

Orpheus and Eurydice, the Trojan Horse and the Labours of Heracles, each told in six pages. Interspersed are pages illustrating the main gods, heroes, heroines and mythical creatures (the deadlier the better!).

What made this book so compelling for me (as someone who is familiar with the myths) was the casual humour. Here are some examples. When Kronos heard that one of his children would overthrow him 'So, naturally, he started to eat them'. That 'naturally' is very

clever! One of the young Athenians in the queue to be fed to the Minotaur cries out 'But I've got a note from my mum'. When Perseus gets out of the box (his first words are 'I need a wee') and is out fishing with Diktys, he asks 'What sort of fish is this?' to which the fisherman (in pirate mode for some bizarre reason) replies 'Argh, that'd be a sandal, lad'. Orpheus' comment on entering Tartarus is 'I'm just visiting. Love what you've done with the place'. And there's a note pinned to the Wooden Horse: 'Dear Paris, we give up. Sorry about all that war. Here's horse for you – it's a Greek tradition – honest. See you soon, (signed) Odysseus'.

This really is a book for everyone, from primary school children to the most gnarled of old gnarled Classicists. It's the ideal present.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631022000472

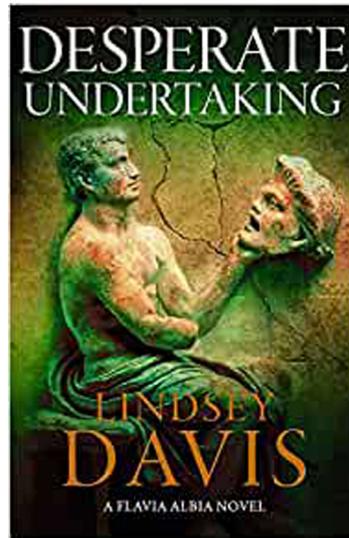
Desperate Undertaking

Davis (L.) pp. xii+402. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2022. Cased, £20. ISBN: 978-1-259-35468-3

J. M. Lashly

Former Head of Classics, Shrewsbury High School, UK
jolashly@gmail.com

Firstly, I should say that I very much enjoyed this book. Several years ago, I read the Falco stories, but I had missed the more recent ones involving Flavia Albia, so I was interested to see if the 'new' character held up. She did. The story is set in AD 89 when Rome is under the rule of Tacitus' hated emperor, Domitian, and Flavia Albia is caught up in the investigation of several gruesome, myth-related murders associated with a troupe of actors known to her adopted parents, Marcus Didius Falco and the senator's daughter, Helena Justina. Davis is experienced in complex plots and, as in all good detective stories, clues are scattered from page one, although I had not completely guessed who the perpetrator was until Flavia Albia did, and I am an old hand at Marple and Poirot stories! The action happens largely in the Campus Martius of Rome and in the numerous theatres, public spaces and racetracks there – a handy map is



provided to allow the reader to plot the course of the action, and there is plenty of background information about the various structures, which are well integrated into the story, rather than clumsily inserted as they sometimes can be. Flavia Albia is British by birth, and her reaction to Roman architecture, and indeed culture, is that of an outsider (as we are), so the careful descriptions and explanations are welcome, as well as providing much needed relief from the horror of the case. I wondered at first whether there was too

much gore (so careful do teachers now have to be of their charges), but, on reflection, no needless detail is given and those that have knowledge of the myths will be well aware of the detail anyway. There is also plenty for ancient theatre buffs to enjoy; references to Plautus' *Rudens* and the construction (or lack of) in Roman comedies is discussed by some of the minor characters, which does rather bring the whole thing to life. We sometimes forget that the Romans and Greeks that we study in class were real people, who had everyday problems and who would have had views about the entertainment they were offered; but this may not be the sort of criticism we see in the textbooks. These plays are seen from the viewpoint of the actors who took part in them, and actors are often the best critics of a playwright's work since literary excellence does not always work in practice on the stage. I definitely think this would be a good addition to a school library – Year 7 and above, perhaps: it has made me scour my bookshelves to find copies of the Falco investigations.

doi: 10.1017/S205863102200023X

A Thing of Beauty. Travels in Mythical and Modern Greece

Fiennes (P.) Pp. 292, map. London: Oneworld Publications, 2021. Cased, £18.99. ISBN: 978-0-86154-061-7.

Hilary Meyrick-Long

Latin Teacher, St. Andrew's Episcopal School, Austin, Texas, USA
hmeyrick-long@sasaustin.org

Peter Fiennes, aspiring ornithologist, potamologist, and zoologist, is a man on a mission to find Pandora's Hope. In a world suffering from the results of man's greed and apparent determination to destroy the environment, in a time of global crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, Fiennes travels around Greece in search of the relevance of Greek myths to today's world.