

The Sword of Demelza: An Australian Fantasy Adventure

J. E. Rogers

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Told in crisp, page-turning prose, readers of all ages will find this to be an engaging novel built around a framework of moral guidance.

The Sword of Demelza, a young adult novel from debut author J. E. Rogers, is both educational and sure to please readers who enjoyed *Watership Down* and the Redwall series. Set in the kingdom of Demelza, a land populated by talking animals, the story contains a large cast of characters, focusing on two young kowaris siblings named Emma and Erik.

Gathering berries in preparation for dinner, Emma and Erik come across a brown, venomous, and hungry snake. Before the two can be eaten, though, they are saved by a large cockatoo who fends off the snake and allows the children to escape. Their home is the small hamlet of Digby, which is teeming with life from all over the outback. However, upon their return, they discover that the snake has followed them. Erik is able to kill it in a brutal fashion, but not before it sinks its fangs into his mother. Gravely poisoned, their mother must wait while Erik and his sister venture into the Wild Woods to retrieve ingredients necessary to make an antidote.

As the children venture out into the larger world, the novel begins to take the form of a bildungsroman, the two encountering a host of creatures—kind and cruel—as their quest grows increasingly complex. Told in crisp, page-turning prose and relying on whimsical dialogue, readers of all ages will find it to be an engaging and easily intelligible novel built around a framework of moral guidance and instruction.

Several other narratives are intertwined with Emma's and Erik's, all concerning Cynric, the king of Demelza. A fox who wields a magical sword, Cynric is haunted by the death of his son, inflicting pain and suffering on his subjects so that all may be as miserable as he. Slowly but surely, a group begins to form with the goal of ending his reign to restore peace and tranquility to the land. However, they will be pitted against vicious dragon lizards and a thylacine who knows no mercy.

Anthropomorphic animals aren't exactly new territory for young adult fiction. What sets *The Sword of Demelza* apart are the animals themselves; mainly taken from the Australian outback, these creatures will be unknown to many, and the novel educates the reader about them as the story and illustrations progress.

Perhaps the most successful and refreshing aspect of the novel, though, is how matters of violence and heartbreak are tackled directly. Too many novels of the genre either shy away from or omit such details all together. Both children and adults will be thankful for the lack of coddling, which tends to impart an insincerity in writing. With the frank writing in mind, though, younger or more sensitive readers might be frightened by the murder, violence, and mystery of the book. Those who are not will be grateful that this novel treats their intelligence and emotions with respect.

ALEX FRANKS (March 27, 2014)

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