

*Bright Against
the Storm*

*THE EPIC OF KAROLAN
THE FIRST BOOK AMONG FOUR*

Ari Heinze

SOLI DEO GLORIA

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About the Author:

Homeschooled from first through twelfth grade, Ari Heinze holds astronomy degrees from Caltech (B.S. 2001) and the University of Arizona (Ph.D. 2007). He's passionately interested in astronomy, but equally so in storytelling. Even in early childhood he entertained his two younger brothers with stories, and now, besides writing with obsessive delight, he invents stories for his own children: Petra, Eleazar, and baby Brogal, born in January 2010. He and his beloved wife Jane live in Houston at present, but plan to move to a more starry and adventurous locale when they have opportunity.

Favorite Books of the Author:

Fiction: *Cry, the Beloved Country*, by Alan Paton

Green Dolphin Street, by Elizabeth Goudge

The Jacobite Trilogy, by Dorothy K. Broster

Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Bronte

The Lord of the Rings, by J. R. R. Tolkien

The Napoleon of Notting Hill, by G. K. Chesterton

Northanger Abbey, by Jane Austen

The Space Trilogy, by C. S. Lewis

Till We Have Faces, by C. S. Lewis

Nonfiction: *Confessions*, by St. Augustine

Desiring God, by John Piper

The Reason for God, by Tim Keller

Jeremiah, by the Prophet Jeremiah

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, by St. Paul

CONTEXT WITHIN THE EPIC OF KAROLAN

This is the first book in *The Epic of Karolan*. It tells of the adventures of Jonathan the blacksmith and Sir Ilohan during the time preceding the great war between Karolan and Norkath, and of the love that was between Jonathan and Naomi the shepherdess, whom he left behind in Glen Carrah.

The second book, **Ashes of Our Joy**, describes how Ilohan and Jonathan acquitted themselves in the Norkath War and its aftermath.

The third book, **Rain, Wind, and Fire**, tells what Naomi did during the Norkath War, and what was the end of Jonathan's search for her. It tells also how a great and unexpected danger arose to threaten Karolan, and what was done to guard against it.

The fourth and final book, **Darkness Gathers Round**, describes how the danger came upon Karolan, and how it was resisted with great heroism. It concludes the story of Ilohan, Jonathan, and Naomi, and others, no less significant, who were caught up in their adventures. For at the last, though darkness gathered round, their stories did not end in darkness.

To explore Karolan further, or learn when books two through four will be available, visit <http://www.hopewriter.com/Karolan.html>.

Acknowledgements

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If I start naming those who shared with me the adventures I have drawn on to write my epic, this page will never be enough – but thanks to those who stood with me on icy mountains, hiked to hidden valleys, ventured into baked but splendid deserts, and dared enough heat and cold, hunger, thirst, and danger that my portrayals of these things have some taste of the reality.

Thanks to those whose love helped me dream of Ceramir, and whose courage and faithfulness helped me dream of heroes.

CEMBAR

KAROLAN

NORKATH

The far North is forested and unpeopled

Forest

Farmland

Britheldore

Aaronkal

Guldorak

Niida

Idranak

Metherka

Dilgare

Tremilin

Valley of Petrag

Felir

Kiuhern

Byrinkal

Glen Carrah

Vykadrak

Kyrta

The Great Mountains

Cliffs of Doom

Drantar

Dilfandokir

Ceramir

Church of Joyful Prayer

Desert Gap

Harevan

Drantar's Gap

Desert Church

The great Desert extends beyond the edge of knowledge to the extreme South, from whence, it is said, the Jarnith once came.

The Desert

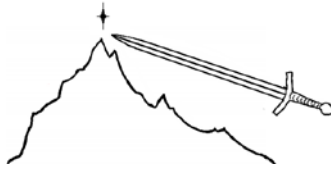
Many other castles, churches, rivers, and other features exist which are not shown.

The borders cannot be traced with certainty where they meet the Desert and the Mountains.

*To my parents:
Joyful amid the broken world,
Brave and skillful as Kindrach,
Faithful and fearless as Eleanor,
And more full of the good handiwork of God
Than I could ever write.*

*It is because of the childhood you gave me
That I grew into a man who could imagine Ceramir.*

Chapter 1



The Fear in Children's Eyes

THE YOUNG MAN KNELT BETWEEN TWO CANDLES ON THE cold stone floor. Beyond the thick walls of the chapel he heard the rising wind and the first drops of rain. Thunder boomed in the unseen sky, and rain poured down, taking all comfort from the world. The candles flickered in a draught under the door, and his prayer lost words and faded into silence. His mind was full of questions, and he felt deeply alone on this his night of vigil.

Tomorrow he would become a knight. That much he knew, and it filled his heart with joy and amazement. Himself, a knight! For this he had worked hard and waited long, almost his whole life. But what, in these days, would be the duty of a knight?

In his training he had learned much of the ancient lore of knighthood, but of the present his tutors had said little – they had left him to reach his own understanding of it. Only recently had he awakened to the dire foreboding that lay across the land. He had seen it in the faces of farmers met upon the road, of merchants at their work, and even of children who played in the autumn leaves beside the roads. He knew a cause for anxiety: the king was old and had no son. But the king was

still strong, and could appoint a successor. There had to be something else that made people afraid – something he did not know, something he had never been taught. What was it? The question arose unbidden in his mind, again and again considered and left unanswered: a riddle in the lonely night.

He turned his thoughts again to the morning, when he, Ilohan, an orphan without known lineage, who might have lived and died as a beggar child in some small village, would become a knight. All this he owed to the mercy of Queen Sarah. When a child who could not yet speak, he had been found the only survivor of a band of knights and ladies that had been ambushed and slaughtered in the mountains. The queen had taken him in – and persuaded King Thomas to have him raised as a ward of the throne, and trained to knighthood.

Ilohan had overheard some in the royal castle of Aaronkal saying that this was Her Majesty's tenderhearted foolishness, and that he was only a servant's child. He hoped he might be the son of one of the dead knights. King Thomas had often told him not to worry about his lineage. "The child of a knight is no different from the child of a peasant," he had said. "Either can become a true knight, or a craven. It is a man's choices that make the man." Ignoring what anyone might say, the queen had loved Ilohan as her own son, and he had called her mother.

Queen Sarah had died four years ago, and slowly he had learned to live with the emptiness her passing had made in his heart. The question of his lineage troubled him little anymore – certainly not now, on the eve of his knighthood. The thunder boomed again, and the cold stone dug into his knees, bringing his thoughts back to the present.

A long time had passed since the beginning of his vigil, but it would be longer still until dawn. He looked around the dark

chapel. The candles cast circles of light on the rough-hewn floor, polished by the feet and knees of many worshippers. Their light fell short of the ceiling, but barely illuminated the near walls and the altar in front of him. He could dimly see the carving on the altar, of Christ and the angels coming on the clouds of heaven. He suddenly found joy in being in this holy place, at this secret hour, alone.

The candles flickered in the draught. The darkness seemed to come in under the door as tangibly as the wind, so that Ilohan was aware of both the warmly lit chapel and the cold and rainy night outside, as if he could experience both at once. He began to pray again. Wind roared in the oak trees surrounding the chapel, and bowed their branches down to scrape the roof. The black sky rumbled and the dark rain fell on the worried land, while the young man kept the vigil of his knighthood.

“Lord God, guard my life, and keep me true to the vows I make tomorrow. May I draw my sword only to fight for the helpless, and against evil. Keep me from falling into error, and keep my hand strong and my heart pure. Give me wisdom to fight only when I must, and then – give me courage! Help me do my part to lift the darkness that has fallen upon Karolan, and make me loyal to my king and my land until I die. When I face pain and hardship, show me how to bear them as a true knight should. Bring me through –”

His prayer was suddenly broken by a thing he could not fight or comprehend. He was not attacked – the chapel floor did not gape beneath him – but without warning, without perceptible cause, he fell into darkness and terror as into a freezing river. Everything he knew was lost to him. He could see nothing but blackness, and feel nothing but overwhelming fear. It crushed his chest and froze his heart. It sent his mind

reeling in hopeless confusion. Darkness. Loss of light and loss of hope: no reference point, no handhold. He remembered nothing of the past, and could not guess what would happen next. His thoughts spun wildly and fixed on nothing. He felt that he was falling into the Abyss, never to return – unless he was already there.

Darkness. Loss. Confusion and despair. He reached again for something, anything in his desperation. “How... what is this thing... what came before...what was I doing... why?” He dimly remembered that he had been praying – and he grasped at the idea as at a straw. “God!” he cried. “If you are there, save me from the Darkness!” There was no answer. The darkness roared. Terror surged around him like an overwhelming river. He began to lose his last hope. “God!” he cried again. “If you will not bring me out, come to me and help me in the Darkness!”

Nothing changed, but his terror faded. It faded even though he still could not move, or see, or feel, or comprehend what had seized him. An idea came to him in the darkness: the idea of Karolan, the land that was his home, whose hearty people and hills and streams he loved. Ilohan found he could not frame words, but he tried to offer up his love itself as prayer. He felt that fear was still lying in wait for him, but that prayer shielded him from it. The idea of the people of Karolan narrowed to one man, whom he had not thought of for months: Jonathan, a young villager in a remote glen, who had once thoroughly beaten him in a fencing match. Still unable to frame his own words, he used Thomas’s: “The child of a knight is no different from the child of a peasant... it is a man’s choices that make the man.”

Horror of the blind darkness all around weighed on him. His prayer faded, and fear began to return. This time he felt a

strong sense of falling, of a prison, or perhaps even a shelter, cracking open. The terror reached a crescendo and then broke. He lay again on the floor of the chapel, gasping and covered with cold sweat. His candles were still burning. The Darkness was over.

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Jonathan awoke from dreamless slumber to see the light of early morning coming through the window of his family's cottage. It shone clear on the clean-swept wooden floor and log walls. The only sound was birds singing, welcoming a new day with joy. He realized with surprise that he was awake before his parents, and that he should get up and light the forge.

He slid his feet reluctantly from under his blanket and stood. He took bread from the kitchen, and drew cold, clear water from the well behind the cottage. He stood in dewy grass and watched the dawn while he ate and drank, letting Glen Carrah remind him that it was good to be alive.

The glen sloped upward in glorious bounds of golden grass, guarded on either side by steep spurs of the mountains. Far behind it, the great mountains themselves towered in misty glory. They seemed to beckon to Jonathan this early morning, but also to defy him as they always did. Birdsong rained out of the clean blue sky, though the singers were too high to be seen. Other birds winged to and fro in the mist above the glen. The first rays of sunlight streamed over the mountains on Jonathan's left, and turned the mist to shafts of golden light. He raised his cup of water, as if in toast to Glen Carrah: the most beautiful place in the world.

He finished his meal and stepped into the smithy, a small, walled yard behind the cottage. He coaxed a flame from

yesterday's coals, shoveled new charcoal and ore into the furnace, and pumped the bellows. Slowly the charcoal kindled, and the furnace grew dazzling yellow inside with the heat. He took a half-formed sword from a chest by the wall, and plunged it into the midst of the blazing charcoal. The walls of the open courtyard shut out the sight of the glen, and the ground beneath his feet was lifeless with black ash and slag. Still, the sky was bright blue above him, and over the roar of the furnace and the rhythmic hiss of the bellows he could still make out the singing of the birds.

The bar of iron grew intensely bright. He drew it out to work it on the anvil. It felt slow and awkward. Molding a smooth and lovely sword with blunt hammer-blows seemed impossible. It always did at first. But as blow after blow fell, and shower after shower of sparks sprayed outward, he remembered the pattern he never really forgot.

Bang, bang, bang, the bright sparks fell and he was completely absorbed in his work. Hammer until the iron glows dull, heat it again to sparking brilliance, hammer again. Turn the blade, bang, bang; pump the bellows, bang, bang; and gradually the impossible is done. What was a crudely tapered iron bar becomes a sword blade, glowing dull red on the anvil.

This sword was smooth and straight, thin at the edges where the grinding wheel would make it razor sharp, thickest and strongest near the hilt, sturdy and lethal to the point. Jonathan tempered it carefully, plunging it again and again into a barrel of cold water, first briefly, then for longer intervals, intently watching the play of iridescent color on the surface of the metal as its temperature changed. The edges of the blade must be cooled quickly: they would be hard and sharp. The center must cool more slowly, to be tough and strong. On his first attempt something seemed slightly wrong,

so he re-heated the blade and tried again. At last it was done, and he reached his bare hand into the barrel to recover the quenched blade. He drew it out and raised it above his head. It was dark and blotchy, not yet sharpened and polished. But it was already a sword.

Jonathan put his gloves back on and grasped the bare iron hilt with both hands. He swung the blade hard and fast, a glancing blow at a wood testing block that hung from a projection on the wall. The sword rang true, a musical note that joined the birdsong. He stepped back and swung harder, blow after blow that set the heavy wood target swinging. He loved the feel of the sword in his hands. He loved knowing that the strength he had earned swinging a blacksmith's hammer also enabled him to wield a knight's sword. His blows sent chips of wood flying in all directions, and the blade he had tempered did not break.

Jonathan suddenly became aware of a presence behind him. He turned around to see his father, Barnabas, standing at the entrance to the smithy. The master smith of Glen Carrah was smiling, a hint of laughter in his face. The brown homespun shirt he wore could not hide the strong, tough muscles of his arms. In one hand he held a heavy bucket of ore he had not bothered to set down.

"Good morning, Father," said Jonathan.

"Good noontide, Son. The morning is already gone. I see you have made use of the time. Still, I sometimes wonder if you do not spend more effort testing your swords than making them."

"You have often told me that we must never send the king flawed swords," said Jonathan. He changed his stance suddenly, and lifted his blade, knowing that his father would

instantly recognize one of the guard positions of the swordsmen of Karolan.

“Very well then, let us test it,” said Barnabas. He opened the chest, took up another half-finished sword, and swung it into a guard stance of his own.

Jonathan attacked hard. Barnabas blocked all his strokes, and nothing Jonathan tried could get through his father’s defenses. Finally Barnabas’ sword was slightly out of place, and Jonathan saw his chance and swung hard. His blade was knocked aside with a wrenching blow. His own effort to parry never even came close, and his father’s sword stopped short a handbreadth from his head.

“Your blade is sound,” said Barnabas, panting.

“How did you do that, Father?” asked Jonathan, equally out of breath.

“Son,” said Barnabas with a smile, “always make sure your enemy’s mistake was an accident, before you attack. But it was a well fought match, and your mother has prepared our noon meal inside.”

They walked out of the smithy and through the clean lush grass together. Father and son had had such sword matches for as long as Jonathan could remember, and he knew they were both very skilled. His father still won most of the time, but he no longer won easily.

The two men stood looking out over Glen Carrah for a moment before going inside. The sun had burned away the mist, and was blazing high in the south, above the great mountains. The grass shone in the light, and waved in the cool wind. Jonathan opened the door of their cottage, and he and his father stepped into the kitchen. Good smells met them – of stew and bread, fresh-cut oak and tanned leather. Jonathan’s mother, Hannah, turned to greet them with a smile. She had

already set steaming goat's meat stew and fresh bread on the table. Oak shavings from a plow she was making lay deep on her work bench at the other side of the room.

"It's been a lovely morning," she said, as she took her seat at the table.

"It certainly has," said Barnabas. "I've been down into the town to get ore, and everything is bright and washed with the rain last night. They had a hard time bringing wagons along the muddy roads from the mines, but they made it sometime last night and brought in some of the best ore I've seen in weeks." He and Jonathan sat down, and all three bowed their heads.

"Our Father in Heaven," said Barnabas, "thank you for the food that you give us. Thank you for our lives, our work, and our land. Make us yours, and be our helper and protector whatever happens to us. Thank you that you are able to bring life out of death. Amen."

Jonathan had heard his father pray like this thousands of times, and though he respected his father, he thought the prayers were foolish. He rarely spoke his thoughts aloud, but today he said, "Father, why do you thank God for his power, that he is able to bring life out of death? Did he decide to be powerful for your sake, any more than I decided to be born your son? And why should I believe that there is a God who can bring life out of death? Is it not more noble to love the life and beauty that we see and know, preserve it and treasure it as long as we can, but form no groundless hopes of bringing life out of death?"

"I thank God for his power because the wandering preachers from Tremilin and the other great churches do it," said Barnabas.

“But you do not know why!” said Jonathan. “You do not test what they do to see if there is good reason for it, and you do not test what they teach to see if it is true. When they say that God brings life out of death, you believe without thinking.”

“No!” said Barnabas. “I listen to the ancient stories, the stories the travelers brought to Karolan. You have heard them too – their words ring with power and truth every time they are told. Could men have written such things, could they have told them and passed them on in such words, if they had not seen them and did not know that they were true? I know they could not. Jonathan, I know how men use words when they lie, and when they speak truth. Have you seen me cheated in our trade? I tell you, I know that the stories are true, and there is life in believing them. Will you not take the life God offers you? If you will not, there is only death in the end. You will not find any other defense against death, and there will be no limit to your loss.”

Jonathan saw the sorrow in his father’s face, and was silent. He did believe in inevitable loss, and suddenly the fear and pain of the loss stabbed him. How comforting must be the foolish hope of his parents’ faith! But he did not hear truth in the ancient stories, as his father claimed to do. Their faith was not for him, and he did not need it. He loved justice and honor, goodness and beauty. In peace, a true man should treasure what was good and beautiful, and rejoice in it. In war he should defend it heroically – but true heroism must not ask for hope that what it saved would endure.

Jonathan forced his fear away. The loss was in the distant future, and to dwell on it was to weaken the love and delight that were so vitally important now. He loved life, Naomi, his parents, and Glen Carrah. He loved the hope of future adventure and victory. He would love all these long and

happily, and see his dreams fulfilled, before he faced the irrevocable loss.

He ate a spoonful of his mother's rich stew, and the wind from the glen blew through the open windows. His thoughts flew back to the present, and the steady peace he felt dismissed from his mind the idea of endless loss. His father was speaking.

"The king has ordered twelve more swords by the end of next month," said Barnabas, "He is filling his armories at Aaronkal with weapons."

"Does he expect war?" asked Hannah.

"He is making every preparation for it," said Barnabas.

"Is there any word yet of the king's appointing a successor?" asked Jonathan.

"Nothing but wild rumors that one knight or another is likely to be chosen," said Barnabas. "Obviously the king himself has not yet spoken."

"But why should war come?" asked Jonathan. "We are making swords, the whole village is worried, but no one will say why. I know only that it is Norkath, not Cembar, that they fear."

There was a long silence. Jonathan looked from his father's face to his mother's and then back again. He felt that his mother wished to speak, but would not.

"What do you know of Prince Kindrach?" asked Barnabas at last.

"Was he not a son of King Thomas who died in childhood?" asked Jonathan.

"No," said Hannah. "He lived to be a man – a prince of whom all Karolan could be proud. Then he vanished, and few now dare to speak of him."

Jonathan wondered if the prince had been killed by something horrible, so that even years later people were afraid

to talk about it. But no – the Knights of Karolan feared no horror. They would have avenged him. Another explanation suddenly came into his mind. “Prince Kindrach was suspected of treachery,” he said.

Hannah stood, and her eyes flashed. “No!” she said. “He was only accused, never suspected. He would have died gladly rather than betray Karolan.”

“It was reported,” said Barnabas, “that before his death, the prince gave Karolan to King Fingar of Norkath: that he pledged that Fingar, rather than he, would succeed King Thomas. This was the lie.”

“Fingar’s lie,” said Hannah.

“Yes,” said Barnabas, “Fingar’s lie, with which he now hopes to stir his people to war with Karolan. When we fight to resist his conquest, he will say we are traitors to the pledge of Kindrach, prince of Karolan.”

“Then you think we will be invaded?” asked Jonathan. Desire for adventure and glory leapt up in his mind like a flame, burning away his fear.

“When King Thomas dies, yes, I think we will be invaded,” said Barnabas slowly. “But the people of Karolan are sturdy iron, and it may be that war will only re-temper, and not shatter the blade. Perhaps it is time we were tested again.”

“And whatever comes,” said Hannah, “we have God, who can bring life from death.”

Jonathan could hear fear in her voice – but also her mastery of the fear as she comforted herself with her faith. There was a long silence. The sun cast squares of warm light on the clean, smooth floor. The wind carried the healthy smell of the drying autumn grasses of the glen. Hannah spoke again, and her hands shook with the intensity of her desire, “Oh Jonathan, my son, why cannot you believe? The Glen you live in, the love

you rejoice in, the sky above you and the strength of your hammer coming down, all these tell you of the God who brought life out of nothing! Why will you not believe that he exists and can bring to you life that is not lost by death?"

"Mother, must we speak of this again?" asked Jonathan. "I grieve to see your pain, and if the things you have named are from God, I do owe him all my allegiance. But what could prove to me that they are from him? Mother, I love you, and I am sorry, but I will keep my own faith. I believe that life is a priceless treasure, but not eternal. It will someday be gone forever. The true way to live is in love and in desperate rejoicing at the treasure as it slips through our hands, never to return. We must fight for the beautiful and true, and defend them from ugliness and pain as long as we can – but in the end we will be defeated. That is how I intend to live my life: I will protect what is good, admire what is beautiful, and fight what is horrible. I will watch with a noble sorrow as everything I loved is lost to me, and at last I lose even myself."

Hannah made no reply, and in the silence Jonathan was haunted by his own words. He wanted to walk – or run – a long way through the beauty of Glen Carrah. He looked again at his mother and saw that the desperation had left her face. He embraced her and said, "I am sorry, Mother." She smiled with a hint of hope in her face, but sadness in her eyes. "Would you like me to go to the mountains and hunt for a goat for our dinner?" he asked her.

"Yes," she said, smiling fully now, "I will invite Naomi to eat with us tonight."

"The loveliest woman in the world," said Jonathan. "Mother, I will surely bring you back a goat." Naomi was more than beautiful, Jonathan thought, as he took the crossbow and arrows from the wall of the smithy. She was strong and

free and loving, a girl worthy, and more than worthy, of the glen that was her home. Worthy of Glen Carrah: in Jonathan's mind, it was the highest praise.

In a moment he was running across the glen, reveling in his strength and freedom, his mind full of Naomi. He ran up toward the sun and the south. The tall grass brushed his legs and gleamed gold in the sun ahead, as he ran toward the light with joy.

Back in the house Hannah watched him go, delighting in his strength – and grieving for him. She turned and found herself in the arms of her husband. She felt his strength, and the strength of the deep love they shared. Trusting each other, sharing both their sorrow and their joy, they walked out of their house hand in hand and stood in the sunshine, watching their son run up the glen until he disappeared behind a swell of grass. Finally they went into the smithy together, and Barnabas put into her hands the cold iron parts that she needed for her work.

After Hannah went inside Barnabas stood alone for a long moment. He heard her begin to sing at her bench. At last he opened the furnace and peered into its glowing interior. The iron had melted out of the ore that Jonathan had put in that morning, and it lay in a dimly glowing heap at the bottom of the furnace. He heated it until it was bright orange, then took it out and began to hammer. He bent, crushed, and folded the iron with blow upon blow from his heaviest hammer. Gradually the impurities, the slag and ash, began to squeeze out of it and shatter into sand on the anvil. The sparks flew out in bright showers to darken his leather apron with tiny burnt dots. He enjoyed his power to refine iron with the strength of his hands and the heat of his forge.

As he fell into the strong and lovely rhythm of his work, he wondered if men are like lumps of iron on an anvil, only to be refined with fire and force. Perhaps a man could only be strong and bright after he had been through a lot of firing and hammering. He believed that he had been through some, though not enough to finish the task. He was still much less than he wanted to be.

The greatest example of his frailty was his failure to pass on his faith to his son. Of course he had not failed alone: he and Hannah had tried together and together they had failed. It was heartbreaking to them both. Yet there was still time, he told himself as he pumped the bellows and looked up at the blue sky. Jonathan would leave the house of his father soon, but he would not escape the reach of God.