Charlotte Farrell, "Entry on: The Medusa Doll (Michael Dahl Presents: Scary Stories, 2) by Steve Brezenoff, Neil Evans", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1329. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Steve Brezenoff , Neil Evans

# The Medusa Doll (Michael Dahl Presents: Scary Stories, 2)

*United States of America (2021)*

TAGS: Dionysus / Dionysos Hera Jason Medusa Zeus






*We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.*

| General information | |
|---|---|
| *Title of the work* | The Medusa Doll (Michael Dahl Presents: Scary Stories, 2) |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United States of America |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | United States of America |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Date* | 2021 |
| *First Edition Details* | Steve Brezenoff, *The Medusa Doll*. Minnesota: Capstone, 2021, 67 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 9781496598912 |
| *Genre* | Chapter book* |
| *Target Audience* | Children (8–12 years) |
| *Author of the Entry* | Charlotte Farrell, University of New England, charlottefarrell@gmail.com |
| *Peer-reviewer of the Entry* | Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au<br>Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il |



This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

## Creators



### Steve Brezenoff (Author)

Steve Brezenoff is a young adult fiction writer born in Long Island, New York. He is the author of *Guy in Real Life*; *The Absolute Value of -1*; and *Brooklyn Burning*. For younger readers he has written the series "Field Trip Mysteries", "Ravens Pass", and "Return to the Titanic", as well as more than fifty chapter books. His young adult fiction has won several awards and accolades including the IPPY Gold Medal and the ForeWord Book of the Year Gold Medal. He studied at SUNY Binghamton and is currently based in Minneapolis.

Sources:

Author's website (accessed: August 3, 2021).

Author's entry on Harper Collins (accessed: August 3, 2021).

Author's entry on Capstone (accessed: August 3, 2021).

Bio prepared by Charlotte Farrell, University of New England, charlottefarrell@gmail.com



### Neil Evans (Illustrator)

Neil Evans is a Welsh children's book illustrator and comic artist who formerly worked under the pseudonym "Nelson Evergreen". His illustrations have been included in publications by Bloomsbury, Oxford University Press, Puffin, Templar, Barrington Stoke, Capstone, Pearson, Macmillan, Andersen Press, Heinemann, Parragon, Miles Kelly, Graphic Classics, Doublesix Games, and Monster co.uk. Evans



This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

specializes in character development captured through expression and body language, as well as illustrating other-worldly environments. He lives in the South of England.

Sources:

Auhtor's webstie (accessed: August 3, 2021).

Auhtor's profile on LinkedIn (accessed: August 3, 2021).

Auhtor's profile on Top Shelf Productions (accessed: August 3, 2021).

Bio prepared by Charlotte Farrell, University of New England, charlottefarrell@gmail.com



This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

## Additional information

Summary

This book is part of the "scary stories" series curated by children fiction author, Michael Dahl. In this short, action-packed installment by Steve Brezenoff, the reader is introduced to the aptly-named hero, Jason Argo. He has a passion for collecting figurines of Olympian Gods. His friend, Wilky Augustine, gives him a magnificent figurine of Zeus at his twelfth birthday party. Jason is thrilled to add the "most powerful and most famous" (p. 8) Greek God to his collection.

At his birthday, he is also given a statue of Medusa by his aloof and mysterious Aunt, Amy. Immediately upon receiving the gift, his blood turns cold and his mind becomes foggy. Spooked, he offloads the gift to Wilky who initially doesn't seem as affected by the doll as Jason is. The next day, Jason discovers Wilky in a coma-like state, clutching the Medusa doll in his hand as he lies prostrate on his bed. Jason tears the doll from Wilky's grip and enlists the help of the local toy store owner, Dolores "Dolly" Threadbare to conquer the evil Medusa.

After failed attempts to destroy Medusa, Dolly gives Jason a Perseus doll. Jason rushes home and places the two dolls in a bag together. After some frenetic movement and ear-piercing screams, Perseus emerges from the bag, holding a sack with Medusa's head inside, but her body is nowhere to be found. Pegasus, the snow-white winged horse, emerges from the bag. Jason explains to his mother that in the myth the horse was born out of Medusa's neck. In this version, too, Pegasus presumably erupted from Medusa's flesh as she was defeated.

Jason's Aunt Amy returns to the house at the end of the book, to see Jason holding the Pegasus figurine. She congratulates him on solving the mystery, explaining that that was the only way to access the Pegasus toy. Jason, shocked that his Aunt knew of Medusa's unyielding power all along, is comforted by his mother who explains that Amy has always had a propensity for giving unusual, spooky presents.

Analysis

This book covers a lot of mythological ground in a small space, making its classical content engaging and relevant to the young adult reader. Inviting comparisons with R. L. Stine's *Goosebumps*, *The Medusa Doll*



This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

is part of a series of scary stories presented by children's author Michael Dahl where he selects "authors he loves" (p. 3) to contribute to the collection. In Steve Brezenoff's contribution, there is a balance of scarier elements in a fast-paced, action-packed narrative, as well as thoughtfully employed mythological references.

Through the figurines on Jason's shelf, the reader is introduced to eleven of the twelve Gods of Olympus: Zeus, Hera, Artemis, Apollo, Poseidon, Athena, Hestia, Ares, Demeter, Aphrodite and Hermes. In keeping with the book's swift and energised pace, the author eruditely touches upon each of the gods' roles and their mythological background without delving into them in any great detail. Dionysus is omitted from the figurine collection, Jason suggests humorously, because "they don't think kids should buy toys that drink wine" (p. 22). Jason demonstrates a passion for, and impressive knowledge of Greek mythology through his relationship with his figurines. In this respect, the book uses Jason's collecting of objects - a common hobby of children in the age group at which the book is aimed - to animate the mythological content to appeal to the young reader.

A critical moment in the book is when Jason places Perseus on the shelf with the Greek gods before he defeats Medusa. The stakes are high in this moment, as Jason needs to overcome Medusa in order to save his best friend, Wilky, who is gravely ill. After placing Perseus on the shelf, blinding light shines before he is revealed to be holding several gifts from the gods: a large sword from Zeus, Hermes' winged sandals, and a shield from Artemis. This diverges from the myth in that only Hermes and Artemis gave Perseus his weapons and protection to fight Medusa, not Zeus. This addition in *The Medusa Doll* endows the gift that Wilky gave Jason at the beginning of the book – the Zeus figurine – with special meaning and narrative significance. It also shifts the emphasis on Jason being the primary hero, to his friend being key to the problem being solved as well.

Perseus' transformation furnishes him with the weapons and protection he needs to defeat Medusa. Zeus' sword is ultimately what rescues Wilky from his coma-like state, as well as Jason's knowledge of the myths (much of which he has ironically gleaned from an earlier gift from his Aunt Amy - a book about the Olympian Gods). Placing Perseus in the bag with Medusa veils the reader from direct violence or bloodshed, leaving the action to their imagination. Ultimately, Jason triumphantly draws on his knowledge of the myth by engaging the Perseus figurine to conquer Medusa. Mythologically, when Medusa



This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

was defeated, the giant, Chrysaor, along with Pegasus was born from her body through her death. This omission places emphasis on Jason's "prize" of the winged horse, where a figurine of a giant would perhaps be less applicable or exciting to him.

It can be said that Jason's Aunt Amy may stand in for an Athena-like figure in the book, given that she was the Goddess of battle-strategy and wisdom. Yet Aunt Amy's malevolence may also connect her to the villainous Amy Madison from the Buffy comic books. Suffice to say, the elements of fantasy in the book connect it to the magical elements of Greek myths, all within the context of a contemporary child's daily life. This book shows that themes of transformation, curses, and battles so central to the Medusa myth can be engaging for young adults, particularly when these aspects are contemporised as they are in this book. In this respect, *The Medusa Doll* draws some comparison with the "Harry Potter" and "Percy Jackson" series, yet its brevity and condensed length, along with its particular use of "scary story" tropes for children, are part of what distinguishes it from these titles.

The classical Greek myth of Medusa exists in relation to and alongside Jason's life in *The Medusa Doll*. It is not a retelling of the Greek myth as such, but a reanimation of the tale of Medusa interwoven with the primary narrative. The author shows fidelity to many aspects of the myth (i.e. Medusa's ability to turn people to stone through her gaze, the gods furnishing Perseus with weapons and protection) while taking creative liberty with it in ways that are accessible and applicable to a child's life. *The Medusa Doll* includes discussion and writing prompts at the end of the book, some of which invite the young reader to further delve into its mythological content. The direct and indirect mythological references in the book give it broad appeal to readers with prior knowledge of Greek mythology as well as those that are new to the subject.

| | |
|---|---|
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Dionysus / Dionysos Hera Jason Medusa Zeus |
| Other Motifs, Figures, | Intellect Knowledge |



This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Further Reading

Lester, Cat, "Giving kids Goosebumps: uncanny aesthetics, cyclic structures and anti-didacticism in children's horror anthology series", in Stacey Abbott and Lorna Jowet, eds., *Global TV Horror*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021, 121–136.

McCort, Jessica R., "Why Horror? (Or, The Importance of Being Frightened)", in Jessica R. McCort, ed., *Reading in the Dark: Horror in Children's Literature and Culture*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016, 3–36.



This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.