

Indie



ARTHUR SMITH

YE GODS

IN THIS SUPERHERO-saturated pop culture moment, pundits regularly make the case that today's caped crusaders are the modern era's equivalent of the mythological gods and heroes who fired imaginations and served as aspirational figures millennia ago. An iconoclastic clutch of recent Indie titles goes back to the source, blending ancient figures of legend with contemporary action and adventure tropes in a way that, ironically enough, feels fresh. Keep your irradiated spiders, arc-reactor tech, and super-soldier serums—Medusa brings snake hair to the party. That's right: Her hair is snakes. Where's her franchise?

Perhaps it will begin with the 2022 novel *Protectress* by Kendra Preston Leonard, in which the gorgon works as a humanities professor and protects

women as a Batman-like vigilante. A worthy nemesis arises in the form of slut-shaming Athena, an ostensibly feminist deity who in actuality supports patriarchy. Our starred review notes that the novella-length prose poem “urges women to care for one another and reconsider the ways their perceptions of female identity are shaped” and calls the book a “clever, illuminating feminist take on Greek mythology.”

Rod Vick's *The Book of Invasions* (2022) looks to the pantheon of ancient Egypt (the Rolling Stones to Mount Olympus' Beatles?) for a paranormal adventure our starred review calls

“*Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* meets *Indiana Jones*,” in which an alcoholic archaeologist is swept up in an international race against cultists for the legendary Egyptian secret of life and death after receiving a priceless map. “A grand spirit of master storytelling hangs over the novel, and readers will be glad to go along for the ride.”

Detective Death (2023) by Darius Ebrahimi features a Persian god named Zarik who is compelled to carry out the killings ordered by those who summon him. Our starred review asserts that “While Ebrahimi constructs a solid mystery, the novel's biggest draw is its cast—the dual protagonists in particular are exceedingly and delightfully complicated.”

Indigenous American myths provide the inspiration for Fiona Wimber's *Bridge of the Gods* (2023), in which immortal brothers Wyeast and Pathoe defend humanity against encroaching demons—when not clashing with each other over the object of their mutual affection, a woman named Loowit. Our reviewer calls their saga “an

enthraling, densely packed, historically rich tale.”

Kim Conrey's *Nicholas Eternal* (2023) features another immortal hero: St. Nicholas, who, despite multiple centuries of heroic actions, has grown emotionally numb and withdrawn. He is pulled from his torpor by the plight of Atlanta homeless shelter manager Noory Abramson. Together, they (along with John, of Jesus' 12 disciples) contend with a conspiracy that could lead to Heaven on Earth or plunge the world into Hell. Our review praises the novel's “witty and lighthearted edge” and pronounces the story “An absorbing, character-driven paranormal tale.”

Catching Souls for Beelzebub by Gordon Haynes (2023) takes a decidedly more diabolical approach; the title character, an agreeable administrator fondly referred to as “Mr. Beel,” charges his top agent, Abel, with the task of retrieving two escaped evil souls, who have returned to Earth and hijacked the bodies of innocent living humans. Our review characterizes the narrative as “A delightful otherworldly story with a zingy assortment of characters”; is it going too far to say it's a Hell of a good read?

Arthur Smith is an Indie editor.

