale and didn't really have much hope for it, but the story pulled me in immediately. A speculative fantasy read that's well worth the time.

Fred Warren says

In The Book of Names, by D. Barkley Briggs, two brothers, Hadyn and Ewan Barlow, stumble upon a portal to another world. The land of Karac Tor is in grave danger, and they are destined to play a role in its saving. Identity is everything in Karac Tor. The Book of Names contains the names and deeds of everyone born there. Evil forces want to erase those identities and plunge the land into a nightmare of despair and meaninglessness.

Hadyn and Ewan are reluctant to accept the task thrust upon them, but pressing forward is the only way to get home. Along the way, they make noble friends and incur the wrath of dire enemies. They experience hardship and mortal danger. They learn about respect, endurance, courage, loyalty, and love. They begin to come to terms with a great loss that shadows their lives. They also discover they have inner resources they never expected.

Briggs spins a good yarn. His characters are engaging and likable, and I found myself quickly drawn into the adventure. I like the way he brings Hadyn and Ewan to life, from their sparring relationship to their distinctive strengths and weaknesses.

Briggs' descriptive language is vivid and multi-sensory. For example, he paints a memorable picture of Redthorn Forest, which has been slowly twisted and corrupted into a deathtrap:

The trees of Redthorn were not merely tall, they were rebellious and angry, reeking of loamy, molded earth, and oozing sap like sticky gray pus. Huge roots curled along the top of the soil...

...There was little sky to see above the clutching branches. Little warmth to feel from the hidden, setting sun. The trees looked like some force had exploded from within, spined and angry, vomiting blood.

There are definitely echoes of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis in this story—a hidden passage to another world, a crazy-quilt of mythologies, a seemingly-absent creator acting powerfully behind the scenes, color-coded mages, an evil witch, a surly gnome, a haunted forest, a weak, petulant regent with a slimy advisor, children from our world with royal destinies, and enigmatic prophecies that could foretell either salvation or apocalypse. The familiarity of these elements doesn't detract from the quality of Briggs' work, in my opinion. This story stands quite well on its own merits.

Now for a couple of minor negatives (hey, it's a review, not a commercial):

I get a little uncomfortable when I encounter more than a couple of pop-culture references in a story. Granted, kids today are marinated in marketing, and you'd expect a few brand names to pop into their thoughts and conversations, but I think a story like this aspires to be timeless. Dialogue peppered with Wiis and NyQuil and Whoppers could leave readers a few years down the road as perplexed as the folk of Karac Tor by Hadyn and Ewan's odd turns of phrase.

This is a boys' story, in that we perceive this world primarily through their lens, which might lessen its appeal to teen girls (it'll be a couple of weeks before I can get my teenage daughter's opinion). The few women of Karac Tor we encounter are inscrutable, mysterious forces of nature, their hair wafting gently in an intangible breeze much of the time. The Barlows do have a strong and capable female companion on their journey, Asandra, an adept from the Black Abbey, but she remains an enigma until near the end of the story. The one moment she lights up, when she begins to tell the tale of Redthorn Forest, the focus shifts abruptly away from her. Even the female villain is upstaged by the true force of malignity pulling the strings.

Finally, the death of a supporting character near the end of the book seems a little gratuitous to me, and makes a very strong force for good appear incongruously weak and unprepared in the face of evil. I know, bad guys don't fight fair, but I liked this character and wished he could have at least put up a decent struggle.

The adventures of Hadyn, Ewan, and their younger twin siblings have obviously just begun. The real villain has been revealed, and a climactic battle looms on the horizon. There's a connection to Arthurian legend in the history of Karac Tor that's poised to take center stage in the next installment, tantalizingly previewed in a sneak peek at the end of my copy.

This is a fine story, and I enjoyed it very much. My copy was a NavPress paperback with attractive wrap-around cover art and a cool map of Karac Tor inside that helped me keep my bearings. Buy *The Book of Names* for a teen in your life, then bum it off them and read it yourself. Better yet, buy your own copy.

Annie says

First Look: This looked pretty interesting. Mainly because I like fantasy and am rather partial to brother-brother stories. Perhaps because I wrote one myself.

Setting: First off, why does every book character hate moving to the country? I live in a rural area, and I love it. I rather like not being hedged in by people on all sides. But it seems that book characters are only capable of liking to live in the city. Why does this happen?

Anyway, Karac Tor. It actually confused me a little. I could never figure out what exactly I was supposed to think about it. At first it seemed like some sort of surreal fairy world, but then it turned into a war-hardened

(kind of but not really) kingdom. And none of it was particularly memorable.

Fun fact: If you say Karac Tor five times fast, it sounds like "tractor". Or at least, it does in my head.

Characters: There were some nice moments between Hadyn and Ewan where I could start to see the bond between them, and maybe some tension. I wish the author would've taken this further, though. It seems like they had all the potential for a deep, complex relationship, but it never went beyond the surface. I liked them, but it was an "I want this character to win" rather than an "I love this character to death and it's like they're real and if something happens to them I will send an angry letter to the author".

My other problem was that these boys adjusted way too easily to Karac Tor. They've just been thrown out of the modern world into a medieval one, but they hardly have any issues at all with it. They accept the reality of it almost instantly, and from there it was like they'd grown up in the place. They had no problems with the strange food, clothing, customs, etc. It was unrealistic.

Plot: It was all pretty generic. Some siblings move to a new place, find something odd, get transported into fantasy world and from there have to save said world. There was nothing to make it stand out. Perhaps this should go under "uniqueness", but the lack of originality was what kept from liking this.

That, and the fact that Ewan and Hadyn didn't do much. Sure, they were along for all of the adventures, but did they themselves make anything happen? No, not really.

Uniqueness: Already discussed.

Writing: I found typos. Not just one typo, but multiple. And not simple things, like a misplaced quotation mark. No, this book had at least one instance of two words stuck together like this. And more. Is it that hard to line edit? I don't think so.

Other than that, the writing actually had some nice moments where I could really feel the emotion of the characters. For the most part, though, it was unmemorable.

Likes: Can we all just take a moment and think about what's happening on the cover of the third book? At first I was thinking "So this is what orcs do when they're done filming LOTR." And then I notice another orc. Alrighty then. And then I notice Tinkerbell in the corner and her facial expression...and I'm laughing so hard I can't even breathe...two orcs versus Tinkerbell...I'm dying over here...this is so much funnier than it should be... And honestly, this would have been the funniest thing I've seen all day, but earlier I saw this video (it's short but it's a gem...and it's actually really stupid but it's so incredibly entertaining), so it can't claim that honor.

Not-so-great: Hadyn's dad originally wanted to name him "Ransom". Hadyn's mom "had a dream" where she somehow realized her son's name should be "Hadyn", so Dad agrees to it. This is not a divine intervention. This is a "Seriously, husband? That kid will hate us forever if we call him that". Or maybe it is divine intervention. Maybe God looked down and said "You know what, let's give her this dream because this kid doesn't deserve to be bullied for having an unusual name."

Overall: This was an unoriginal book, which made it rather unmemorable. It had the potential to be exciting, but in that regard it fell flat. I kind of cared about the characters, but not to a huge extent. Not as much as I would've liked to. And besides, they adjusted way too easily to living in a fantasy world. It had some nice moments, but overall it was just an okay read.

Similar Books: It bears many similarities to *The Door Within*, with the most obvious being the city-boy-goes-to-fantasy-world thing. It also has a similar feel to the Ranger's Apprentice books, which begin with *The Ruins of Gorlan*.

Matthew Sampson says

One of my favourite books. Still as good as ever.

Briard says

Reactions:

This book is an awesome beginner for a sure to be awesome series! While reading it, I kinda felt like it was a cross between *The Door Within* and then *Beyond the Reflection's Edge*. It's not that they have similar plot twists and stuff, it's just that the style of writing is similar and both have a lot of suspense!

In this story, there are technically four brothers but only two join the adventure this time round (Which means there will be more!!). The two brothers get sucked into another world, but not together. They are separated... for the first bit. They meet some strange people who believe they were sent to save the kingdom and off on the adventure they go! Scandals and death at every turn! The bad girl always up to something terribly evil... EUREKA!!

Ron says

An entertaining mash up of Middle Earth and Narnia set against a culture drawn from Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Norse and Christian elements with a dash of the Arthur thrown in for fun. It works better than it sounds. Because the story focuses on the young protagonists, the reader is not burdened with more than hanging on for the ride. Briggs is neither a Tolkien nor a Lewis, but he tells a good story.

One of the better transitions from this world to that of fairy. Once there, of course, the boys just want to get home. Not so fast.

Extra credit for managing both a satisfying climax to this story and sufficient hooks to the rest of the saga. Many contemporary authors propel you toward book two (or twelve) without bothering to entertain you in book one. Briggs manages both.

Jill Williamson says

Review by Jill Williamson

Hayden and Ewan recently moved to rural Missouri. Their mother recently passed away, and they are grieving her loss and the loss of their old home. Hayden has been assigned the job of clearing the briar patch, and Hayden, for fun, has been clearing it by cutting tunnels into it. His brother Ewan offers to help one day. As they are working, four ravens approach carrying something. The birds drop their cargo in the briar patch and vanish. Hayden and Ewan discover four tubes holding scrolls. Each reads the same: You have been chosen for a life of great purpose. Adventure awaits you in the hidden lands. The boys search for the birds and discover a stone arch with strange carvings on it. An arch that is a portal to another world.

The Book of Names is a clever, intriguing story. Briggs does a wonderful job of crafting his storyworld. His characters are real, with faults and fears. My favorite character is Creed and his magical sword that will not allow him to tell a lie. Briggs' story is filled with wonderful parallels that really get you thinking about life. This book is a great choice for fantasy lovers. I can't wait for the sequel.

Anna del C. Dye says

Just as you think that our society is too futuristic, author D. Barkley Briggs spins a great tale of today's life intermingled with fantasy. If you don't believe that a regular young man like you could end up in a fantastic adventure and transported to another dimension it is because you have not read this book...

It involves two brothers that moved to a country setting after the death of their mother. The young men are the oldest of four boys with a younger set of twins. The oldest of them is Hadyn Barlow, a boy of fifteen who misses his beautiful mother and tries to not let on. His other three brothers talk about her all the time, but he cannot bring himself to do so.

Hadyn is put to work by his father to clear a briar patch on the new land his parents had dreamed of owning for a long time and that his father had purchased even after their mother was gone. It was in this monotonous and boring job that one day while his brother Ewan, a year younger than him, was helping or more likely getting in his way, that they had a unexpected visit... At first they thought that they were being attacked but then that was absurd... wasn't it?

After the scare of their lives, their visitors delivered four invitations to the startled youths and disappeared. The boys tried to find the messengers to no avail and turned to open the four containers left behind, but couldn't make sense of the old parchments. Who were they for? How can they deliver them without addresses? Surely even in this remote monotonous country place everyone knows about e-mails... don't they?

That was the beginning of this tale that takes you through a portal to another place where the boys discover a world full of life and darkness. After the confusion of where they were and why they were there, they figured out that they are expected to save this strange world from a ruthless enemy that is engulfing it in his malice and darkness.

The shock of expecting two young men to be able to save a world they are not even sure is not a figment of their imagination weighs heavily on their shoulders and soon they find themselves in mortal danger. The journey the two brothers take is full of excitement, twists, magic, and legends; all to keep you guessing and

turning the pages. At the end, the young men discover that they too have choices to make and that they have within themselves the power they need to conquer all their fears.

And to wet your appetite, you will find at the end of the book two chapters of the next installment in the legends of Karag Tor... I bet you will want to get your hands on that one as soon as it comes out.

A great tale for teens and those who are young at heart alike. Young men will find the characters very believable and will identify with them in their own lives. A big 5 stars for The Book of Names.

J.L. Mbewe says

Normally, I wouldn't have picked this book up because I don't like to read a fantasy that starts in our modern day world where you are then whisked away to another, fantastical world. But I did and I am glad I did. The characters felt real, the story is tight, the prose is well-written. I couldn't help but feel a little too much like Narnia in the beginning, but once the story is in motion it flows well and takes on a life of its own. I will be reading the rest in the series.

Lori Twichell says

I heard fabulous things about these books before I picked them up. Several highly respected readers/reviewers told me that I would very much enjoy these books. I went into this book with high expectations. Briggs' story captured my imagination from page one. My sympathy with the boys and their father as they deal with their grief was instant and immediate. Being a lover of fantasy masters like Stephen Lawhead and Piers Anthony I was ready for adventure and I was not disappointed on that score. With two young boys instantly immersed in a new land, Briggs was able to hold my interest, suspend any disbelief on my part and keep me intrigued with the prophecies and their stories. I really enjoyed it.

There were moments when the text was heavy in exposition. I bogged down a little way through and felt like it took a long time to get beyond that point, but once I did, I was pleasantly surprised at how easily the story flowed. I enjoyed the adventure, the dialogue and the history of this new land.

I'm curious to see what happens next. This book was obviously a set up for books two and three in the series, so I've got book two, Corus The Champion, primed and ready to go. Let's see where Briggs is going with this adventure...

*Review copy provided by Glass Road PR – THANK YOU!

Cecelia English says

A good young adult novel. I read this book to see if my daughter would enjoy it. I know she will love it! I immediately purchased the next two in the series. Good for young readers.

I especially appreciate this author & the Christian influences in the mythology. I look forward to convos with my daughter about her thoughts.

mari says

Ewan and Hadyn Barlow have just moved to a farm in Missouri with their twin brothers and father after the death of their mother. While clearing away a briar patch they find a stone arch carved with ancient runes. They discover that the arch is a magical portal to another world, the world of Karak Tor. Here they learn that they have been called to be Champions and save the world from evil and darkness brought by The Devourer and the witch, Nemesia. The boys, on their journey to find a way home, meet friends and enemies, adventures and dangers.

It was an enjoyable read with lots of action and suspense. Very similar to the style of CS Lewis or JRR Tolkien. The book is published by a Christian Publisher so there are some parallels with Christian theology. I have to say that this is the first Christian Fiction book I have read and was pleasantly surprised. I admit, I was slightly apprehensive. Worried that the book would be preachy. With some Christian symbolism, the book is more about good conquering evil, and the boys' journey to find strength and purpose within themselves. A good fantasy book (which is the first in a planned series) for teens and middle school aged kids.

Ginny says

So glad I finally got around to reading this book. It reminded me a lot of reading The Chronicles of Narnia. Good clean YA adventure.

Jim says

It's always such a pleasure to find a new (to me) author who is able to craft compelling stories with rich backgrounds, real characters, and original settings. There is a depth to Mr. Briggs' writing that reminds me a bit of the usual suspects in this genre - Tolkien and Lewis - in that one senses there's much more to the history of Karak Tor than we're getting spelled out on the page. I haven't read the second book yet, so I can't speak for the continuation of the series, but at least in this first book there's an awesome plot cycle being developed here.

Hadyn and Ewan are very believable American boys. Their grief at losing their mom is real. The world into which they step is both fanciful and familiar - the "nameless" teenagers reminding this adolescent counselor all too vividly of the plight of teenagers in our world.

The prose is accessible, but rich. At times the vocabulary stretches the imagination: "The sun, bleached and globulous..."

But it stays rooted in the perspective of a teenage boy: "Low banks of clouds came tumbling from the horizon like old woolen blankets, gray and purple. Weird. Like that scene from Independence Day when the alien ships first appeared."

It's a good sign that I'm already dreading reading the third book of this series, which I understand to be the

last. It's the same dread I had when I got halfway through "Return of the King." The one I had when I started reading the final Harry Potter book. The feeling that once I finish it, I'll never be able to experience this story for the first time again. That's a very good sign. [EDIT: I have learned that this is planned as a five-book series. Woo!]

Here's hoping that Mr. Briggs continues to write, and write at this level.
