

Evil Speaks

S. Woffington

Red Summit Publishers (Feb 15, 2017)

Softcover \$14.99 (384pp)

978-1-944650-00-1

Classic elements are woven into this fast new adventure with plenty of twists, battles with monsters, and teenage attitude.

S. Woffington's fantasy novel, *Evil Speaks*, weaves suspense into an action-packed plot and brings characters from classic mythology into a modern adventure story.

After a series of sudden and threatening events, misfit Benny finds himself joined up with a team of other teens at a remote, special school. It turns out they all share a magical and dangerous background. Together the teens fight for their lives against mythical villains. After a rocky start, the boy who's always been a loner forms true, loyal friendships.

The dialogue between the young characters sounds true-to-life and is peppered with slang. There's a tension in the teens' relationships that feels appropriate to their situation—they are going through puberty with only a handful of peers in a tiny school with no television.

Characters are from an appealingly broad range of ethnic backgrounds, and their differing physical abilities result in a welcome embrace of diversity. The teen heroes each have a few defining characteristics to play off of. Similarly, a diverse array of mythologies is woven into the book.

Some characters are familiar and draw from world mythology, though Greek and Roman references dominate, including a thoughtful and offbeat school principal whose office is filled with owls. A wonderful series of scenes in the second half of the book finds the teens progressing through the underworld. Limbo and its inhabitants are vividly strange, and there are original, contemporary takes on mythological characters Charon and Cerberus.

Language is fresh and fun. Coffee in an FBI office is described as "strong enough to dissolve the hull of an aircraft carrier," and a mythical villain is described as "another no-shirt guy." There's some rich interplay between regular teenhood and classic mythology, like when no one knows what to pack for their trip to the underworld.

Benny's mom, Neeve, seems to possess the knowledge Benny needs in order to understand the true identity of his friends (and himself). Unfortunately, the bad guys kidnap Neeve early on, so for most of the book she is more of a plot object than a full character.

Some of the book's backstory is repetitive, such as requests to family elders for origin stories; this detracts from the otherwise fast-paced plot. Sometimes realism is compromised to serve the plot—a minor released to a stranger; a conveniently produced set of keys.

Evil Speaks features realistically flawed young heroes facing a challenge of literally mythical proportions. It weaves classic elements into a fast new adventure with plenty of twists, battles with monsters, and teenage attitude.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (April 27, 2017)

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