

## Epic of Helinthia

**MJ Pankey**

Muse and Quill Press

(387pp)

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*Set in an alternative ancient world, Epic of Helinthia is an exciting novel, filled with drama, mystery, fantasy, and hints of romance.*

In MJ Pankey's historical fantasy novel *Epic of Helinthia*, plotting rebels face human and godly threats as they try to save their homeland from ruin.

For years, the island of Helinthia has suffered under a tyrannical king and a patron goddess who seems to ignore her worshippers' prayers for rain and good harvests. Dargon, pious leader of one of the island's city-states, spearheads a plan to put the rightful ruler on the throne. This plan is made all the more risky by Dargon's own secrets and his allies' conflicts and distrust. What's more, the gods have their own plans for the island and its inhabitants—plans that Helinthia's suffering mortals must divine and counteract before it is too late.

Set in an Ancient Greece-inspired world where only a blessed few can see the gods and furies walking among them, the story follows two pairs of siblings—Dargon and his naïve, pampered sister Gonivein, whose visions warn of a dire threat to herself and her city. They have their disagreements, but they love each other regardless. Elsewhere, Kelric and Gadnor form a stark contrast: arrogant Kelric, Gonivein's betrothed, often belittles and mocks Gadnor, who must overcome his timidity to bring justice and compassion back to Helinthia. Each distinctive person clashes with others, making for tense interactions that are fraught with misunderstandings and battles of wills.

Meanwhile, Helinthia is built up as a once-beautiful place that has been reduced to dust and emptiness since her patron goddess's disappearance. Dargon and his companions travel through various heartbreaking settings featuring desolation, as well as a lush, enchanted forest that solves an immediate problem but may cause trouble in the future. In the midst of such want, the lavish wedding feast of a prospective ally is an effective, aesthetically pleasing scene in which moral contrasts are drawn.

The story lays out its clues in a deft fashion before revealing its secrets in the final chapters. By this point, the characters have come to a sober realization: their mission, and the world in general, is much more complex than they ever thought possible. Only by learning from tragic losses, overcoming terrifying betrayals, and perpetuating the most painful of lies can they hope to win the advantage over those who want the world to remain as it is.

From its harrowing first chapter to the firm, inspiring final lines, *Epic of Helinthia* is a memorable, high-stakes adventure—the first in a trilogy of fantasy novels in which mortals and immortals clash over the future of the island they all hold dear.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (April 10, 2023)

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