

Pafinna's Prophecy

Gael Whelan

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Pafinna's Prophecy is an imaginative tale that inspires compassion for African wildlife and a sense of the importance of preservation.

The second book of the Tales from the Masawani Game Park series, Gael Whelan's *Pafinna's Prophecy* is an adventurous story that plays out against the beauty and harshness of the African terrain. Here youngsters join forces with concerned adults to save a rare white lioness and her cubs in an effort to help bring prosperity to the Botswana nation.

Pafinna is a *sangoma*, a healer known in the villages around the arid Sua Pan. Before she dies, she has visions of the birth of two rare lion cubs. If they survive, they will end the land's devastating drought and bring renewal and revitalization to the area.

Meanwhile, another rumor spreads, predicting a future of doom and gloom if the lions are not destroyed. Tracey Veronique and her friend Jonathan White, who has the special ability to communicate both telepathically and audibly with animals, learn that locals are threatening to kill the cubs. With the help of Jonathan's father, who is the game park warden; an aboriginal medicine man; and others, they must counter the erroneous information and thwart the intentions of a visiting German looking to make a profit from the cubs.

Though this is a fictional tale, there is a nice educational component threaded throughout the narrative and the children's inquisitive dialogue. Details about the natural environment abound, as do details about the wildlife, as when a mother lioness licks her cub to stimulate breathing. Information about the steadily declining wild feline population is sobering. Photographs of referenced wildlife enhance the safari-like appeal of the story, and simple muted-color illustrations showcase a few characters, but there are not enough to adequately complement the story's action.

Flavor and texture are brought to the story through an interesting cultural mix of characters working toward a common good. From the story's multilingual vocabulary to the lurking hyena and from a Lakota Sioux legend of a white bison to an ancient Maselloane rattle stirring up powers, details lead to overarching unison.

A steady pace moves the plot through the youngsters' explorations, animal communications, Bushmen's tracking abilities, and nefarious conversations replete with foreboding. Tensions mount with kidnappings, chases, and tranquilizer guns, but a gentle styling ensures that the ultimate conflict—a heroes versus villains situation—stays center stage. A final focus on the drought of the dry Etosha Pan jars the story from its focus on the animals, though.

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CAROL DAVALA (April 26, 2018)

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