

Neal Shusterman

Dread Locks (Dark Fusion, 1)

United States (2005)

TAGS: [Medusa](#) [Perseus](#)



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General information	
Title of the work	Dread Locks (Dark Fusion, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2005
First Edition Details	Neal Shusterman, <i>Dark Fusion. Dread Locks</i> . New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2005, 164 pp.
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Genre	Horror fiction, Magic realist fiction, Mythological fiction, Novels, Thrillers Fiction
Target Audience	Young adults
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Creators



Neal Shusterman , b. 1962

Neal Shusterman by Hillel Steinberg. Retrieved from [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/hillelsteinberg/1344444444/), licensed under Creative Commons [Attribution-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/) (accessed: December 15, 2021). Copyright: (c) 2019 Hillel Steinberg.

Neal Shusterman was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1962 to a working class family. He began writing in ninth grade, on the encouragement of a teacher. He studied at the University of California, Irvine, before working as an editor. He lives in California, and has four children. His first novel was published soon after his graduation, and he has written numerous novels, film and television scripts. Shusterman's work can broadly be described as philosophically-inclined magic realism, fantasy, or science fiction for young readers, often with an interest in morality, individuality, socialization at school or in families.

Sources:

[successtory.com](https://www.successtory.com/) (accessed: June 24, 2018);

Author [website](#) (accessed: July 6, 2018);

Author [Tumblr](#) (accessed: July 6, 2018);

Author [Goodreads](#) (accessed: July 6, 2018).

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

Dark Fusion 2: *Red Rider's Hood* (2005).

Dark Fusion 3: *Duckling Ugly* (2006).

Summary

Wealthy American boy Parker Baer has just turned 15. His parents give him a statue of himself as a present, prompting him to reflect that he now has everything he will ever want or need, and to dwell on a growing sense of detachment from his family and his world. Mysterious new neighbour, Tara, moves into the decaying mansion next door, bringing with her thirteen vans full of statues. As the action proceeds, it becomes clear that Tara is a Gorgon, the original Medusa. She works her powers on Parker's friends and family, gradually turning them to stone. Initial symptoms include paleness, lethargy, drinking copious amounts of milk (for calcium), and eating dirt. Parker is attracted to Tara, and to the sense of power his association with her gives him. She encourages him to reckless behaviour, such as riding his trail bike off the edge of "Darwin's Curve," a stretch of road near a ravine. Parker, who has been prone to anomie and a sense of hopelessness, largely related to an aimless existence in a wealthy family, likes the danger and excitement Tara represents.

Eventually, Parker realises what she has been doing. He consults the sculptor who made his statue at the opening of the novel and discovers that the statues in Tara's mansion are in fact her petrified victims. Meanwhile, Tara has been gradually turning Parker into a Gorgon himself, pulling his hair into snaky curls, which come alive as his transformation grows. When Parker confronts her, she invites him to live forever with her as Gorgons, feeding on the energy of others. She is lonely in her life as an immortal Gorgon (who has escaped Perseus – "he tried [to cut her head off] but he couldn't resist looking") and looking for a companion. Parker is tempted – as he becomes a Gorgon himself, he receives energy from petrifying animals, and he feels the lure of petrifying the other kids at his school. But when he accidentally looks directly at his friend Dante, and when he sees his brother and sister have been petrified by Tara, he realises he must act.

Tara releases his sister and brother (by cutting off two of her own snaky locks); then, Parker goes with her to a secret place, an



abandoned oilfield with oil derricks that Tara has decorated to look like monsters. There, he looks directly into her eyes. The two are petrified forever in this hidden oilfield. "if the night brings stars I cannot see them, for all I see is her, Tara. My friend. My enemy. My victim and my destroyer - our eyes fused in a frozen gaze until the rains erode the frozen stone of our bodies. . . . until our hardened flesh is turned to stand and carried off, grain by grain, by the wind."

Analysis

Dread Locks is a young adult horror novel that plays with the conceit that the Gorgon evaded Perseus's sword, and is living out eternity, feeding on victims by freezing them. Shusterman uses the concept to think about different ways that people are "hardened" by experience. Parker Baer is hardened by affluence: used to getting what he wants instantly, he is impatient with delays and intolerant of others. Tara, who appears like a typical "golden girl," with her golden locks, seems attracted to Parker's arrogance. Much of the novel plays with the typical setting of an American high school novel: the mean girls, the sporting star, the different layers of social strata, and Tara's exploitation of the high school strata initially make her appeal to Parker. As the novel progresses, Parker gains some sympathy for others, even as he also becomes increasingly arrogant.

Dread Locks also plays with the fairy tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Tara's golden curls, and her invasion of the Baer household (eating their cereal, breaking a chair, sleeping in Parker's bed), interweave with the imagery of Medusa's snaky hair. The story invites reflection on what Goldilocks's invasion of their home might mean for the family of bears in the tale (who is the predator, and who is the prey?).

Overall, *Dread Locks* uses the concepts of petrification and predators to talk about aspects of the human condition: the things that harden people (power, wealth, arrogance, disconnection), and the effect of power on the human heart.

Classical, Mythological,
Traditional Motifs,
Characters, and
Concepts

[Medusa Perseus](#)



Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: Dread Locks (Dark Fusion, 1) by Neal Shusterman ", peer-reviewed by Miriam Riverlea and Daniel A. Nkemeke. *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/128>. Entry version as of February 21, 2026.

Other Motifs, Figures,
and Concepts Relevant
for Children and Youth
Culture

[Character traits](#) [Coming of age](#) [Emotions](#) [Family](#) [Friendship](#) [Sacrifice](#)
[School](#) [Self](#)

