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Clarion Review ★★★★★ GENERAL FICTION

Herald

N.F. Houck
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Adventure sex power drama and the whole gamut of human emotions — has Hollywood ever fully exploited the richness of Greek mythology? N.F. Houck a nonfiction book editor and a lover of classical myth has done so with *Herald* an entertaining and instructive fictional autobiography the first of a planned trilogy.

Houck's narrator is the Olympian god Hermes who most recall as almighty Zeus's bastard son and messenger. Zeus often summoned Hermes to help hide his extra-marital shenanigans from his ever-jealous wife Hera. Hermes begins this memoir by recalling how he lulled Hera's spy Argus into a sleep so complete that every one of Argus's many eyes closed thus killing him. In the book's final episode Hermes details what he calls his "greatest accomplishment" at the behest of Zeus. He had long ago saved a fetus a half-brother who later became known as Dionysos from the burning body of the princess Semele another of Zeus's lovers who was victimized by Hera. With Athena and Apollo Hermes is asked by Zeus to bring Dionysos who has grown to become the much-adored patron of wine and unreason into the council of Olympian gods. Dionysos having little reason to trust in the family of Zeus and Hera greets Zeus's emissaries with the taunt "So Wisdom Wit and Reason have come to temper the hands of Madness have they?"

Readers will understand that Hermes was more than a gofer for the God of Thunder. He was a clever and amiable god a trickster and a mischief-maker. And with an ability to fly and to see the bodiless souls who wandered the earth Hermes was the psychopomp or soul guide for the dead who did not know their way to the Underworld. In this volume Hermes recalls many of his excursions below including those involving the goddess Persephone the lover Orpheus and his ill-fated bride and the reunion of Dionysos and his mother. Hermes was an independent spirit who spread his seed among goddesses nymphs and dryads. Hermes documents his awkward and painful affair with Aphrodite as he comes to understand why this off-and-on relationship with the goddess of Beauty could not work. And although Hermes swore off love when it came to humans he tells of his enchantment with the Athenian maiden Herse. This is the most touching part of the memoir as Hermes reveals the depths of his love as well as his capacity for despair.

Houck illustrates that as Hermes tells Perseus "gods and humans are the same except for magic and mortality." Given his super-human powers and the fact that ichor not blood flows in his veins Hermes is not all that unlike us. By showing a sometimes flawed and suffering being who must discover his place in his world Houck pulls in and holds readers. At the same time he adds color but stays true to the details of classical mythology.

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