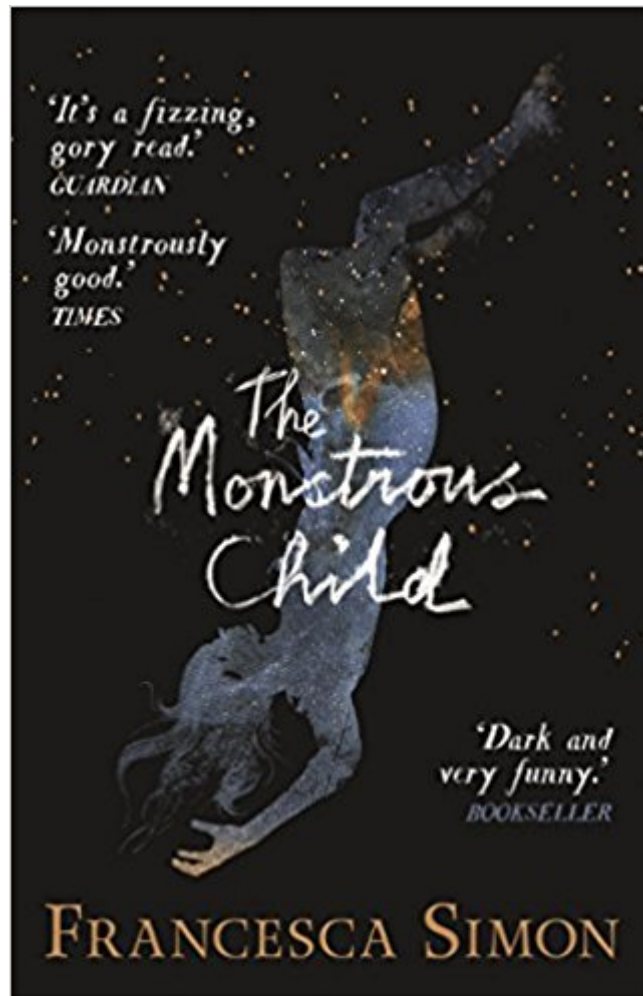




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The Monstrous Child



Synopsis

A stunning, operatic, epic drama, like no other. Meet Hel, an ordinary teenager and goddess of the Underworld. Why is life so unfair? Hel tries to make the best of it, creating gleaming halls in her dark kingdom and welcoming the dead who she is forced to host for eternity. Until eternity itself is threatened. Francesca's first and wonderful foray into teen.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 6 and up

Customer Reviews

"Hel, the protagonist of this deliciously fun YA debut from Simon (the Horrid Henry series), is the daughter of trickster god Loki and Angrboda the giantess. Hel was born a monster: while her top half is normal, she has the legs of a corpse. The Fates have foretold that Hel's brothers, Fenrir the wolf and Jormungand the snake, will kill Odin and Thor during Ragnarok, so the deities abduct the siblings and bring them to Asgard. Hel falls in love with the god Baldr, but her happiness is short-lived: Odin incapacitates Hel's kin, then ban-ishes her to Niflheim to rule the dead. By recasting the Norse queen of hell as a snarky, disaffected teenager, Simon makes the ancient relatable and adds humor to an otherwise grim and gruesome tale: "Let's pause and take a closer look at just some of Dad's children," Hel offers. "Eight legs (Sleipnir). Four legs (Fenrir). No legs (Jormungand). Corpse legs (yours truly)." Though the book is light on plot and narrative drive, it oozes style, and Simon's evocative

descriptions transport readers to the strange and brutal world of Norse myth." Ages 12-16. (June) Publishers Weekly "The darkly funny testament of an accidental teenage goddess of the dead. The Horrid Henry author's first foray into YA follows 14-year-old Hel, an eternal teenager who also happens to be the queen of the underworld. Her legs are in a permanent state of decay. Hel's parents put her in charge of all who enter, and she grows increasingly bitter, as she has nothing to occupy her mind aside from the dreams of a lost love, Baldr. All Hel wants is to be able to tell her story. This title is perfect for Percy Jackson lovers who are looking for their next read. Those who enjoy the young adult work of Neil Gaiman but are not old enough for his American Gods would also appreciate this book. As Simon includes many allusions to Norse mythology throughout, this could be incorporated in similar units of study in a language arts curriculum. Small illustrations at the beginning of each chapter will help readers keep the pages turning. VERDICT An excellent choice for young adult fans of all things mythology." School Library Journal "Mum's a giantess, Dad's a trickster god, and her brothers are fated to play major roles in ending the world; trapped in her fetid underworld, Hel (aka Goddess of the Dead) has had enough eternity, thanks, and she's about to tell you why. Jotunheim, land of the giants, leaves plenty to be desired. Snow, sleet, and howling winds scour the mountains. It's no Asgard. A seemingly ordinary girl on top, Hel's legs are in a permanent state of decay, blotched with gangrene, wrapped in bandages. Her father, Loki, rarely visits the family cave. But then the children are kidnapped and brought to golden Asgard, as Odin hopes to render her ill-fated brothers harmless, at least for now. At first overlooked, narrator Hel develops a huge crush on Baldr, a beautiful, kindly and married god, before Odin hurls her to Niflheim to rule over the dead. This permanent teen doesn't take her fate lying down at first. Failing to escape, she occupies herself constructing a palace for the dead and dreams of Baldr, fated to die eventually and come to her. But as years pass, she grows bitter and vengeful, and she doesn't hesitate to tell readers: "I have no friends. I don't want any friends. I'm fine by myself. I am cradled by hate and fury; I need no one." Hel's persuasive, compelling, brutally grim, and very funny voice drives the narrative. Seen from below, the Twilight of the Gods is neither tragic nor noble; it's long overdue." (Fantasy. 12-16) Kirkus Reviews "In this British import from the author of the Horrid Henry series, a young Norse goddess with an accursed affliction (she was born with the legs of a rotting corpse) is banished from Asgard to Niflheim, the underworld, to reign over the dead. Hel, the daughter of Loki and the giantess Angrboda, at first does her best by building an enormous hall and welcoming the dead, but she is consumed with thoughts of revenge against Odin and longing for Baldr, the lone god who was kind to her. Teenage Hel tells her story directly to the reader in first

person, with equal amounts bitter sarcasm, miserable whining, and cold rage. While Hel's anachronistic tone is modern, fast-paced, and funny, it grows tiresome, as there isn't much else to the story: this is more of a stylish monologue than a retelling. Readers may enjoy Hel's flippant insolence, aimed at adults, while others may find the quirky presentation of Norse mythology a good companion to Rick Riordan's Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard series. "Hel, Norse goddess of the Underworld, tells her story, on her terms, in THE MONSTROUS CHILD. Born in a cave with a snake and a wolf for brothers, Hel is the daughter of a giantess and of Loki, the god of mischief—it's no wonder that Hel is unusual too. While her torso is normal, her legs are those of a corpse. Her mother proves to be hateful, and her brothers are terrifying. Her absentee father appears and disappears for much of her life. She has never known affection; Baldr, a god, surprises her with that. But it cannot last. She is already jaded and cynical by the time that she comes to live among other gods, before she is cast down into the Underworld—a place she later names after herself. Hel's voice is definite and strong. She's a sarcastic and bitter lead, and unapologetic. Why should she be, when she was born half dead and sent to live with only the dead for companions? Hel often seems to be a victim of her circumstances—of her parentage, her rotting and painful form, and a lack of love. But she is also derisive of nearly everyone and sometimes seems suited to her awful fate. Most of the book takes place in the Underworld, where those who have not died in battle go to spend eternity. Not much happens in the land of the dead; Hel keeps it interesting, and her scenes hold attention. Hel's story is unique; her toughness carries the story, and her inner monologue is absorbing." Foreword Reviews

Francesca Simon is universally known for the staggeringly popular Horrid Henry series. These books and CDs have sold millions of copies worldwide and are published in 27 countries. She lives in North London with her family.

Hel's upper body and face are human, but her legs are those of a corpse. She's the child of a giantess and a god. All she wants is to be loved, but what she gets is the exact opposite. Her brothers are monstrous as well and she dislikes them. She doesn't get to spend much time with them though, as Hel's future has been decided, she's been given a domain to rule by herself. She has to be Queen of the Dead and will have to spend her time with rotting corpses, something she hates. Being consumed by anger and disgust Hel tries to survive in her own kingdom, where she'll have to remain until the end of time, but how long is that exactly? The Monstrous Child is a beautiful

story about mythology, decomposing flesh and complex family relationships. Hel laments, she's negative, she's annoyed and she's miffed. She never has any positive emotions. Francesca Simon writes about this intriguing main character in a fantastic humoristic way. Hel's complaining is always borderline irritating in a good way and that is what constantly made me smile. I absolutely loved her sarcasm and her dissatisfaction. She's a character whose behavior I didn't take literally, instead I took her story with a grain of salt and that's what made me enjoy it even more. Francesca Simon writes about fantastic mythical creatures in a vivid way. I was instantly fascinated by Hel's dysfunctional family. There are power plays and trickery and exclusion is something Hel knows everything about. I sometimes pitied her and felt sad for her, but her difficult personality made it impossible to sympathize with her. That's another thing I liked about this story, Hel is someone to dislike, but I really enjoyed reading about her and constantly felt conflicted. That kept me on my toes and I think Francesca Simon's ability to play with these opposites and stay in control is quite a skillful achievement. The Monstrous Child is a fabulous creative story. I loved Francesca Simon's gorgeous writing. Her sentences have a nice flow and she's great at choosing the exact right words for her descriptions. That made the story come to life very well. She even manages to describe Hel's colorless surroundings, where everything is dark, dead and decayed, in a colorful way. The Monstrous child is unusual, it's filled with surprises and unexpected twists and turns. I had a lot of fun reading this captivating story.

****I received this book free of charge in exchange for an honest review. Thank you to LibraryThing and Faber & Faber for this opportunity****I feel like this book had a lot of potential, then it tried to cover too much ground too quickly. In this book, Francesca Simon covers a plethora of myths, starting at Hel's birth and moving on towards Ragnarok. We meet a LOT of characters and we go through them all so quickly that with the exception of her giantess friend, we don't really get to know any of them enough to care. I understand this is the third book in a series, but I feel like the story would have been better served more fleshed out and over the course of several books. I really liked Hel's voice. She was angry and witty and sarcastic. Given her history, she had every right to be! Unfortunately, this anger also leads to a lot of ranting and rambling on Hel's part and it just got repetitive after a while. **HOWEVER.** I appreciate the fact that Simon chose to remain loyal to Norse mythology. This is not the story of an average teenage girl who eventually became Hel, Queen of the Underworld. Most mythology is weird. Gods are born in strange and precarious ways, and that is **EXACTLY** how Simon runs with the story. Hel's siblings are a snake and a wolf and yup, that's correct per the mythology. It's not what we'd normally see in fiction, but it's technically canon. Overall,

I did like this story, and I read it really quickly. It was interesting and witty and fun but there was a lot of room for improvement in the speed of the story, the fleshing out of the world and characters, and personally I think we could have done with a better dialogue/description balance. Plus, Hel never changed or matured... I felt like the character didn't grow at all. I don't know. I liked it, but it's definitely a two star book for me.

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