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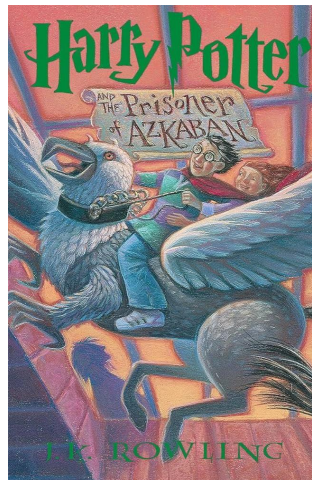
The Realms of Heroism in Fantasy

No matter the time or place, there is one archetype that can be found within literature, the hero. When the days are looking dire, problems causing people to fret, or someone in need of a guardian, a hero is sought. Young adult literature can serve as a reminder to the teens that sometimes they don't need to wait for someone to save the day, but rather it could be an adolescent as well. Stories from young adult fantasy are a great way to plant the idea that age isn't a limit to making a change. Fantasy books in particular often push courageous young characters into incredible challenges while also giving them extraordinary powers and skills to overcome the task. Heroic fantasy stories can be found as far back as some epics like *Beowulf*, to 20th century novels like J.R.R Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, and contemporary superheroes most commonly found within comic books. A commonality found within the many fantasy books I've read throughout all my life is a grand conflict that a single character or a team must face. With social media being popular among teens as a way to see the countless issues plaguing the world such as war and a worsening, the escapism found within fantasy is also a great way to ease the mind. At the same time, being a hero isn't always an easy task, as making critical choices that have massive ramifications upon themselves and the lives of other people.

The fantasy books I've chosen contain elements of magic, grand societies, monsters, and good battling evil. Some of the books have more overt cases of heroism such as Percy Jackson going out of his way to retrieve the Golden Fleece to protect

Camp Half-Blood. Meanwhile, a few of the books have the characters reluctantly take the role, or inadvertently fit into the mold through their actions. My samples come from a range of the distant past, worlds out of sync with our own, and times from a far flung future.

1. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999.)



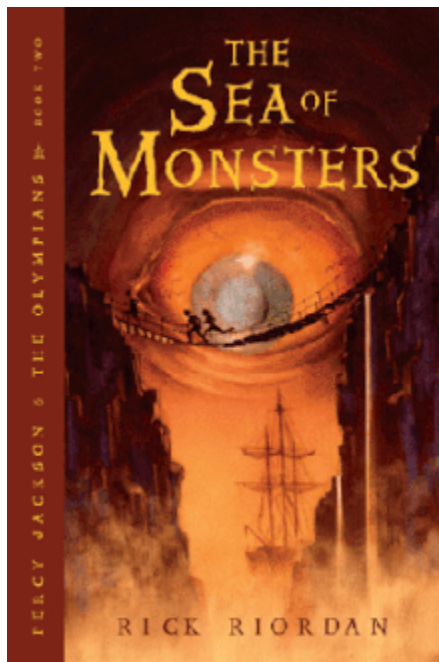
Harry Potter is a 13-year old boy attending the magical school of Hogwarts with his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Trouble strikes when the supposedly dangerous Sirius Black escapes his imprisonment, and is seeking Harry. Eventually, Harry learns the truth that Black is innocent of the crimes he was charged with, and sets off in a time traveling escapade in order to save the life of a man dismissed as evil from the happiness draining dementors.

The Prisoner of Azkaban is a strong case of a teenager stepping up to protect someone (in this case Sirius Black) from evil forces with the power of magic. Additionally, Harry is going out of his way to help someone that has brought great trouble into his life

for about a year. When measured by the Exeter Qualities, the book notably fulfills Quality #4 by providing an atypical experience that adolescents can apply to their own lives. J.K. Rowling's story is an example of how the dismissed may be innocent and in need of a defender.

2. *The Sea of Monsters* (Riordan, Rick. *The Sea of Monsters*. Disney-Hyperion Books, 2013.)

I read this book back in 2013, but don't remember enough details to provide my own full summary. The summary written is adapted from Goodreads.



Set after the events of *The Lightning Thief*, demigod Percy Jackson befriends a kid named Tyson at the end of his 7th-grade year. Upon discovering that his other school, Camp Half-Blood is under attack by monsters due to the loss of its magical barrier, he thrusts himself into a quest to ensure the protection of the camp. Teaming up with his friends Annabelle, Grover, Tyson (who's actually a cyclops), and Clarisse, Percy goes on a

quest of uncovering truths as well as retrieving the Golden Fleece to restore Camp Half-Blood's defenses.

Percy Jackson's quest to save a place that he cherishes is a heroic act in full. A highlight of the book is the close bond the protagonist has with Annabelle, Tyson, and Grover. Without the help of his allies like Tyson, Percy never would've been able to snatch the relic he needed to save the day. Also, the act of going out of the way to protect the wellbeing of an entire camp's worth of people is a grand act that is admirable.

3. *Beowulf* (*Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. Translated by Seamus Heaney. Norton, 2000)

An epic poem from the English early middle ages, a young man by the name of Beowulf arrives to assist in the slaying of the terrible Grendel, a monster that terrorizes a kingdom. Beowulf succeeds in slaying the Grendel with his bare hands, and even slays the monster's vengeful mother. Decades later, the warrior turned old ruler fights one last time against a dragon to protect his people, dying in the process.

Due to being one of the oldest and highly regarded pieces of epic fantasy literature, *Beowulf* serves an important role within the canon of great heroes. Beowulf as a young adult fantasy hero works with his age being ambiguous enough to be slotted into the age range of a late teenager. On top of that, Beowulf's courage in the face of several monsters sets an example for teenagers that sometimes a person needs to be somewhat self-sacrificing in spite of the terribleness of the situation in order to protect others.

4. *Sword in the Stars: A Once and Future Novel* (McCarthy, Cori, and A.R. Capetta.

Sword in the Stars: A Once & Future Novel. Jimmy Patterson, 2020.)

The close-knit party of 22nd Century freedom fighters consisting of Ari, Gwen, Jordan, Lam, Val, and the wizard Merlin time travel back to the time of the legend of King Arthur in the hopes of retrieving a chalice to finally defeat the overwhelming power of the Mercer corporation in the present. In their foray into the past, the team must not only survive the experiences in the past, but also have to take care not to radically alter the events of history. However, trouble ensues as Gwen's pregnancy rapidly progresses and Ari is forced to take on the mantle of Lancelot. Chief among their issues is Merlin growing younger with every use of his magic, and having to confront his more feral past self. As the group's odds grow more slim, they give it their all, learning in their adventures what heroism, fate, change, and family truly means.

A unique aspect of this book is how it addresses how the idea of a hero can be more than just a male hero that fixes everything by beating things up. Merlin's choice to spare and give his lifelong rival Nimue a second chance shows that being a hero doesn't always default to violence, but rather kindness. Additionally, the novel excels at fulfilling Exeter Quality #3 of possessing strong female protagonists through the usage of Ari.

5. *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001.)

I have not read this book, summary is adapted from Amazon

A prelude to the *Lord of the Rings* series, *The Hobbit* features the reclusive Bilbo Baggins reluctantly going on an adventure after meeting Gandalf. His adventure sees him

infiltrating his way to a treasure mound protected by the dragon Smaug. However, in his quest, Bilbo ends up meeting more intriguing things than just a dragon.

Bilbo works as a character that many teenagers could implant themselves in since his life at the start where he is living an unremarkable life. Because of its transition from a dull life into an exciting adventure, *The Hobbit* also fits with Exeter Quality #4 non-typical experiences that could be applied somewhere in life. As a hero, Bilbo fits into the archetype of the reluctant hero that accepts an intimidating task.

6. *Six of Crows* (Bardugo, Leigh. *Six of Crows*. Henry Holt and Company, 2015.)

I have not read this novel, summary is based off of fellow classmate's Ashely Goard's Book Talk

Set in a world where magic is present, the users called "Grisha" enjoy the boons of magic usage. However, the introduction of a drug called "jurda parem" allows the enhancement of a Grisha's magic power but to the detriment of their health. A young criminal by the name of Kaz Brekker is tasked with breaking out the creator of the drug out of a seemingly impenetrable stronghold with the help of a gang of misfits for a large cash prize (and to ensure that magic is ruined).

Six of Crows features a cast of characters who, while not overtly heroic in their motivations, end up taking on a mission that would better the world. Also, an attractive point for this book would be the team dynamics of the book. An important detail about a team up quest is that sometimes it'll be made up by members with wildly different backgrounds. On top of that, the novel's band of heroes also show how the reward at the

end of a mission isn't always the most valuable thing, but rather what was created in the process of getting it.

7. *Champions #22-27 (except #24)* (Zub, Jim, writer. *Champions #22-27*. Dunbar, Max, artist, Librandia, Kevin, artist, Izaakse, Sean, artist. New York: Marvel Comics, 2018. Print)

The teenage superhero team "The Champions" find themselves in trouble when two of their teammates (one of them with no powers) are whisked away by the mystical being called "Man-Thing." In order to save their missing friends, the rest of the teammates go in after them and find themselves in a dimension called "Weirdworld," a fantastical place. With the majority of the heroes scattered, histories changed, and oblivious to their true identity, the unaffected Ironheart must save her friends from this bizarre place.

One of the major reasons I chose this book is its unique style of being a series of graphic novels. I believe it would be more accessible to younger students, in addition to the inclusion of familiar superheroes like Spider-Man (Miles Morales). In terms of heroism, the multitude of superpowered heroes contrasts well with the powerless character of Sam Alexander. As a character, Sam has to admit that there is more to being a hero than having fancy mystical powers or technology. The set of comic books fulfill all the Exeter Qualities, with the main highlight of possessing a strong female protagonist as the main viewpoint through Ironheart.

8. *The Cruel Prince* (Black, Holly. *The Cruel Prince*. Little, Brown and Company, 2018.)

I did not read this book, summary is based off fellow classmate Hannah Le's Book Talk

The siblings Jude and her twin sister Taryn, as well as her half sister Vivi are taken to Faerieland after the murder of their parents. For ten years onwards the sisters live a life of trying to blend in a world hostile to their kind. However, things become heated when tries to find her way into the Court, ending up as a spy in the midst of all the drama.

As a heroic fantasy novel, I could see *The Cruel Prince* fitting in with the main character of Jude bravely trying to make her way up the social ladder against terrible odds. An important aspect of teenage heroism in fantasy is the ability to make a change, and Jude appears to do so in a rather chaotic manner. The way Jude manages to come out with some sort of victory is a good case of an underdog coming from seemingly small origins. Of course, this novel qualifies for Exeter Quality #3, doing so very well due to being the center of attention as the sole protagonist, not having her time cut up by being alongside a male co-lead.

9. *Six Crimson Cranes* (Lim, Elizabeth. *Six Crimson Cranes*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2021.)

I did not read this book, I based this summary off of Goodreads

Shiori the princess of Kiata accidentally unleashes her forbidden magic abilities during her betrothal ceremony, alerting her sinister stepmother Raikama. As punishment for her magic, Shiori's six brothers are turned into cranes, and to make things worse, she is banished as well as forbidden to speak. With trouble in tow, Shiori must use the magic she's been holding back all her life to save her brothers and her kingdom.

I felt the mixture of both hiding a true self and the heroic act of saving so many people to be a strong premise. An important aspect necessary in being able to save the day is being able to be content with inner identity, which in Shiori's case would be the

magic she has been suppressing. The addition of Shiori being unable to speak or else one of her brothers die is a unique twist that heightens tension, resulting in it fulfilling Exeter Quality #2 in addition to #3.

10. *The Nature of Witches* (Griffin, Rachel. *The Nature of Witches*. Sourcebooks Fire, 2022.)

I have not read this book, I based this summary off of Goodreads

In the world of *The Nature of Witches*, witches are the keepers of the climate, but lately their powers have waned. However, the existence of Clara, an Everwitch with access to all four seasons brings hope. Unfortunately, Clara has little love for her powers, and has little choice but to step up to the role and save the world at the potential cost of losing her beloved Sang.

The idea of the reluctant hero is something that would likely resonate among many teenagers. Realizing that sometimes heroics at a cost are a necessity is a major point that would be valuable to young adults. At the same time, it is also a feature that young adults can find themselves in the bleak future that the book bases its conflict on, climate change.

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