



The Wild Folk

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Usborne welcomes readers to Part One of a 'duology' with the claim that **The Wild Folk** has 'a dash of Ursula Le Guin' (as in *Earthsea*, Balance must be maintained in all things here in Farralone or catastrophe will follow) and 'a generous helping from C.S. Lewis' (resourceful children entrusted with saving the world, talking animals including two courageous leverets and an Aslan figure in the *Creatrix*, the Elk of Milk and Gold). Tolkien might also have been cited, for much of the adventure involves an intrepid group, each with particular skills, journeying across unknown terrain on a dangerous quest. There is also a debt to Eastern European folk-tale since the witch Baba Itha strongly echoes Baba Yaga, one moment threatening to chop up the leverets for her stew-pot, the next twinkling with good humour. Like Baba Yaga, she lives in an ambulatory hut supported on birds' legs - this time those of an owl, 'the talons each as wide as the bases of fir trees'. Sylvia Linstead's own prefatory letter to readers hopes that her story will inspire them to look at the natural world with renewed wonder, to recognise how everything is interconnected and to become increasingly sensitive to environmental destruction.

So, you might say, there's a fair amount for young readers to take in here. What's more, those in the UK will not find the flora and fauna familiar. Linstead's island of Farralone reflects her beloved Point Reyes Peninsula, north of San Francisco. Mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, elk and grizzlies wander through the redwoods and manzanitas.

Two twelve year olds are caught up in all of this. Comfrey is a girl from Alder, a village in the Country, some distance outside the forbidding walls of the City; ordinary people never move between the two. Her life is attuned to the rhythms of her rural world. She lives with her mother since the disappearance, several years earlier, of her much-loved father - though readers may well guess that she hasn't seen the last of him. Then there's Tin, an orphan boy, living in the City under the fierce disciplines of the Star-Priest Brothers of the Fifth Cloister of Grace and Progress. Tin is a secret inventor; from discarded junk, he has created a travelling machine with eight metal legs (on wheels) which he calls Fiddleback (after a variety of spider). Before long, the paths of Comfrey and Tin intertwine. Knowing of the challenges which lie ahead for the children, the far-seeing and legendary conjoined Greentwins send the two leverets, Myrtle and Mallow, to support them. The talkative young hares are perhaps the most engaging of the many creations in the *Chronicle*; at once brave and timid, comical yet wise beyond their years.

The Star-Priest Brotherhood is in desperate need of energy to sustain the City. Supplies are almost exhausted and that

energy derives from stargold which can be found only beyond their Walls. Supplies in the City are almost exhausted, so the Brothers will have to raid the Country to secure new resources at whatever cost to the inhabitants - the Wild Folk, the Country People, talking and non-talking animals and their ghosts, the grizzly-witches and many more. The adventures triggered by the Brothers' need for stargold are excitingly told in language which is consciously 'poetic', as Linsteadt herself confirms. There is no doubting the idealism and the storytelling energy of this first part of the Stargold Chronicles. The publishers suggest a reading age of 10+; those young readers will need to be alert and with a keen grasp of geography and time in Farallone. Without that, given the diverse plotlines, the digressions into history, the legion of characters and the tale's implicit messages for our own world, the narrative recording the immediate crisis could well lose clarity. As for the secrets of the Psalterium and the question of whether the ancient arachnid, Old Mother Neeth, is still alive? well, that's another story. Part Two is promised for Spring, 2019.

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