

the legless Stumps, despite his great strength, could drag John's unconscious father off the rocky beach and all the way back to town strains credulity. Mawgan's ambiguous portrayal keeps us guessing until the end, but it is almost disappointing to discover that he is really a "good guy" who made one tragic mistake years ago. And John's father is no smuggler after all, but has simply been cheated by Spanish wine-merchants. Ultimately, we are left with a clear assortment of "good guys and bad guys"; there is no beguiling Long John Silver winking at us here.

Nevertheless, most readers will be too immersed in this breathless, dangerous world to notice such shortcomings. They'll be too busy flipping the pages to find out what happens next.

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Of Gorgons and Peanut Butter

Snake Dreamer. Priscilla Galloway. Stoddart Kids, 1998. 231 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-5981-6.

"Her plumage was like the rainbow, and her face was like the face of a nymph, only her eyebrows were knit, and her lips clenched, with everlasting pain...." Here, Charles Kingsley is describing Medusa the Gorgon as Perseus saw her seconds before he cut off her head. In literature, Medusa is known chiefly as a frightening, though mainly inactive, bit-player in Perseus's triumphant career. But unlike most other monsters of mythology, mere targets for glory-seeking demigods and heroes, she has a touching history, and despite her serpent tresses and petrifying visage, she is often accorded pathos, tormented beauty, and dignity, as in the Kingsley passage.

It is, therefore, a bit of a shock to find her dragged by her snaky locks into a prose equivalent of a B movie — Priscilla Galloway's *Snake Dreamer*, an adventure story about a present-day teenager improbably named Dusa who is borne off to a Greek island to be treated for convulsive dreams of snakes by formidable sisters, Teno and Yali Gordon, medical doctor and psychologist respectively. (Too late, Dusa recollects that the raging, grieving, immortal sisters of the slain Medusa were called Stheno and Euryale.) What has an awesome, sad character of antique myth to do with two brisk mistresses of modern skills and technologies and a young consumer of peanut butter and Hershey bars? Little that's credible.

Nevertheless, Galloway launches her grotesque story efficiently. Necessary tidbits of information and provocative hints are planted with care. In

spite of the characters' loaded names, the reader is held in doubt for a while, as is Dusa, about whether the multi-talented, seemingly empathetic sisters are what they claim to be — dedicated researchers into a specific sleep disorder — or shape-shifting gorgons with a wholly exploitive interest in their subject-patients. Once the author has to start showing her hand, however, suspense is increasingly eroded by unintended comedy, which turns black and ludicrous when the scholarly sisters resort to gruesome, primitive methods ... and achieve their Frankensteinian purpose.

Snake Dreamer transmits some whiffs of theme. It suggests, for instance, that maternal wisdom can live on through generations to thwart the stony-hearted. However, the book's brevity and Galloway's concentration on action hinder thematic development. And some spellings-out of unnecessary, cluttering details, such as the precise location of a plane seat, waste words and subvert effective emphasis.

This mixture of heterogeneous ingredients isn't exactly a dud novel. It has its excitements. But lovers of the majestic, the heroic, the tragic, and the terrible in classical stories are likely to find reading it a jangling experience.

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Liberating Tale or Cultural Appropriation?

Clever Lazy. Joan Bodger. Illus. Chum McLeod. Tundra, 1997. 204 pp. \$8.99 paper. ISBN 0-88776-418-5.

Clever Lazy is a cleverly-crafted young adult novel about a girl "in a land that might have been ancient China" who grows up to be the Court Inventor for the Emperor. As a feminist fable about the strength of women in the face of patriarchal oppression, this tale works very well, but as a rewriting of the earlier book, *Clever-Lazy, The Girl Who Invented Herself* (1979), its eurocentric use of Chinese culture is at the very least somewhat anachronistic.

The protagonist, Clever Lazy, first shows her inventive powers when, as a young child, she designs an abacus. Her indulgent parents shelter Clever Lazy from mundane housework so that she can devote more time to developing her special talent. They also kindle in their daughter a great reverence for the Goddess of the Dancing Mountains whose wisdom, passed on through Clever Lazy's mother, helps the girl on several occasions to make difficult choices between good and evil. When Clever Lazy reaches adolescence, her parents die from disease and famine, so she goes to the city to live with her wicked, widowed aunt who runs a shop near the Emperor's palace. Clever