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Perseus



Synopsis

This adventurous, dramatic, and at times funny retelling of the Perseus myth retains the spirit and structure of the original while offering a coming-of-age story sure to appeal to modern readers. Readers will follow Perseus on his quest to kill the hideous, snake-haired Medusa in an effort to save his mother from marriage to a less than noble king. A power struggle among the gods both hinders and helps him along the way, and Perseus even manages to find true love when he rescues the breathtakingly beautiful Princess Andromeda from the horrors of a bloodthirsty sea monster. *PERSEUS* is the second of the four books in the *HEROES* series, which debuted in the Fall of 2004 with the release of *ODYSSEUS*.

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Customer Reviews

Grade 5-8
This retelling of the myth takes Perseus from the oracular pronouncement that he will cause his grandfather's death to the time the hero settles in as King of Little Tiryns. The writing is often energetic and riveting, as when McCaughrean describes the Medusa head's effects on soldiers ranged against Perseus: They saw the hand draw out something green, repulsive, and writhing. A nasty smell struck their nostrils, and curiosity plucked at their brains. But then their nostrils smelled nothing more, their brains struggled no more after understanding, and their eyes—their eyes that had focused on something so hideous that no eyes should ever have seen it—froze over—like winter ice sealing a hundred ponds, and they were stone,

stone, stone dead. The story itself, with its twists and turns, its dangers and unexpected rescues, has compelled attention for thousands of years. While the author does not achieve the same dimensionality of characterization as some writers who expand on traditional fairy tales, she fleshes out the myth enough to provide motivation and emotions to all of the actors in it. For readers already in thrall of Greek mythology or those who must delve into it for schoolwork, this title will be a valuable addition. —Miriam Lang Budin, Chappaqua Public Library, NY Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Gr. 4-7. Like McCaughrean's *Odysseus* (2004), this retelling of a Greek myth in the *Heroes* series makes a thrilling read-aloud. The naive young hero, nicknamed "One-shirt Perseus," doesn't know what he's taking on when he agrees to bring the head of Medusa to the evil king. But Perseus not only beheads the gorgon but also rescues beautiful Andromeda from the parents and lover who betray her. McCaughrean blends the colloquial and contemporary into the heroic quest: "teenage" Perseus worries that the feathered magic sandals look "rather unmanly and tasteless," and when he first sees naked Andromeda chained to a rock, he tells her, "You're extremely beautiful, if you don't mind my saying so." It's the rhythmic storytelling of the gruesome and the heroic that will grab kids, whether the focus is on the three monsters sharing one soft, gray, slippery eye, or the brave hero on his quest to find himself. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

All four of the books from The Hero series is wonderful! Theseus was my son's favorite of the four. Odysseus was my favorite. The author does a magnificent job maintaining the integrity of the original stories while making it re-able to the fifth grader. However, it is still enjoyable to an adult. The language is descriptive and paints a great picture!

Got this for a reading project for my daughter - she loved it! Greek myths are her absolute favorite to read

There are probably much shorter retellings of this hero-story, and there are probably quite a few longer ones - but if you wish to avoid the simplicity of a picture book and the long-windedness of an epic, then I don't think you'd find any reason to complain about Geraldine McCaughrean's version of the Perseus myth. In fact, I would go so far as to say that its fidelity to the well-known myth and the lyrical prose in which it is told make it the quintessential retelling of the ancient story (perhaps a

premature claim considering I'm far from having read them all, but this would surely be up there in the top five!) King Acrisius foolishly asks the Epidauran Oracle how he will die, and gets a devastating answer: that it will be at the hands of his own grandson. Inevitably, he takes pains to insure that his daughter Danae will never beget a child, by locking her up in a specially-designed tower. Just as inevitably, this attracts the attention of Zeus, the king of the gods...and a few months later Danae gives birth to a son: Perseus. Horrified, Acrisius sets mother and son adrift on the sea in a wooden chest, only for them to be rescued by a fisherman and introduced to the King Polydectes. Coveting the hand of beautiful Danae, Polydectes sets her son an impossible task in order to pursue his reluctant bride without inference. Perseus is tricked into bringing back the head of the Gorgon Medusa - but you don't need me to tell you how this particular quest will pan out. In fact, (though no fault of McCaughrean herself) this is one of the inevitable weaknesses of the book: that you already know what's going to happen! When Perseus discovers exactly who and what the Medusa is, I thought to myself: "wait - how can he not know that already?" The myth of Medusa is so well-known, it seems strange that anyone (even the characters in her story) wouldn't know about her! But of course, I was reading from the point of view of a person who has known these stories for years - for a young reader just discovering the world of Greek myth, this is the perfect way in which to introduce them. McCaughrean takes us through all of Perseus's adventures: his encounters with the hideous Graeae and the beautiful nymphs, the accumulation of his god-given weaponry, his confrontation with Medusa and her sisters, his meeting with the Titan Atlas, the rescue of the beautiful Princess Andromeda from the sea-serpent, and the conclusion of his grandfather's long-awaited fate. Speaking of fate, McCaughrean weaves in an underlying theme of the immutability of fate and the despair that this can cause - yet manages to add in a glimmer of the hope that comes with free choice by the story's end. McCaughrean retains the sensuality that is so prevalent in Greek myths, without making it all too obvious (such as Danae's union with Zeus as he appears as falling gold through her window: "Coins and ingots and gold dust pelted her like hail so that she reeled and fell on her back and drew up her knees and cried out in fright. But it was not unpleasant - just a little startling"). Likewise, the author's prose throughout the story is wonderfully poetic and descriptive, from the beauties of Mount Olympus to the horror of the gorgons. It's quite reminiscent of Rosemary Sutcliffe actually. The tone shifts mid-way through the story, from grim seriousness of Perseus's youth and the fight with the gorgons to a lighter and more comic confrontation with Andromeda's people (the poor girl is tied up naked to a rock on the shore, having to listen to Perseus muse about whether she'd like to marry him: "Sir! I would marry your horse if it would save me from being eaten!") but it was probably wise to write "love at first sight" with a touch

of tongue-in-cheek. Basically, I read "Perseus" in one sitting, and felt that although it was a story well-known to me, I had experienced it in a new, refreshing light. For any young person just beginning to get interested in the world of myth, this would be the book to get them (this and McCaughrean's other retellings of Greek heroes: *Heroes: Hercules* (Heroes) and *Theseus* (Heroes)).

First I should point out that this is not a novelization of the classic myth of Perseus but rather a retelling. We do not really get into the thoughts of anyone but instead follow the story of Perseus as he slays Medusa, takes down Atlas, fights various kings, saves a princess, and kills a sea monster (not necessarily in that order). This book really helped to flesh out my knowledge of Perseus - all I knew came from a video game that I had played where he was one of the heroes you requested to slay Medusa. As this is a retelling of a myth, I'm not going to critique the character or plot development. At 160 pages (the hardback version) I think that this is a pretty sufficient retelling - you don't feel like you are losing out on anything. There is one thing that irritated me throughout the story - all of the pantheon of gods were referred to by their Greek names (like Zeus, Hera, and Artemis) with the exception of one - Hades was constantly referred to as Pluto, his Roman equivalent. This broke the continuity for me and was frustrating. I think to stick with the Greek names would have made the most sense as the story is taking place in Greece. While McCaughrean's books are intended for a YA audience, suggested for 4th - 8th grade, this was still the enjoyable read for an adult. It didn't feel like the story had been watered down for youths. I certainly am interested in checking out the other Heroes that she has written about. This was one of the best audiobook productions I have listened to in awhile. This is a full cast production. You have a different actor for each character - even the minor ones. This really helps to flesh out the characters even more and gives a good feel for their personalities - especially the gods. The storytelling was well paced and dramatic. There were tiny musical interludes between chapters - it reminded me of harp and drum music. This just helped to break up the chapters and didn't take away from the story - they were approximately 5 - 10 second clips. I would certainly listen to one of their productions again.

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