



The Phoenix of Persia

Books Reviewed:

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Open this book and you find yourself in a park in present day Tehran as children and adults eagerly gather to hear a musical storytelling of the Simorgh, the Phoenix of Persia.

The story is beautifully told, and we are swiftly transported to the top of a mountain of gems to find the magical, wise and mysterious Simorgh, or firebird overseeing life in the world below.

We then find ourselves in the royal court in ancient Persia where a familiar story is playing out. A king and queen are longing for a child. Unfortunately, when a child is finally born to them, he is rejected by his father because of his strange white hair. With echoes of the fate of Paris in Homer's Iliad, the child is abandoned in the mountains as the king feels he will bring doom to the kingdom. The young child is rescued by the Simorgh, cared for alongside her own chicks and she teaches him ?all a prince needs to know.?

Eventually the king, now white haired himself and wracked with guilt, goes in search of his abandoned son. Amazingly he finds him, and despite reluctance to leave the nest and his phoenix mother the sixteen-year-old prince goes back to the palace as an anointed king taking some magical phoenix feathers to burn as a signal if he ever needs her help.

The book is strikingly illustrated using an intricate sgraffito (scratch board) technique which is at its most effective in the colourful illustrations of the amazing firebird.

This story provides an insight into Iranian culture and history and the ancient stories of the Shahnameh, an important text in World literature. It introduces Prince Zal who features in many other stories in this Iranian epic and of course the firebird a mythical creature guaranteed to capture the imagination.

There are themes of love, regret, rejection and acceptance of difference within the story; Prince Zal is named after the Iranian word for individuals with albinism.

The importance of music in storytelling generally and Iran in particular is highlighted in this book which includes online access to a retelling of the story by the author accompanied by traditional Iranian instruments representing the different characters. The final pages of the book provide information about these instruments. The publisher's website also includes additional resources for schools and libraries including a Shahnameh box.

The Phoenix of Persia represents a highly successful project from **Tiny Owl** and a wonderful collaboration between storyteller, illustrator and musical team

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