



## The Book of Heroes

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A young girl travels into a magical world to save her brother from real-world bullies.

When her brother Hiroki disappears after a violent altercation with school bullies, the young Yuriko finds a magical book in his room. The book leads her to another world where she learns that Hiroki has been possessed by a spirit from the Book of Heroes. She visits the magical Nameless Land, where she is told how to save her brother, and is sent back to Earth with a young monk named Sora and the magical book, now a mouse named Azu. Yuri has to piece together the mystery of Horiko, and has a library of powerful magic books at her disposal to do so!

## The Book of Heroes Details

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## From Reader Review The Book of Heroes for online ebook

### Educating Drew says

"Consider a person's life," the Sage continued over her objection. "no matter that great deeds they might accomplish, they are merely creating a reality, nothing more. Only when we have thoughts, and the telling of thoughts, and those thoughts become stories is the Hero first born. What we think, we tell, and are told - all are stories. But the Hero is the story that is the source of all the greatest deeds. The heroes who exist in your Circle all spring from this original story. They are like copies. The story called "The Hero" came first." (62)

If you've been reading my blog for quite some time, you already know that I'm not one to jump up and down for fantasy fiction. It's not that I would ever roll my eyes and refer to it as second-rate literature, which is evidently what irritates fantasy and science fiction readers the most - referring to the genre as pulp. I'm on another side of that coin entirely. Science fiction and fantasy has always seemed like the smart kinda books. Not to mention names with lots of consonants intimidate me the mostest (I bow down to you Russian Lit Lovers!)

But - BUT - I'm all hanging out in the Borders a few months ago and in the young adult section I see this GORGEOUS cover. Seriously, like Alice who drank a special potion to make herself smaller or larger, I wished there was a potion that could thrust me into the cover of this book. Yeppers. I picked it up solely on cover appeal.

In the most concise terms possible, here's the dealio on the story: Yuriko hears tragic news. Her beloved big brother has slain two students at his school and is now missing. Yuriko cannot believe this is possible. She loves her brother. And so does everyone else. Yuriko visits her brother's room, trying to make sense of the events or find clues. And a clue she sure did find. A talking antiquated dictionary named Aju. This leads Yuriko into a whole other realm, a quest, her own personal hero journey to find answers.

Allrighty then. I finished this book yesterday and am sorta on the fence with it. Firstly, it's a translation and I have got to wonder if perhaps the parts that were slow and less riveting and more stilted had less to do with the story being poorly written and more to do with the translation not always being spot on. I don't read a lot of translated books, but understand that this does occur. There were times when I would read this book right before bed and after a couple of pages I was ready for sleep. Also, whole chapters would go by and I would worry that I would never finish the journey.

But because it was Japanese there were a lot of philosophical aspects about the book that I digged immensely. Mainly, they refer to the Hero as an original story that becomes powerful each time it is experienced. (In a weird way, think of Freddy K. from Nightmare on Elm Street - he as "nightmare" is only as powerful as you make him). Secondly, which I find to be very much an eastern thought, when Yuriko is learning about the Hero, it is explained to her that Hero is two sides of one coin. The good of the hero is accompanied with the bad. Nothing is pure. I LOVE this concept. And because essentially this whole novel embodies this concept it makes me really REALLY like this book. Plus, I am a huge supporter that we are all storytellers, telling our own story. (I study narrative therapy heavily in grad school as it made the most sense). Our creation of Self, that which we externalize and internalize creates our own identity. Miyabe touches on this as well.

The characters were pretty nifty as well. Yuriko, obviously being the main character and 'hero', is eleven. Miyabe does a sweet job keeping her right there at that tween age. One minute she wants to be the badass

sister who saves the day while the next she is hyperventilating, throwing a tantrum, and sobbing. Sky and Aju are both Yuriko's "servants" throughout this journey; she is also accompanied by Ash. All three have distinctive voices and contribute to the energy of the story.

Overall, a worthwhile read I think. I just don't know if I'd put it in the young adult section of a bookstore.

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## **Bonnie (A Backwards Story) says**

Every now and then, it's good to break away from the mold and try something different. I don't often read adult sci-fi/fantasy, but walking through the aisle one day, Miyuki Miyabe's *The Book of Heroes* caught my eye. The novel's concept intrigued me. Plus, it had something else going for it from the get-go: I always enjoy a good hero story.

Eleven-year-old Yuriko Morisaki is an ordinary fifth-grade student until her older brother Hiroki does the unthinkable. After a bad altercation at school results in his disappearance, Yuriko embarks on a journey to save him. The most interesting thing that drew me into the story was this: the "hero" is not as good and virtuous as our society allows us to believe. Only one part is. No matter how magnificent the hero, there is always a darker side that we overlook. The hero has two sides to him, and the darker side of the coin is often referred to in the novel as the King in Yellow. It's hard to explain the concept, but for example, think about Hercules. He performed a lot of heroic deeds, but also did some pretty vile stuff that would seem more like what a villain might do. This dual look at heroism was interesting to me, especially since it's something I've been studying in order to flesh out my own characters. I love the concept that there's more to a hero than what meets the eye. Things aren't always black and white.

The part of the hero that is the King in Yellow likes to wreak havoc on our world as much as the hero likes to save it. He needs vessels to break out of *The Book of Heroes*, where he has been imprisoned in the Nameless Land where all stories are born. Yuriko's brother Hiroki finds *The Book of Elem* and uses it to unknowingly become the last vessel and release the King in Yellow from imprisonment. Taking on the role of Allcaste, Yuriko finds herself faced with an impossible quest to save not only her brother, but the entire world.

*The Book of Heroes* was really unique and refreshing. I'd never read a book quite like it before and after turning the last page, I wondered if Miyabe would write another book in her world. I also went back and re-read the poem at the novel's beginning in addition to perusing the prologue once more, which gave me an even fuller understanding of the story. I also took a more in-depth look at the cover and understood why the artist created the image they did (much as I did after finishing Rebecca Stead's *When You Reach Me* earlier this year). It made sense in a way it wouldn't have before I started reading the book.

It was also interesting to read a Japanese novel after having lived in Japan. I could visualize Yuriko's world much better than I would have had I never been there, though I don't feel the lack of knowledge would detract a reader from the story. It just made things like school life, teacher/police/parent/student/etc. responses, etc. make more sense. There were a couple of "monster" fights that were uniquely Japanese. If I hadn't seen the Hayao Miyazaki movie *Spirited Away*, it would have been harder to imagine black-tentacle monsters with dangling faces because I've never been one for Japanese horror/monster stuff. However, by envisioning No-Face or No-Name or whatever the character's name was, it gave me an idea of what the author was referring to. It was really interesting to see what constituted a "traditional" Japanese novel. Before Miyabe, the only other Japanese author I'd ever read was Haruki Murakami, and that was before I'd been to Japan. Back then, I just remember thinking that the Japanese have a very different outlook on life from us Westerners, and after having lived there, it definitely reaffirms that thought (albeit in a good way).

If you're looking for something interesting and are open to something a little different from what you're used

to, The Book of Heroes might be a good choice for you.

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### **Murray Horne says**

Very similar in tone to Brave Story. You follow a young girl, Yuriko, after her brother of 14 years old kills another student in school. Her brother is missing and there is evidence that the brother has been possessed by the man in yellow. The story creates a world where books are alive and magic is real. The ending is what you would expect from Miyabe, drowned in realism with a touch of fantasy. I will most likely pick up the sequel, the Gate of Sorrows when it comes out in paperback.

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### **David says**

The narrative arc and character development are strong and have a lot to offer. The plot draws from the classic "Hero's Journey" archetype. One of my favorite parts about the book is Yuriko's motivation for going on the quest. She isn't dragged into it by 'destiny' or 'being the chosen one' or some ancient prophecy which she must fulfill--or some other abstract plot device. And in fact, there are numerous instances where she's given the option to turn back. She goes on the journey though because she wants to rescue her brother, and I love this as a motivational force behind the journey and her decisions along the way.

Yuriko is a wonderful character too: curious, courageous (despite her fears), kind (especially to people who have been rejected or treated cruelly), hopeful and optimistic, and honest (about her feelings, about her mistakes). And she grows a lot from her experiences, which is interesting to watch. There were many plot threads that I wasn't sure how the author would resolve. I found the ending very satisfying.

The book was very heavy on the exposition, especially through the maybe second and third quarters of the book. Not all of this was bad, but ultimately I do think it could have trimmed back somewhat and the pacing could have been improved at points. I also made the poor choice of reading a pdf copy of this on my phone. Small font. Long pages. Eye strain. Compounds the challenge of working through a book that doesn't rush itself. I think those who are willing to have a little patience with this one though will be rewarded.

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### **AO says**

What a strange and wonderful book. This is a story about a girl who discovers her brother has been possessed by The King in Yellow (the flip/evil side to the archetype of the "hero" in stories) and must go on a journey through stories to save him.

On a personal level, I connected with the journey of a young girl trying to save her older brother - I might be biased in the themes of love and letting go. The story feels very slow and wise - at times funny and cute, at other times dark and sad. Would recommend to readers who like thought-provoking, imaginative stories that feel like classic animated children's films (Unico, The Never Ending Story)

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### **Sophie Kihm says**

The Book of Heroes:

Who is the Hero?

What would you do if you were told that your brother was possessed in a magical land, and only you could save him? In *The Book of Heroes* by Miyuki Miyabe, a five star book, Yuriko comes home one day to her house in Japan to find that her brother Hiroki has stabbed two boys, and now has disappeared. When Yuriko meets Aju, a magical dictionary mouse, he tells her that Hiroki has been possessed by The King in Yellow, or The Hero. Aju tells Yuriko she is the only one who can save him. So, she goes inside The Circle to the Nameless Land to find her brother and defeat the King in Yellow. *The Book of Heroes* is one of Miyuki Miyabe's best fantasy adventure books. Yuriko is an admirable character because of how she uses her powers, she is very forgiving, and her determined attitude.

Yuriko is an admirable character because of the way she uses her powers. When her servant Sky was hurt, she used her glyph, (a magical symbol on her head she got from becoming the "allcaste") to help him get up. "Now place that on your servants forehead." "U-ri (U-ri is Yuriko's allcaste name) did so, and Sky moaned softly. He opened his eyes." (190) Instead of using her glyph to do evil things, Yuriko uses it to heal her friends. Yuriko can also make objects invisible, by hiding them under her invisibility coat. She makes her friends and herself invisible to hide from The King in Yellow's henchmen, so they stay safe and Yuriko can complete her journey. I admire Yuriko for using her powers for good, and not for evil like The King in Yellow.

Yuriko is also admirable because she is very forgiving. She forgives Hiroki for stabbing the boys, even though she wishes it never happened, Yuriko knows it was not his fault and can forgive him. At the end of the book, Yuriko figures out that her faithful servant Sky was her brother Hiroki in disguise, and that everyone had lied to her. Though she is mad at first, Yuriko forgave them, because they were trying to help her, not hurt her. "You hid the truth and sent me on a journey so I would see it for myself." "And for that we are sorry." (331) Yuriko knows that Ash is her friend, so she can forgive him.

Finally, Yuriko is an admirable character because of her determined attitude. When she finds out that her brother was captured, she is very determined to help him. "I have to help him!" (39) Throughout her whole journey, she was determined to go to all lengths to find her brother and help him. Even when she found out that her brother was purified, and could no longer be saved, she still wished she could have done more. Being determined is a very good trait because you always do extra to help people.

Yuriko is an admirable character because of how she uses her powers, she is very forgiving, and her determined attitude. I have some Yuriko's traits. I am very determined like Yuriko. I always try to do extra credit, and strive to do the best I can at all times. I really like this trait of mine. I always work harder and get good grades because of it. I use power (not powers) responsibly like Yuriko. When I baby-sit for example, I let the kids do fun things, and I don't try to control every little thing they do. I am also very responsible and take into account what the parents tell me to do. I am not like Yuriko in the way that I am not as forgiving. If all of my friends had lied to me like that, it probably would have taken me a long time to forgive them. I don't like it when people lie or are mean to me. I learned that people sometimes do bad things, and that we should forgive them for it. You don't always know the story behind what they did, and most often it's not what you think.

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### **Snarktastic Sonja says**

This is a very interesting story. The premise is intriguing. The prose is beautiful. And, it is a translation. This book is a credit to both the author and the translator.

And, that is all I know to say.

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### **Rhea says**

This reminds me a lot of Brave Story. It's a lot more concise than Brave Story though.

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### **Eric says**

What we have here is 350 pages of information dump. A couple of monsters show up to keep things lively (the giant eyeball is especially cool), but everything else is backstory, exposition, and endless lecturing. Terrible.

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### **Megan says**

Overall, a very creative story with memorable characters. I had some problems with either the writing style or the translation when the story tried to explain some of the fantastical elements, but otherwise a smooth read.

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### **Powersamurai says**

A wonderful story overall, but too many long explanations to get through to get to the action. The ending dragged out too. Once again, too long an explanation of what happened. The overall pace could've been quicker. Not the fault of the translation, which was brilliant.

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### **Erin says**

I wanted to like, I really did. But it just didn't hold my attention. I love the premise, but there's so much build up to nothing much happening. 100 pages was enough.

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### **Michelle Kee says**

FINALLY FINISHED READING THIS BOOK. To be honest, it wasn't an easy read for me. Took me almost 2 months to finish reading. The storyline is good and interesting but maybe the way of writing kinda made me lost interest slowly. Overall, I would say read at your own risk?

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## Matt says

The beginning of this book was charming, despite being about violence in a school (a situation that was perhaps not treated as gravely as it should have been). As the main character deals with her brothers terrible action, a new world unfolds around her - echoes of *The Book of Lost Things* which is a top book for me. But the execution was not phenomenal. The author has a penchant for long exposition rather than description, and much of the detail felt unnecessary and could have been left on the cutting room floor.

3.5 stars, rounded down.

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## Seth T. says

Let me get this out of the way at the outset: the antagonist is story! \*jaw drops\* Now, back to your regularly scheduled review.

It's pretty easy to see why fans of Miyabe's *Brave Story* could be disappointed in *The Book of Heroes*. The former was a winsome, compulsive read. Miyabe played with familiar fantasy and JRPG tropes using a wholly believable protagonist and did so with beauty and confidence. It was almost impossible not to enjoy her 800-page entry into young adult fantasy. *Heroes* has likewise been strangely shelved in bookstores' manga sections. It wasn't fitting for *Brave Story* and it wasn't fitting for *Heroes*. And unfortunately, similar treatment may wind up giving readers the impression that Miyabe is extrapolating on the same riff here.

Which is where we come to the obvious collage of reader disappointment. Expectations can be brutal. And I myself expected this new novel to be something at least in similar vein to *Brave Story*. I was, however, fortunate to be mistaken.

What Miyabe does with *Heroes* is just fantastic. It's not nearly so compelling a read as *Brave Story*, but it's not supposed to be. Just like *Crime and Punishment*, *Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, and *Gravity's Rainbow* aren't supposed to be ruthless page-turners like *Twilight*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, or *Hunger Games*.

Not that *Heroes* is meant to be compared with those other books either. Honestly, it may be in its own category. I don't know. I haven't read everything, but I have read a lot. I've yet to encounter anything like *The Book of Heroes*.

Miyabe's central conceit here is her villain. Rather than something mundane like a human or horrific like a goblin king or fantastic like a giant floating eyeball of mal-intent, she chose something more abstract. I won't be surprising you here, since I mention it above, but the bad guy is story. Or more, Story, with a capital Store. It is in the narrative form itself, perhaps even Platonically, that her antagonist arises. This floored me. I found the concept so brilliant and strange that for thirty pages or so, I muttered a string of Wows and Whoas and Whats and Huhs.

I had a grand time.

As you can likely imagine, explaining this concept takes a boatload of unpacking. That is to say, exposition. And exposition, in most cases, is the enemy of a plot-driven page-burner. So the simplest recourse is to reclassify *Heroes* as something else. It's not a potboiler or adventure novel or fantasy epic. It is, instead, literature. It finds greater pleasure in exploring ideas than it does in exploring new landscapes and cultures (though it does that too). The action comes in spurts. The climax is abrupt. The plot is nearly inconsequential.

But Miyabe's novel is not *about* those things. It has bigger fish to fry and does so with a (mostly) deft hand. To be honest, there are still a couple point upon which I remain unclear. Likely a second reading would promote better understanding.

*The Book of Heroes* is not my favourite book. But it is a very good one and deserves its readership. Even the unappreciative readership who (fingers crossed) may one day change their team colours.

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