In the Shape of a Boar by Lawrence Norfolk

Lawrence Norfolk has been hailed in his native England as just about ahead of everyone in his generation of novelists (The Observer) and acclaimed as Britain's brightest young writer by The Guardian. His award-winning novels Lemprieres Dictionary and The Popes Rhinoceros were best-sellers there, and have gone on to win acclaim throughout the world. Now he has written his most ambitious novel yet -- a story that sweeps from prehistory to the present day in addressing the meeting point of truth and lies: In the Shape of a Boar. The story begins in the ancient Greece of myth, where King Meleager of Kalydon has assembled the sixty greatest hunters -- and one huntress, Atalanta -- to rid his realm of the supernatural boar sent by the vengeful goddess Artemis to lay waste to his lands. But as the hunters bear down upon their prey a darker tale unfolds, of treachery and destructive love. It is a tale that will reverberate in those same hills across the millennia in the final chaotic months of the Second World War, as a band of Greek partisans pursues an S.S. officer. Solomon Memel, a young Jewish Romanian refugee who was rescued by resistance fighters and subsequently joined them in their chase, will be inspired by the experience to write a poem, titled Die Keilerjagd, or The Boar Hunt, which mixes the elements of the mythical hunt with the historical pursuit of S.S. field commandant Heinrich Eberhardt. The partisans, from the charismatic leader Xanthos to the dangerous beauty Theyella, will themselves become part of modern mythos, as the poem becomes an international sensation. But the truth of what happened in the hills of Kalydon in 1945 is more complicated than it seems, and as the older Sol reunites with his childhood love, Ruth, in 1970s Paris to make a film version of the poem, the dark memories and horrors of those days emerge anew. Epic in scope and staggering in its mastery of language and character, In the Shape of a Boar is a tour de force.

My Personal Review:
This is a Very Serious Work, one that cannot be read (or summarized) quickly without doing it an injustice. A newly created, classical epic for the
first hundred pages, it has larger than life heroes from Greek mythology fighting great, ancient battles in which the survival of a culture is at stake. King Meleager of Kalydon, the lone huntress Atalanta, her dog Aura, and her cousin Meilanion are, with sixty other hunters, trying to conquer a ferocious boar unleashed upon the country by the angry goddess Artemis. As the other hunters fall prey to jealousies, duplicities, and betrayals, these three alone face the final battle, the outcome of which is never clear.

The rest of the book tells parallel stories from three 20th century time frames, involving modern characters whose lives involve similar battles with the boar and what it represents. Solomon Memel, Ruth Lackner, and Jakob Feuerstein are teenage friends in Romania in 1938, when the Russians and, soon afterward, the Nazis, occupy the country, create ghettos, and bring the Holocaust. In 1952, Solomon publishes a poem, Die Keilerjagd, in which he describes his World War II experiences with partisans in Greece, paralleling the boar hunt of the ancient heroes, as they chase a Nazi field commander through the same mountains in the wars waning days. Some years later, when Sol is 49 and a heroic icon to schoolchildren, Ruth, a successful theater figure, decides to make a film of his poem and experiences, and the accuracy of his poem and memory are challenged publicly. Sol’s battles to fill the gaps in his memory and to recall uncertain events represent yet another battle with the boar.

Time is flexible here, filtered through the consciousness of Sol, as memories from all three time periods crowd his life in no particular order, and he recollects one event after another, perhaps imperfectly. Norfolk does not always dot all the Is and cross all the Ts as Sol tells his story, requiring the reader to bring his/her own consciousness to the interpretation of events, and, like Sol, to keep an open mind to alternative interpretations. His concern with myths, both ancient and modern, how they are created, what they reveal about human needs, how they reflect reality, and why they are perpetuated give tremendous impact and broad scope to his several stories. The hypnotic, musical cadences and the elaborate, minutely detailed descriptions lend a weightiness appropriate to an epic. The action is intense, the themes are universal, and the scope of the authors vision seems almost limitless. This is a slow, but ultimately rewarding, reading experience, sometimes requiring the reader to fight his/her own battle with the boar. Mary Whipple

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
In the Shape of a Boar by Lawrence Norfolk - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!