

(ACOUSTIC GUITAR THEME MUSIC)

JONATHAN ROGERS, HOST: Welcome to The Habit Podcast: Conversations with Writers about Writing. I'm Jonathan Rogers, your host.

(THEME MUSIC CONTINUES)

JR: Hello Habit Podcast listeners! Jonathan Rogers here with a little bonus episode of the podcast! It's March 10, 2020, and we're celebrating the re-release of Andrew Peterson's Wingfeather Saga in hardback, with new, gorgeous covers by Nicholas Kole and forty additional interior illustrations by Joe Sutphin. Books 1 and 2, that is to say, *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* and *North! Or Be Eaten*, are out today. Books 3 and 4 will be out later this year.

When the folks from The Rabbit Room went digging around in the archives for Wingfeather related items, they ran across an episode of the old Rabbit Room Podcast, in which I read aloud my release day review of *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* from 12 years ago. We thought you might like to hear it.

I'm thrilled for my pal Andrew Peterson, and I'm especially thrilled that even more people are gonna be exposed to these great stories. If you don't already own The Wingfeather Saga, I suggest that you get your books right away. And if you *do* already own The Wingfeather Saga, well now you can get a matched set of hardcovers for the first time ever.

(THEME MUSIC FADES OUT)

JR: And now, going all the way back to 2008, here's my original release day review of *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness*, with an introduction by Andrew Peterson impersonating Alfred Hitchcock.

Yeah, I was never really sure what that was about.

ANDREW PETERSON: For more information about the songs, writers, and artists featured here, please visit rabbitroom.com.

(PIANO MUSIC)

AP: Rabbit Room theme music composed and performed by Ben Shive.

(PIANO MUSIC CONTINUES)

AP: Welcome to The Rabbit Room Podcast. I'm Andrew Peterson, who will be doing his best Alfred Hitchcock impersonation for the remainder of this episode.

(PIANO MUSIC FADES AND ENDS)

AP: (clears throat) (Alfred Hitchcock voice) Last year, Jonathan Rogers was kind enough to write a review of my first book, *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness*. And we even recorded him reading it for a future Rabbit Room podcast. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but it never felt quite right for me to post a review of my own book for your listening pleasure, even though, as I'm sure you know, Jonathan's opinion is quite sophisticated and always correct. His literary taste is complex, and should be heeded at every turn. In fact, it's probably best if you snap up any book he praises, because it's surely bound to become a valuable classic. Still, I feel silly offering up this incontrovertibly accurate assessment of my story.

In just a few days, the second book in the series *North! Or Be Eaten!* will hit the shelves. So, in the interest of convincing even one skeptical listener to give this humble tale a shot, I offer this review of book 1, which is only one extremely intelligent and well-regarded author's opinion on the matter. All kidding aside, I'm grateful to Jonathan for his kind words, and hope you will enjoy the review while I check to see if the Pulitzer Prize board has Facebooked me yet.

(ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS THEME MUSIC)

JR: Janner Igiby lives in Glipwood, a nothing little village in the land of Skree, on the edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness.

(MUSIC FADES OUT)

JR: Manhood is on the horizon, but Janner finds it hard to feel much hope for the future. Skree is ruled by foreign oppressors, snake men called the Fangs of Dang, servants of a shadowy emperor named Gnag the Nameless. The Skreeans are weak and weaponless. They're even tool-less. Any Skreean who needs to use a hoe has to borrow one from the Fangs (and fill out the requisite paperwork). And from time to time, the Black Carriage arrives in Glipwood to carry young Skreeans toward an unknown fate across the Dark Sea.

But once a year the Sea Dragons sing just off the coast of Glipwood. With their song, life reasserts itself in the hearts of Skreeans who have long since learned to numb themselves:

“A middle-aged man named Robesbus Nicefellow, who had wasted his life balancing records for the famed button merchant Osbeck Osbeckson of Torrboro, decided that he wouldn't spend another day working behind a desk; he had always wanted to sail. Mr. Alep Brume, who was sitting beside Ferinia Swapelton (proprietor of Ferinia's Flower Shop), turned to her and whispered that he'd secretly loved her for years. Mayor Blaggus silently swore he'd never again pick his nose. All of the passion and sadness and joy of those who listened wound into one common strand of feeling that was to Janner like homesickness, though he couldn't think why; he was a short walk from the only home he'd ever known.”

A homesickness for a place he has never been. A nostalgia for a happiness he's never experienced. The dragons' song is a moment of otherworldly beauty and hope—of abundant life.

There's something very big at stake here: you get the feeling that the

Fangs would have a hard time maintaining their grip on Skree if the Skreeans heard this song too long or too often. And yet the song does its work on a small and personal scale too—in the realm of personal dreams, of unspoken crushes, of nose-picking. Such juxtapositions are the stuff of Andrew Peterson’s new novel, *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* (Book 1 of the *Wingfeather Saga*). Here is a world where the everyday, the mundane is barely adequate to conceal deep longings that point to deeper truths.

It is altogether appropriate that Dragon Day is the day when Janner and his younger brother and sister defy the Fangs. It starts out as an accidental defiance, but its effects are profound and irreversible. The plot unspools from there.

I won’t say much else about the plot, but I will say that the Igiby children discover things about themselves, their family, and their fellow villagers that they never imagined. They’ve always known that their grandfather Podo is a retired pirate; but, as they learn, that isn’t the half of it. Their mother, an unassuming householder, has a stash of treasure. And the father they’ve never known—they learn to know him too. Their wildest dreams aren’t wild enough.

In *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness*, Peterson has created a rich, strange, wonder-filled world that somehow manages to be homey at the same time. He has drunk deeply of Tolkien, and yet this is not a derivative book.

This book describes a world that is much bigger than the book itself. You get the feeling that Peterson isn’t telling all he knows about Aerwiar (that’s the name of this world)—not because he’s withholding, but because there’s so much to tell. In frequent footnotes and asides, he alludes to little details of Skreean life, customs, and history that don’t play a part in the story itself but add depth and texture, giving the impression that this is one of many stories one might tell about this world.

You've read tight, precisely structured books in which no sentence is wasted, no action is introduced without its equal and opposite reaction, no minor character is so much as mentioned unless he's going to be significant before it's all over. Those books have their pleasures, but they aren't the pleasures you should expect from this story.

This story is wild and overgrown. I mean that as high praise. It has a well-built plot and beautifully drawn characters; it also has throwaway lines and rabbit trails. Picture a well-constructed grape arbor. AP has proven himself a skilled craftsman, building a solid and pleasing structure. He has also had enough confidence in his art to let the vine grow on the arbor—lush and organic and not altogether manageable.

Life is busting out all over the place in this book, often expressing itself in ludicrous details. The bookstore in Glipwood has a category for "Books about Blacksmithing and/or Pie." In the game of handyball, competitors try to score goals without using their feet, even to move. There is a statue outside town of a man enjoying his soup. The reader never finds out why.

By dwelling on the ridiculous aspects of *The Dark Sea of Darkness* (even the title is a little ridiculous), I don't mean to give the impression that it's a ridiculous book. It's a deep, beautiful, satisfying book, and my heart is still full of it.

Ironically, the ridiculous touches make this fantasy story feel more real; experiencing Aerwiar for the first time is a little like experiencing this world for the first time, as a child. You're not born knowing what's normal and what's ridiculous. So you're forced to take a lot on faith. A pearl comes from an irritated oyster? OK, if you say so. But it sounds like you're pulling my leg. And of all the crazy stories ever told about where babies come from, none of them is crazier than the true one.

As a reader of *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness*, you're thrown into a ridiculous, wonderful world where there's much more than meets the eye.

(PIANO MUSIC FADES UP)

JR: Sort of like what happens when you come into this one. You can take it or leave it. For my part, I'll take it.

(PIANO MUSIC CONTINUES)

AP: I'm Andrew Peterson with Jonathan Rogers, and this has been Episode 22 of The Rabbit Room Podcast, produced at The Warren outside of Nashville, Tennessee.

(MUSIC FADES AND ENDS)