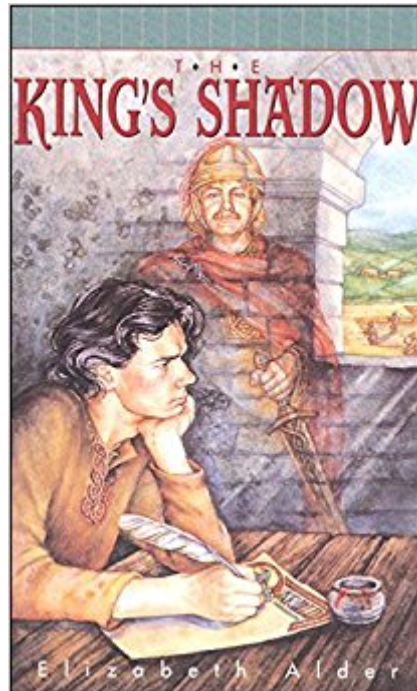




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# The King's Shadow



## Synopsis

Evyn, a young Welsh serf, has dreamed all his life of becoming a storyteller. But in a cruel twist of fate, Evyn and his father suffer a brutal attack by a group of murderous ruffians. Evyn's tongue is cut off and his father is killed. Orphaned and unable to speak, Evyn assumes he is destined to a life of slavery. But Evyn is resilient and teaches himself to read and write. He is then appointed the personal companion to Earl Harold of Wessex, who later becomes the King of England. The two travel the countryside together, forming a close father-son bond. Evyn chronicles all of their exciting journeys, which culminate at the Battle of Hastings, where the future of the country is decided.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Alder's clunky debut charts the rise and fall of King Harold, as seen by the fictional Evyn, the king's loyal Welsh servant and foster son. A regular Horatio Alger hero of Saxon England, Evyn finds his promising career as a storiawr (wandering storyteller) stopped short when his tongue is cut out by the high-born ruffians who killed his father. A few days later, Evyn's uncle sells the mute boy into slavery on the vast estates of Lady Ealdgyth Swan Neck, who, for some reason, arranges for the boy to be taught to read and write. Later, Evyn leaves Ealdgyth's household to serve her lover, Harold, Earl of Wessex. At this point the narrative really bogs down, becoming essentially a star-struck account of Harold's ascent ("It seemed to Evyn that all the power of the Saxon people

was concentrated behind the muscle and bones of the Earl of Wessex") and his defeat at the hands of William the Conqueror. Characterizations are wooden and oddly distant: it's hard to get a sense of Harold's repeatedly emphasized charisma from Alder's clichéd phrases. A wealth of potentially fascinating historical details indicates thorough research; unfortunately, these snippets are poorly integrated into the story. Ages 12-up. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gr. 7<sup>+</sup>-12. Eleventh-century Britain is the background for Alder's finely written account of a slave who becomes the chronicler of Harold, last of the Saxon kings. When Evyn is brutally attacked and rendered mute, his hopes of becoming a storyteller and escaping his life as a serf are shattered. Sold into slavery, he joins the household of Lady Ealdgyth, the common-law wife of Earl Harold of Wessex. Illiterate, mutilated, and feared by the thralls, Evyn becomes known as Shadow. When he is sent to a monastery to be educated, his future is altered forever. After his return, he saves the life of Earl Harold and follows Harold, as his squire and later as his foster son, from Wessex to London and eventually to the Battle of Hastings, where he witnesses Harold's death. On the journey, Evyn learns about loyalty, honor, and bravery, and he comes to realize that by chronicling the fate of his king, he has actually become a storyteller. Alder's vivid descriptions of the harsh conditions and customs of medieval life make the story come alive, and her brisk pacing never wavers. Evyn is an observant, sympathetic narrator, an apt recorder of the perilous times. Chris Sherman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It is 1063 during the reign of Edward the Confessor, king of England and Wales, and thirteen year old Evyn is a serf who lives near Carmarthen, Wales, with his father, a widower, on the estate of Lord Rhywallon. His mother Joan and all the little ones had died from a fever the year before. Evyn has dreamed all his life of becoming a storiawr or storyteller. His father's brother, Uncle Morgan, returns after some eight or nine years' absence and promptly insults the sons of the powerful neighboring Lord Gryffin who claimed to be king of Wales, at a community feast. In retaliation, they murder whom they think is Morgan and cut off Evyn's tongue. However, they actually killed Evyn's father. Morgan rescues the boy but sells him into slavery on the vast estates of Lady Ealdgyth, the common-law wife of Earl Harold Godwinson of Wessex, where he, now mute and unable to say his name, becomes known as Shadow. Harold's sister was King Edward's wife. His mistress sends Evyn to a monastery where he is taught to read and write by Lewys, a fellow Welshman. After this, he is made the personal servant, then squire, and

finally foster son to Earl Harold, who later becomes the King of England, and is called Æthelstan's Shadow. The two travel the countryside together, and Evyn is there for the battles of Carmarthen where Gryffyn's insurrection is destroyed, of Stamford Bridge where the combined armies of Norse King Harald Hardrada and Harold's own brother Tostig are defeated, and of Hastings or Senlac Hill with the forces of William the Conqueror. History, of course, records that Harold, the last Saxon king of England, dies at Hastings. But what happens to Evyn, now just sixteen? Will he be killed too or will he survive? There are a few oaths, a couple of instances of drinking ale or mead, and a reference to dancing, but otherwise this is good historical fiction, reminding me a little of G. A. Henty as one reads about Evyn's growth in self-confidence and courage while learning how to deal with both the physical and emotional effects of his injury. There are two caveats that parents may want to be aware of before choosing *The King's Shadow* for their children. First, the descriptions of Evyn's tongue being cut off and of his father and later uncle being killed, while not overly graphic, might be disturbing to younger or especially sensitive readers. Second, Harold makes a political marriage while he has another wife who had borne his children. It might be a good discussion point to compare this situation with Solomon and his many wives and concubines. It is interesting to see how professional book reviewers differ in their opinion of this book. *Publishers Weekly* calls it a "clunky debut" in which "Characterizations are wooden and oddly distant, with clichéd phrases and potentially fascinating historical details that are poorly integrated into the story." However, *Booklist* says that it is a "finely written account" where "Evyn learns about loyalty, honor, and bravery, and he comes to realize that by chronicling the fate of his king, he has actually become a storyteller." I tend to agree with *Booklist*, but it makes me wonder if these folks really know what they're talking about.

My son (13) found this book to be very sad and sometimes hard to read. But, overall it was a good book.

Great book that arrived on time!

For anyone who loves history especially in the middle ages, this book is fascinating. It gives an inside view on the battle of Hastings from a unique viewpoint. My advice for reading this volume is to ignore its length and simply let it whisk you away into the medieval world. You won't be

disappointed.

This is required reading book for my son for school

For our grand-daughter's birthday.

The book came in great condition

This story is about a the life of Evyn, a boy in England, first as a freeman, then a slave, and eventually as a foster son of King Harold, the last Saxon king. The time period is well imagined, and the historic part of the story line is well told, but the actual story of the boy is the least engaging part of the story. His character is not fully fleshed out and his exploits and actions are not written thoroughly enough to engage the reader in his life. He seems to be a secondary character, even though the story is told from his viewpoint, and his pain, his happiness and his conflicts are given only an outline, without the detail needed to draw the reader in to his life. I read this aloud to my children, ages 8 & 10, and the 3 of us struggled to finish it. We've read Robert Lewis Stevenson, Charles Dickens among other authors with joy and excitement, but this book did not hold our attention.

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