

## The Perilous Journey of Gavin the Great: A Fable: Illustrated Edition

**Don Gutteridge**

**A.T. Balsara, Illustrator**

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*Animals band together to return to their flooded home in the allegorical novel* *The Perilous Journey of Gavin the Great*.

A flood is coming, in which an entire forest's worth of animals will be swept away, in Don Gutteridge's compelling novel *The Perilous Journey of Gavin the Great*—about a raccoon on a quest to save what is left of his home.

After the flood, Gavin, a raccoon, wakes up in a strange tree with his brothers. Banding with others, they form a ragtag group that also includes cottontails, a fox-snake, a porcupine, mice, beavers, a jackrabbit, and a fox. Raccoons in this universe are divined leaders: they are able to read and write in their own critter language, and they can interpret the sacred text, the Book of Coon-craft, for others.

Gavin also carries human texts with him, as well as fables that his father kept hidden. For this reason and others, Gavin is soon elected the leader of the small group. He devises a pact: the animals will forgo the instincts of their respective species until they reach home. To return to Earthwood, which is across the channel from the deserted island where they are stranded, the group has to travel through the Forest of Everdark and traverse the Serpentine Ridge, both of which are full of beasts. As they travel, they are tested beyond imagination. They are also guided by their faith in Gollah, their god. Gavin's leadership proves invaluable to them: he uses his awareness of grand texts to rally morale every time the animals start to doubt that they will ever get back home.

Gavin is fleshed out best, both via his internal dialogue and through his interactions with others; he also demonstrates the most growth among the members of the cast. While he starts off fearful and doubtful of his qualities as a leader, he perseveres and carries his group home. In comparison, the other members of the group are stagnant—literal creatures of habit who trail behind Gavin and who can only progress so much on their own.

The prose is verbose, and the world-building is dense. The novel establishes its setting by doubling down on its use of adjectives, emphasizing its darkened atmospheres and desolate places and playing with the spellings of words. Embellishments abound—in part, thanks to Gavin's florid style (he is credited with recording the entire fable): he alone is able to read Tallwalker Gibberlish (human words), and he has fun experimenting with the language. In speech, he and others speak at considerable length, evading their points and showing off—sometimes to distracting effect. Still, the book's overarching messages are clear: it champions hope, friendship, and overcoming differences throughout.

In the allegorical novel *The Perilous Journey of Gavin the Great*, a leader comes into his own, working to save animalkind in the wake of a flood.

RACHEL TELLJOHN (December 13, 2023)

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