



Gilgamesh the King (The Gilgamesh Trilogy)

By Ludmila Zeman

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Gilgamesh, half-god and half-man, in his loneliness and isolation becomes a cruel tyrant over the citizens of Uruk. To impress them forever he orders a great wall to be built, driving his people to exhaustion and despair so that they cry to the Sun God for help. In answer, another kind of man, Enkidu, is sent to earth to live among the animals and learn kindness from them. He falls in love with Shamhat, a singer from the temple, and he follows her back to Uruk. There, Enkidu, the “uncivilized” beast from the forest, shows the evil Gilgamesh through friendship what it means to be human.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The Mesopotamian epic about a tyrannical king who finds his humanity and embarks on a quest for immortality here takes shape as a trio of books: *Gilgamesh the King*, *The Revenge of Ishtar* and *The Last Quest of Gilgamesh*. All three are illustrated with vivid pastels on black paper. Ages 8-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 3-6-- This picture book account of the first part of the ancient epic retains the main characters and events of the story that is Mesopotamia's claim to literary fame. The god-king Gilgamesh rules oppressively over the city of Uruk. The people cry to the gods for relief, which comes in the form of a wild man named Enkidu. Gilgamesh sends a temple woman, Shamhat, to lure Enkidu from the wilderness. He returns with her to the city, where he fights Gilgamesh and the two men become best friends. There are alterations (e.g., Shamhat is no longer a courtesan who seduces Enkidu, but a city favorite who falls in love with him, Gilgamesh no longer subdues Enkidu but falls off a wall and is saved by him) as well as additions and deletions. Granted, there are several versions of the story, but the reteller does not note that this is a rather free adaptation of the "standard" text. Though padding the Shamhat role seems more than a little anachronistic, the dramatic choices usually work well, setting up the rivalry/friendship that propels the rest of the epic (to be continued in two future volumes). Unfortunately, the telling lacks the feel of the ancient poetry; the cadences of oral tradition with its repetition and vivid description needn't have been sacrificed. The full-color illustrations, however, capture that ancient aura wonderfully well. Spreading horizontally and dominating the page, they incorporate elements from Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian art. They remain rich and lively--sometimes almost cartoonlike--imparting a sense of personality and landscape. Bernarda Bryson's *Gilgamesh* (Harcourt, 1967; o.p.) retells the complete epic in more evocative language, but the ratio of text to illustrations is much greater, making it less accessible. In spite of its playing a bit fast and loose with history, this makes an attractive introduction to one of the world's oldest stories. --Nancy Palmer, The Little School, Bellevue, WA Junior High Up

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Review

The Gilgamesh Trilogy:

“A powerful version of the Gilgamesh epic...a stirring and sad tale.”

–*The New Yorker*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

William Hoover:

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