

Pegasus Rider

by Deavlynn

A young boy finds a passage to a strange and wonderful world. He and his new friends battle against evil together.

Themes: bullying, good vs. evil, dating, friendships, sibling rivalry, etc.

Chapter 1: Meet the Barbarouts

Chapter 1 of 4

A young boy finds a passage to a strange and wonderful world. He and his new friends battle against evil together.

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The sunlight was pouring through the windows of the small summer cottage that was to house the Barbarout family for the next six weeks. The youngest Barbarout child, David, was waiting patiently in the back seat of the family sedan with his forehead pressed against the window glass, his breath leaving a barely-visible line of condensation each time he exhaled. He was concentrating on breathing more than a usual young man might have been due to the fact that lying across his lap, restricting his breathing, was his older and much larger brother, Solomon.

Solomon was a strapping boy, fourteen years of age, with thick, dirty-blond hair and impressive, blue eyes. David, however, could have easily fit both scrawny legs into one leg of Solomon's jeans. He was only two years younger and three inches shorter, but Solomon outweighed him by sixty-three pounds. David had darker hair that he kept short; he didn't like for it to get in his eyes. His eyes were also a deep blue, but one hardly ever saw them because they were most often fixed on a book.

"We're almost there!" squeaked a small voice from the driver's seat. The voice belonged to an easily-excitably woman with a small frame that complimented the small voice well. "Tonight, after we've unpacked, we'll get a fire going and have s'mores!" She smiled at her own idea as if it were the greatest thing she'd ever said. She'd spent most of the car ride going over the complete breakfast, lunch, and dinner menus that they would be eating from for the next six weeks. Nothing excited Lindsey Barbarout, David's mother, quite like food. He found this odd because she hardly ever ate anything and she was an uncharacteristically thin woman.

She had been going on like that for the last two hours as David was slowly being crushed to death in the seat behind her. She flicked her eyes to the rear view mirror and strained her neck to look into the back seat. She beamed down at her sons. David produced a weak smile, hoping that she might take it for enthusiasm. The only thing that he was truly enthusiastic about was being able to escape the weight of his lung-collapsing brother.

Her husband, David's father, was working away on his newly-purchased Treo700 in the passenger seat. He had an amazing ability to appear interested in what she was saying, even while completely ignoring her in favor of his client to which he was sending an E-mail. He grunted in all of the right places to prove that he was listening. But David wished he wouldn't; it only encouraged her.

The subtle gray car turned onto the secluded drive that ran the length of the lake, dead-ending at the wooden steps that led into the family's summer cottage. To some it would have looked like a polite gingerbread house. To David it resembled a wooden jail. Every year they drove up here, and every year David came back sunburned, mosquito-bitten, and battered with fresh bruises. His parents insisted that he bruised easily and suggested that he should stop climbing so many trees. David, however, knew that it didn't matter if one bruised easily or not if one was turned into a human punching bag by one's brother's friends every summer.

In her excitement Lindsey slammed on the brakes a little harder than she had really intended, stopping the car several feet in front of the cottage and tossing the older boy off of the younger boy's lap and into the back of her seat. David mercifully pulled in a deep breath.

"Oops!" she squealed while putting the car into park and hopping out the door at the same time; it really was a marvel that she hadn't run over her own foot. Mr. Barbarout grumbled into his expensive phone something about not using the parking brake. He didn't care much for his wife's driving techniques, but she insisted that he not work and drive at the same time, which left him most-often the passenger on these excursions. Solomon, being suddenly awakened, pushed himself up with one arm and gave David a sharp jab in the ribs with the other.

"Come on, sucker," he said, hoisting himself out of the car.

The summer cottage was nestled along-side Lake Erie, in the top corner of Pennsylvania. Their year-round home was in Pittsburgh. Every year they made the seemingly-endless trek north to spend the summer in a seclusion that Mrs. Barbarout called "refreshing." David did not miss their home near the city more than he would miss the summer cottage when they left. The truth was that he never really felt at home at all. His mother said that he was a chronic malcontent; his father didn't say much of anything.

Mr. Barbarout immediately pulled his laptop out of the car and headed for the back room that he claimed as his office away from home. His use of this room meant that the two boys had to share a room for the duration of the summer in the dusty bunk beds on the other side of the house. Solomon always claimed the top bunk, not because he truly wanted it, but simply because he didn't want David to have it.

The boys lugged their bulging suitcases into the crowded bedroom. Solomon gracefully leaped up to the top bunk, taking care to leave a large, dirty footprint on David's pillow as he went. He glared down at David, daring him to say anything. When he was sure David would do no such thing, he swung back down again with a soft thud.

"Mum!" Solomon called, "I'm going out to see Jack." Without waiting for a reply, the older boy pushed his way past David and burst out of the screen door, heading down the path to the neighboring cottages.

David unpacked his suitcase, tucking his clothes into the chest of drawers in the corner. Pulling a paperback novel from the side pocket, he went out and climbed into the branches of a large, shady tree by the lake.

Chapter 2: The Boy Who Climbed Trees

Chapter 2 of 4

Continuing David's story. Solomon's true nature becomes apparent.

The reason that David seemed to fall out of so many trees was, of course, that he found them to be the best hiding places. He could escape into the cool branches of a secure maple and not be found for hours. The wind would blow through the leaves and rustle his hair while he continually turned the pages of the latest dragon novel. David loved all kinds of books, but fantasy was by far his favorite.

On the other end of the scale, Solomon did not believe in dragons, knights, or anything that required an imagination, and he found no value in reading. Although one of his favorite pastimes was hunting for David and attempting to knock him out of the tree, book and all.

David had always known that reading was an especially good skill to have, and so he read, despite the taunts of his brother. Reading may not have kept Solomon from beating on him, but he found comfort in the fact that his brother might some day be washing dishes in the local grease pit while he sat in an executive's office like his father's. David wasn't sure he wanted to be like his father, but he was sure it was better than being like his brother.

The dragon in his latest book, a beautiful blue female with wings that would have stretched from home plate to first base, was engulfed in an awe-inspiring battle between good and evil. Surrounded by elven archers and dwarfish warriors, she was fending off the attacking goblin army. She was just about to eat a goblin, who happened to be remarkably similar to Solomon, when a football nailed David squarely in the head.

"Look what got stuck in this tree," called up a taunting voice from below. Without looking David knew that there would soon be a pack of five boys kicking at the shallow roots of his tree.

"Knock him out!" yelled Solomon as he jogged to his friend's side.

David, having no desire to be knocked from the tree, dog-eared the page and closed the paperback. Stuffing it into the waistband of his shorts, he moved as quickly as he could to the higher branches.

"Look at the monkey climbing the tree," boomed a voice below him. "Don't fall outta the tree, Monkey!"

A rock nailed David in the back of his right knee, which happened to be supporting most of his weight, as he scrambled to climb away from the bigger boys. Consequently, his leg gave way under him, and he swung precariously from the branch above. The paperback slid out from the place where he had tucked it into his shorts, and it fell down one leg, bouncing through the branches, until it came to rest at Solomon's feet. David cursed under his breath.

"What's this?" he smirked. "Reading about fairies again? Fairy Boy."

"Give it back," David said calmly, knowing full well that he would never see that book again. His leg was bleeding, and he could feel the warm trickle running down his calf.

"No," Solomon said, "this is for your own good. I can't have my little bro turning into a freakin' fairy lover, now can I?" He pointed his face up to look at his little brother still swinging above him in the tree. For a moment David considered dropping straight down on to his head, but he reconsidered, remembering that he was outnumbered five to one. Right on cue the other boys laughed and added in broken phrases of "yeah, freakin' fairy" and "Monkey Boy is a fairy lover." David thought that they probably had a combined IQ of somewhere around eighty, but they were all bigger than he was, and he didn't want to start their summer fun early. His arms were tiring, and he was kicking around for a good foothold.

"I've gotta protect my little brother," Solomon said cockily, sweeping the blond hairs back from his forehead. "This crap'll rot your mind, Bro." With that he pulled the front cover from the book. David winced. It was a brand new book purchased with the money he had earned washing his mother's car, and his brother was shredding it five feet below while he was bleeding into his sock.

"Awww, the little monkey boy wants his book back," crooned a tall, thin boy. David could see the beginnings of the acne blooming on the boy's chin, even from his branch in the tree. He suddenly wished with all his might that the boy's whole face would just explode from it.

"Better make sure you don't want to tape this back together," sneered another boy named Jack, the one whom Solomon had run out of the house to find.

There were murmurs of "yeah good idea, J-man," and with that Jack pulled down his fly and urinated on the pile of torn pages at the base of the tree. The clean white pages turned a putrid yellow under the thick stream. This prompted a huge roar of laughter from the boys who cheered him on; evil grins spread across their faces.

David found a foothold and leaned his head against the tree, resigning himself to a long and unpleasant summer. He was too old and too mature to cry over something as replaceable as an average paperback novel, but the humiliation of it washed over him like a great current, and he felt his face grow warm. He would not give them the satisfaction of knowing that they hurt him. Instead, he drew his legs up to his chest and waited for them to go away.

Seeming to have lost interest in him, sometime later, the gang of older boys moved off to go swimming in the lake, and David climbed down from the tree. The last thing he needed was his mother finding the pissed on remains of his book. She only ever managed to make things worse for him when she reprimanded his older brother. Turning his head away from the stench, David picked up a corner of the ripped novel and did the best he could to collect it all without getting his fingers wet. He gingerly carried it down to the lake and tossed it into a pile of brambles near the water's edge. He didn't think it likely that anyone would venture in there. He rinsed his hands in the lake and dried them on the side of his shorts.

Chapter 3: The Ladder

Chapter 3 of 4

David finds the entrance to an amazing new world.

The next morning David woke at the crack of dawn. He dressed quickly and left the house quietly. He wanted to make it to the book store and back before Solomon got up. Solomon never woke early at the cottage; he was often out past his curfew and felt no need to rise before 10:00 am.

The small town of Fairview was about a mile and a half from the Barbarout's summer cottage. It wasn't much, but it had a short main street with a pharmacy, grocery store, hardware store, and a few other things that one might expect to find on any main street in small town America. It was drab and ordinary, but that was okay with David because hidden on the last block of Main Street was a small book store called The Best-Seller Book. David was a regular customer at the Best-Seller.

The shop was owned by a delightful woman named Mrs. Treatise. "David!" she said warmly as he walked in the door, "I'm so happy to see you back." Her smile lit up the room, and her round face and soft eyes were a welcome sight.

David liked Mrs. Treatise a lot, not only because she loved books, but because she was the kind of adult that understood when a boy was in a hurry. David had spent many hours in the cool recesses of her book store discussing novels and killing time while hiding from the older boys that sometimes hung out at the 7-11 across the street. Today, however, he simply wanted to replace his destroyed book and find a safer hiding place to read it before Solomon's gang awoke. He found the book quickly and handed Mrs. Treatise a ten dollar bill to pay for it while filling her in on the previous school year. "Yeah, my grades are okay," he said, "mostly A's and B's." There really wasn't much else to tell. David didn't find school to be very exciting.

Mrs. Treatise gave him a twenty-five percent discount, saying it was because she was so glad to see him back in her shop. Really, he thought she probably just felt sorry for him. She knew that his life wasn't always easy, but she graciously never asked too many questions.

David started back to the cottage with the paperback curled tightly in his hand. He was just going over the previous chapter in his head, trying to remember where he had left off, when he heard an unfriendly giggle in the woods to his right. Hidden in the shade of a thick clump of trees were the five people he least wanted to see right now, Solomon and his crew. Judging by the nauseous smell wafting out from the trees, one of them had nicked a cigar, and they had all gotten up early to try and smoke it before their parents started lurking about doing yard work.

The situation really was quite comical. Five fourteen-year-old boys were standing in a circle. Each was trying to look as though they were really enjoying an activity that was clearly making them sick. A putrid green color had taken over the boys' faces, and several of them were coughing into cupped hands but trying to make it look like laughter. Before he could stop himself, David gave a short barking laugh at the scene. The boys looked out from the shadows and saw him.

"David!" yelled Solomon, "you tell mom and you're dead!" He started running at David, but David, who had a ten foot head-start, was already moving as fast as he could. The other boys, momentarily forgetting their prized contraband, took off as well, joining in the chase.

David knew he had no chance of out running them; he was by far the slowest of the group. His best bet was to go somewhere they wouldn't follow. He spotted a tall, thin pine tree ahead and decided to climb for it. He knew that the tree was bound to be sticky with sap, and the sharp needles would be far from appealing to the older boys; evergreens like this were nearly impossible to climb. They weren't particularly appealing to him either, but he was in no mood to lose another brand new book, and he thought a few jabs from the pine needles would be an improvement over the broken nose he was bound to receive if they caught him.

David darted under the bottom most branches and made a jump for it. It was surprisingly dark in the tree, and he had trouble finding the first few hand holds. He could hear the other boys coming. He was just out of reach, climbing furiously, despite the jabbing branches and pine needles.

"Come here, Monkey Boy!" taunted Solomon.

"Come down! Come down! Sissy Boy!"

David climbed higher.

"You can't climb forever!"

Suddenly, it seemed to David that he could climb forever. He thought he should be nearing the top of the tree by now, but all he could see above him were more thick, sappy branches. They seemed to be making an excellent climbing path, a ladder with rungs that were spaced perfectly apart, so that a boy just his height could climb at great speeds.

David climbed faster and faster, and it seemed as though the taunting voices below were growing fainter. He thought they should be giving up soon.

After what seemed like a very long climb, David could no longer hear the voices at all. It was then that he stopped and straddled a fat branch, catching his breath. He tried to look down, but he could no longer see the base of the tree. The branches had grown so thick that he could barely see five feet below. "How high am I?" David wondered to himself.

He shimmied out as far as he was confident he could go, without the bough below him breaking from his weight. He reached out and pushed the branches apart. With a gasp, David beheld the most breathtaking site of his life.

The sun was setting over an awesome, blue ocean; the evening star was blooming on the horizon. He was high atop a sheer cliff that appeared to be made of solid granite. It was white, but the setting sun lit the smooth reflective surface with a rainbow of warm colors. He leaned forward, breathing in the cool sea breeze and hearing the cry of a gull below on the beach.

"How can the sun be setting?" he thought to himself. "It can't be later than 10:00 in the morning."

He had, at first, mistaken the clear, blue ocean for the muddied waters of Lake Erie, but there was no mistaking the white, granite wall that dropped down to the sea. There were definitely not cliffs like that in Pennsylvania.

When he came to his senses, David realized that he must have fallen from the tree and hit his head or been caught by his pursuers and beaten to death. This was a wonderful dream, and certainly the most realistic of his life, but this couldn't be real. He turned his head to the left and saw the sap-covered trunk of the old evergreen behind him, covered with needles and pine cones. But, when he turned back, he saw that the tree changed somehow, half way up the branch. The part closer to the trunk was a distinctive Frasier Fir, but as it extended further out, the tree became a leafy deciduous tree, a tree he could not name.

David's mind was racing. He'd of course read about a whole host of fictional explanations for the miracle before his eyes, but this didn't feel like fiction. In fact, this felt more real than anything he'd ever known. There was a tingling sensation in his arms and legs; he could feel the blood pumping through his body one cell at a time.

"So what should I do?" he said to the leafy branch in front of him. "If I climb back down, where will I be?" Saying it aloud, even to himself, suddenly gripped his heart with fear. He was thrilled to have found this place, but what if he couldn't get back to his own world? True, there were a few things he wouldn't miss, but the prospect of being completely alone in a new place, even in a world as magnificent as this, was terrifying.

Near panic, David scrambled back down a few branches and listened. Barely audible, he could just make out the sounds of lawnmowers starting up and the laughing of his brother's gang. All around him were regular old branches just like the ones he decorated every year at Christmas. He moved back up the tree, and he could still see where the branches began to change. Now he understood why he hadn't noticed the difference right away. The blending of leaves and branches happened very gradually as one moved up the tree. The leafy tips were barely visible at the ends of the lowest branches, but the higher one climbed the more prevalent they became. "A very strange tree indeed," David thought.

So then, if climbing back down the tree led back to his own world, how could he get into this new world that he could only see at a distance? He settled himself on a higher branch with a clearer view of the world below. He had, at first, thought that his tree was one of many along a steep ridge that fell to the ocean, but now he realized that this was the only tree. Odder still, it wasn't a ridge at all, but a great wall, less than twenty feet wide and steep on both sides. It had to be over two hundred feet tall. One side of the smooth granite wall did stretch down to the ocean, but the other side fell to an equally impressive sea of flowers. As far as the ocean stretched to one side, rolling hills covered in vibrant flowers stretched to the other. David sat stunned at the top of the tree, simply trying to catch his breath. "How incredible," he thought. The beauty of the place was simply amazing.

To David's dismay, the sun was setting quickly, and his fantastic view would soon be fading away. The darkness was already blurring the horizon, making the land indistinguishable from the night sky. The night air was cool, and the wind came in forcefully from the ocean, making the tree sway uncomfortably beneath him. He would have no choice but to climb down and hope that he would still be able to reach this place in the morning. But when was morning? David knew he had only left his bed two or three hours before, but time was clearly different here.

"I'll come back," David whispered into the fading light. For a moment he expected an answer to be whispered in reply, but all was silent.

David climbed back down, out of the tree. He was confused about the time, but he could not hear Solomon and the other boys, so he hoped that they had grown tired of waiting and had moved on to other things. He cautiously crept out from under the tree and looked around. He was alone. He took a few minutes to examine the tree itself; he wanted to see if the change in the leaves was visible from the ground. Craning his neck back, he squinted into the sun. "It's almost noon," he thought, but he could not see the high branches where he had been. The tree was simply too tall and too well hidden by the surrounding forest.

He walked slowly back to the cottage, thinking over the morning's experience in disjointed pieces, each new thought interrupting the previous thought. He decided the best course of action would be to climb the tree every few hours to determine what time it was in the other world. He also realized that he couldn't call it "the other world" for very long. It would need a proper name, although he had no intention of sharing the name or the world with anyone else. This led him to the problem of keeping his bullying brother away from the tree. How could he climb it every few hours without being seen?

Chapter 4: Night Sky

Chapter 4 of 4

David visits the new world at night.

Lindsey Barbarout made grilled cheese sandwiches for lunch, and tomato soup. David chewed thoughtfully on the crust of his first bite of sandwich. He couldn't decide if he was hungry or not. He knew he would need strength to be climbing the tree over and over, but there was a nervousness in his stomach that made it difficult to eat. Solomon sat across from him, glaring across his steaming bowl of soup.

"David's been climbing trees again," Solomon said, trying to sound casual, but looking forward to the reprimand he knew David would get.

"Oh, David," squeaked their mother, "just don't get hurt. You already got a bad cut on the back of your leg. We've only been here one day!"

David and Solomon both knew that the cut on his leg had come from being hit by a rock and that it had nothing to do with the trees. "I'm fine, Mom," David said passively. He had considered retaliating with a comment like "Solomon's been smoking again," but he really didn't want his mother interfering with his ability to get back to that tree, and getting Solomon into trouble didn't seem wise just now. Solomon was clearly upset that David had avoided his gang so well that morning. David turned his attention back to his soup.

"Did you make it to the book store today, David?" his mother asked.

"Yeah, I did," he replied, wishing that his mother wouldn't have asked.

"What did you get?" she continued.

"Nothing," said David. He couldn't tell her that he had replaced his book without telling her how the first copy had been destroyed. "I was just looking."

"Long way to walk just to look, isn't it?" chimed in their father. David had almost forgotten that he was present at the table. He had been consumed by the business section of the morning paper, and he hardly spoke at meals anyway.

"Um, yeah, but I felt like taking a walk," David muttered lamely and then added, "and I wanted to see Mrs. Treatise." That seemed to be a sufficient enough answer for his father who returned his attention to his newspaper.

The truth was, David had completely forgotten about the book. He knew that he'd had it when he was running away from Solomon, but he didn't have it now, and he was rather afraid that he had dropped it somewhere in all of the excitement. His biggest fear was that Solomon had picked it up and was now holding it hostage. David stole a glance across the table, but if Solomon had it, he gave no sign.

David finished his lunch and as soon as he could escape, returned to the tree. He had no trouble finding it again, as it was so near the path and he knew these woods so well. Again he began the long ladder climb, watching the tree change as he went. He knew almost instantly that it was night time in the other place. When he had climbed before, the light was dimmer at the bottom and grew steadily brighter as he climbed. This time, however, it was dark and cool under the bottom branches, but the darkness only seemed to grow thicker as he went higher. When he reached the higher branches and was completely surrounded by the unusual leaves, he stuck his head out into the cool night air.

He was better prepared for the shock this time, but the site that he beheld was equally as magnificent as the first time. It was pitch black, but all around him there were brilliant stars dotting the night sky. Some of them appeared to be so close to him that David was sure he could reach out and touch them. He had never seen so many stars, and these stars were all unfamiliar to him. He had studied a little Astronomy the previous summer, learning the basic constellations like Orion and The Big Dipper. These stars made similar patterns, but none of the stars he had studied had been nearly this vivid.

As his eyes adjusted, David could see that there were planets among the stars, much larger or closer than anything he had seen before. This was like looking through a telescope but with the naked eye. There was also a small sliver of a moon hanging over the ocean, and it cast an eerie glow onto the crashing waves below. David was not afraid of heights, but all of a sudden the sheer drop below him seemed immense in the darkness. At first he felt small and all alone, but then a royal feeling flooded over him, as if he was the king of all creation on his throne high above the world. He gripped the tree branch tightly with both hands and shouted into the night.

"Hello! Hello... Hello... Hello..." his voice echoed, and he once again had the feeling that someone was actually listening. In many ways it seemed to him as if he were being heard for the first time in his life, and he welcomed the silence of this new place, wondering what it held in store.