



★ David and the Philistine Woman

Paul Boorstin

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This is a lovely and loving take on David's early story.

Paul Boorstin's *David and the Philistine Woman* fleshes out the David and Goliath story as never before, populating it with complex personalities from both sides of the divide who raise fresh questions of religiosity, faith, and nation.

While elements of the novel will be familiar to those versed in King David's story—the boyhood as a shepherd, spent filling the air with music from his lyre; the affection between David and King Saul's children, Michal and Jonathan; the contention that followed his anointing—much of its power comes from the gaps it fills in. Goliath is here, fearsome in his presence; paranoid King Saul does what he can to trip the shepherd up. But it's the personalities around them that make their stories shine.

This is particularly true when it comes to Goliath's bride—a towering woman, Nara, whose strength led her to forge weapons for the Philistines in secret, and whose safety depends on her ability to give the warrior sons. She is dutiful at first—but life with a vicious hero reveals cracks in her society. The warrior god, Dagon, does not provide. A forbidden goddess, Ashdoda, might—but trust in her might come at a great expense, too.

David's turns inspire. He is written in as a humble and patriotic young man, committed to the role that Israel's God has chosen for him, and determined to honor Saul's line all the same. He risks much to push Israel back to a righteous path, and his brave decisions throughout the novel make for engrossing fare. His faith leads to great acts; yet the novel respects the beliefs of his enemies as well, with goddesses beyond Israel given full and honored treatment.

This is a lovely and loving take on David's early story—seeing him only through the showdown, yes, but awakening cravings for more after the giant is felled. If Boorstin gives the complicated King David the same thoughtful treatment in future novels as he has given to the young shepherd here, it will be all the better.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July/August 2017)

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