



RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA
READING GUIDES



Roland Wright, Future Knight (Book One)

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Roland Wright, Brand New Page (Book Two)

ISBN: 978 1 74166 230 6

Written by Tony Davis
Illustrated by Gregory Rogers

Reading Level: for confident readers aged 7 to 9

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COVER BLURB

Roland Wright, Future Knight

Roland wants to be a knight in armour – but Roland's dad is a blacksmith, and only boys from noble families can even dream of becoming knights.

When mysterious visitors arrive in the village one day, everything changes. Roland finds himself in the contest of a lifetime, with a real chance to become a page – the first step on the road to knighthood.

But how can skinny, clumsy Roland beat an opponent who is bigger, stronger and older – and who doesn't fight by the rules?

Join Roland and his pet mouse, Nudge, in the first book of their laugh-out-loud knightly adventures!

Roland Wright, Brand New Page

It's really happened! Roland is to join the royal household at Twofold Castle as a brand new page. This is his big chance to impress the king and his knights.

There are a few small problems. The Queen hates mice, and Roland is told his littlest friend, Nudge, won't be allowed to stay. There's an older page who hisses like a snake and always makes sure that poor boys are sent straight home in disgrace. And did we mention that there's an elephant on the rampage?

If things don't improve Roland's dream of being a knight could be over in a day.

Roland and Nudge take on all comers in book two of their laugh-out-loud knightly adventures!

ABOUT THE SERIES

Roland Wright, Future Knight is the story of a boy who is almost ten – well, who is nearly almost ten, and wants nothing more in the world than to be a knight in armour.

Fortunately it's the perfect time – right smack bang in the middle of the Middle Ages, otherwise known as the 'medieval' era (or period).

The year is 1409 – about 600 years ago – and it's the time of broadswords and spiky steel maces and warhorses and jousting competitions and sieges and enormous catapults that can fling boulders through castle walls.

That's the good news for Roland.

The bad news is that Roland's dad is a blacksmith. Although Roland's father is very good at what he does – quite famous, in fact, because he makes the best armour in the land – he is from the wrong part of society. In the middle ages, only the sons of noblemen had a good chance of becoming a page.

Being a page was the first step on the road to knighthood. If he was good at what he did, a page could become a squire when he was about 14 years old, then a knight when he was perhaps 21 years old.

Roland has a pet mouse named Nudge, who is his best little friend in the world – despite a series of mishaps, including a flying lesson that doesn't quite go right.

As it turns out, both Nudge and fate intervene in the story. One day a group of mysterious visitors arrive in the village and bring surprising news. Roland finds himself in a contest that could change his whole life.

In the second book of Roland's adventures, Roland finds that life in Twofold Castle is not as wonderful as he'd expected. He learns that Nudge won't be allowed to stay; and he discovers unfairness in many things within the castle. For example, only the really important people are given soft beds and tasty food.

Worse still, he encounters Hector, a bully from a privileged background who tries his best to ensure that Roland is sent home. Hector's a snob and thinks poor peasant boys like Roland couldn't possibly be good enough to be part of the royal household. Hector does his best to get Roland into trouble, but Roland's bravery, determination and honour see him through when he encounters a problem that even the knights can't help with.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Davis is based in Sydney, Australia, where he lives with his wife Carolyn and his three young sons.

Over the years he has worked in newspapers, magazines and publishing – as well as being the author of several books for children and grown-ups.

Tony originally trained as a journalist on *The Australian*, and he later worked at *The Sydney Morning Herald*, where he held several major editing positions.

As a senior staff feature writer he wrote extensively about popular culture, travel, history, cars and a myriad of other subjects. His travel stories have been published around Australia and internationally.

He is now writing books full-time.

Tony's non-fiction titles include the memoir *F. Scott, Ernest and Me* and the local bestseller *Lemon! Sixty Heroic Failures of Motoring*. Also published in the US and UK, this was adapted to create Tony's first book for children, *You Must Be Skidding!*, about the biggest losers of the car world. A sequel called *Are You For Wheel?* about the most amazing cars ever was published in February 2008.

In between these two non-fiction children's books, Random House released Tony's first fiction for children: *Roland Wright, Future Knight*. It was enthusiastically received, with the *Sunday Age*, for example, describing it as 'perfect for young readers' and 'cheeky and charming'.

Tony is currently writing more books in the Roland Wright series – and taking lessons in sword fighting. The third book, *Roland Wright At the Joust*, will be published in October 2008.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Gregory Rogers studied fine art at the Queensland College of Art and has illustrated a large number of educational and trade children's picture books including five books in the Random House *30 Australian . . .* series. In 1995, Gregory won the Kate Greenaway Medal for his illustrations in *Way Home*.

His first wordless picture book *The Boy, The Bear, The Baron, The Bard* was selected as one of the Ten Best Illustrated Picture Books of 2004 by the *New York Times* and received numerous other awards and nominations.

Midsummer Knight, the companion to *The Boy, The Bear, The Baron, The Bard*, was published in 2006.

As with the *Roland Wright* author, Tony Davis, Gregory has a strong interest in all things medieval – and this shows through in his superb illustrations of Roland Wright and the people he meets along the way.

ON WRITING THE SERIES

In the author's words: 'I've always been fascinated by the Middle Ages, and the technology of the time – how they could build catapults that could hurl massive boulders great distances, or make a suit of steel so light and flexible that a knight could run or even do somersaults while wearing it.'

'I've also always been interested in the legends of King Arthur and his knights, how these stories came about, and how they grew to have such an important role in England, Continental Europe and then around the world.

'When I came to write fiction about the period, however, I was less interested in dealing with myths and fantasies and more concerned with the realities of everyday life. I wanted to turn out a lively action story about what it might have been like for a young boy who was living in those times.

'Of course it was important to be as historically accurate as possible, but I was also determined to make it a fast-moving story about people and universal themes, rather than a thinly disguised textbook about the Middle Ages. To help move the story along, I also decided to make the dialogue fairly modern, rather than fill it with words such as *ye* and *thou*. I wanted it to be funny as well, because I reckon that so many things were difficult, smelly and bleak in the Middle Ages, they would have needed to find plenty to laugh about.

'When I'd finished the manuscript, the publisher was very excited by the way it combined history, action and humour. To my great delight, she persuaded the award-winning artist Gregory Rogers to illustrate it. He is as enthusiastic about the era as I am. He draws warm and charming characters and also really works hard to get the little details right.'

THEMES

Roland Wright, Future Knight

- **Chivalry:** The medieval term 'chivalry' meant different things to different people. In general, it was a code about how to behave nobly. As it was explained to Roland, though, it meant that winning wasn't everything. The good knight Sir Gallawood told him: 'The object of a contest is not to beat your opponent. The object is to be true to yourself . . . to do as well as you possibly can, to behave justly, nobly and never selfishly.' It also helped to be a good with a sword, of course, and Sir Gallawood was certainly that.
- **Determination:** Roland might be small and a little bit clumsy, but nobody tries harder. It is an important part of his character, and a trait that will benefit anyone in any situation.
- **Sibling rivalry:** It happens to all of us with brothers and sisters, but competing with them can lead to good things too and help us learn about ourselves.
- **Doing things well:** In various parts of the story, doing something well brings an unexpected reward – as it often does in real life. But doing something well can also be its own reward.
- **Having a go:** Roland's dreams are dismissed as silly but he believes that if he works hard enough, and practices long enough with his wooden sword and shield, he'll be such a good fighter they will have no choice but to make him a knight. It turns out not to be such a silly idea at all.

Roland Wright, Brand New Page

As above, plus:

- **Overcoming adversity:** Roland has been allowed to become a page because of the King's special gift, but he still needs to prove to the other pages that he deserves a place at the castle. Not all of them want him to succeed.

- **Bravery:** Roland is willing to risk his life stopping a rampaging elephant when he sees the ladies of the castle in its path.
- **Respect for adults:** Roland must learn how to behave at the castle, and how his actions might differ depending who he's talking to.
- **Friendship:** Roland soon finds friends at the castle, including his roommates, Morris and Humphrey. Morris doesn't necessarily make a good first impression, but Roland treats him well and wins his respect – and Morris eventually risks everything to save his new roommate.
- **Bullying:** Hector, another page, is from a wealthy family and believes that he can't get in trouble if he bullies other pages. But Hector's actions in setting Roland up to fail are exposed and Roland's bravery is rewarded.
- **Animal behaviour:** Why is the elephant on the rampage and how can it be stopped? Different people deal with this enormous creature in very different ways – and obtain very different results.

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

General discussion points

- When were the Middle Ages?
- What brought about the end of the age of armour?
- Why didn't people live as long in those times?
- What was chivalry – and who was meant to follow its code?

Roland Wright, Future Knight discussion points

- What were the main differences between how Roland and his older brother, Shelby, approached things?
- How did Sir Gallawood's advice help Roland? What might Roland have done if he hadn't met Sir Gallawood?
- Roland and his father, Oliver, have quite a few things in common. What are they?
- Do you think Roland's father made the right decision about which son would be a page, and which would learn the family business?

Roland Wright, Brand New Page discussion points

- Humphrey and Morris stand up for Roland in front of the King, even if they are very scared about doing it. Do you think it's important to stand up for your friends?
- Would the King have believed Roland if he'd said he hadn't taken the bolt out of the elephant's gate? How could Roland have convinced him?
- Why didn't the Queen like mice? These days mice are kept as pets, but in medieval times they were seen as a pest. Why was that?
- Roland has a chance to throw rotten fruit at Hector, who has bullied him, but he chooses not to. Why?

Activities

- What did people eat in medieval times? Search the web for recipes and learn about the food from the middle ages, including the famed 'cockentrice', which Roland was given the chance to sample (note that there are different spellings for cockentrice and other medieval words; it was only much later that spelling was standardised). What were the differences between what normal people such as Roland's

family ate, and what the nobility ate? You could try to cook one of the more simple dishes yourself, with the help of your parents – such as pottage. In book two, *Brand New Page*, Roland finds that the food in the castle wasn't what he expected – they didn't eat cockatrice every night. What would they have eaten for each meal?

- What do you know about medieval weapons? Read up on the different types of swords, spears and bows. Try to make a wooden sword and shield – or, better still, a mini catapult.
- Draw your own suit of armour and design a crest – just in case you ever become a knight! What shape would your shield be? What symbols would you have on your crest? Common symbols included a hand, a bear, a bow, a boar, a castle, a cat, a cup, a dog, a lion, tiger or rose.
- What does 'By Royal Appointment' mean? (Roland's dad's armoury business can use this title – and after the end of Book Two, so can Nudge!) Research other items that have this label, even to this day.
- Research what a medieval castle looked like. Where would pages have slept? What is a bailey? Where did everyone eat? What sort of things were found within the castle's walls?
- Find out more about the people in a royal household. Who was the King's assistant? Who was in charge of all the pages? How many people lived in the castle?

PRAISE FOR THE SERIES

'The ink illustrations within the text introduce each chapter and extend the humour of the text. Davis and Rogers have produced an entertaining and informative story which also explores sibling rivalry, family relationships and values such as honesty and loyalty. Highly suitable for reading aloud to junior primary children or for emerging independent readers.' **Reading Time**

'The story flows easily and well, and should prove to be an enjoyable read for most primary aged children. It would also be an excellent novel for a teacher to use with middle grades, if read in conjunction with a theme on life in the Middle Ages. Roland has more adventures to come.' **Magpies**

'This is a delightful story about a young boy striving to be a knight, but he has to beat his older brother in a competition first. It's a great story to show children the value of doing their best.' ABA Children's Special Interest Group, **Kids' Reading Guide 2007–2008**

'This book is ideal for boys aged 7+ and is the perfect introduction to historical fiction for junior readers. Full of interesting facts about knights and life in the Middle Ages, it combines a history lesson couched in easily digestible portions with humorous, sometimes graphic details about fighting and fighting equipment. *Roland Wright, Future Knight*, is not just about fighting, however. Its central themes are important issues that ring true for boys today. That is, to be true to one's self and always try your best no matter what. This is a clever, enjoyable read and hits the spot perfectly for young boys . . . The illustrations by Gregory Rogers add a touch of humour and detail to this great story that boys will find fascinating and which is highly recommended.' **Buzzwords**

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