

## **The Witch's Boy**

**Kelly Barnhill**

**Reviewed by: Rina Guo, 16**

**Star Teen Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity**

[www.bethestaryouare.org](http://www.bethestaryouare.org)

Ned is the son of “Sister Witch”, the only human keeper of magic in their small kingdom. When Ned’s home is attacked by foreign bandits, greedy for his mother’s magic, Ned does something risky and desperate. He binds his mother’s magic to his skin and makes a run for the woods, a notoriously dangerous and very magical forest on the outskirts of the kingdom and perhaps the world, as the village people know it. In the woods, Ned befriends a wolf and a girl—the girl who happens to be Áine, daughter of the Bandit King aka the leader of the bandits scouring the woods to get his hands on Ned and his magical powers. Áine’s father keeps a trove of stolen riches hidden in the heart of the woods, including a magical pendant that slowly corrupts his conscious and weakens his love for his daughter. Despite her initial distrust of Ned and the wolf, Áine decides to help Ned get through the woods and return to his village, in hopes that her father may give up looking for the boy and finally return back home. What they don’t know is that their adventure will be so much more than what they asked for, including battling bandits, undoing a magical curse and stopping a growing oncoming war between the two kingdoms pressing in on opposite sides of the magically unpredictable forest.

This book is suitable for readers age 10-16. The novel is of a fantasy and fairy-tale genre and I think it would be appealing to middle school audiences or younger too. There are, however, scenes of blood and death to keep in mind, but most of it is minimal.

I enjoyed this book. One of the things I liked was that different chapters were told in different perspectives or narratives, including some that were not Áine or Ned’s. Whenever a chapter transitioned to a different scene, it was a little confusing to put together at first, but toward the climax of the novel, the different perspectives and viewpoints were helpful in understanding the full picture of what was going on. I liked how seemingly unimportant minor characters and their individual stories ended up tying back and contributing a major role in the plot near the climax. I feel like the storyline was nuanced and multifaceted. It wasn’t just a telling of a cliché fairytale involving magic or romance in a medieval kingdom setting. I feel like it was more of a diverse telling of multiple stories from different people and how sometimes magic can make people corrupted and selfish. With the plot and storyline being said, I feel like the writing style was relatively simple. Simple, not in terms of the sentence variety or vocabulary, but as in the story-telling voice. The characters had some personality and voice development, but I feel like they weren’t distinct enough. The novel sounded more like a narrator describing the whole story, rather than having the story unfold on its own through each of the character’s voices and thoughts. This is fine, if you’re a reader who prefers this old-fashioned and classy style of story-telling, but I feel like this reduced a bit of the suspense and drama of the story.

But overall, I feel like this was a great book! I haven’t read a children’s fairy-tale book in awhile and I feel that this one gave me enough complexity in terms of plot and yet simplicity in terms of tone at the same time. I would definitely recommend this to fans of magic or fantasy. It’s a bit of a different take on traditional fairy-tale-style novels but still very worth reading.

**Recommended Titles:**

- Magyk by Angie Sage
- The Girl Who Drank the Moon by Kelly Barnhill
- East by Edith Pattou
- Fablehaven by Brandon Mull
- The Land of Stories by Chris Colfer