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Twists on Greek classic make 'Thread'

Second Season presents an update of the Greek myth of the Minotaur in 'A Thread in the Dark' starting Feb. 4

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

Sometimes, with a little reworking, classic tales can have relevance to modern political situations. This is the common theme reappearing in the University Theatre Department's Second Season productions.

Meant as an outlet for small-cast

productions and experimental plays, Second Season productions are performed in the "black box" Arena Theatre in Villard Hall. Fall term's production of "Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief" was a feminist reworking of a Shakespeare's "Othello." This term's production has a similar take on a different kind of tale.

A new take of the Greek myth of the Minotaur, "A Thread in the Dark" by Hella Haase, also changes the perspective from a male to a female lead, but with a different purpose in mind.

"In this working, the Minotaur represents those secret fears that people have and that politicians exploit," director Elizabeth Helman said. "It really makes it relevant to today's political situation."

Helman has directed a number of productions for the theater department, such as "Picasso at the Lapin Agile," as well as productions for children through the Mad Duckling Theatre. She decided to put on "Thread" after reading it in a Western European theater class.

"It's an obscure Dutch play that was first performed in Holland in 1962," Helman said. "I think this will only be its first or second performance in the United States."

Cast members were also interested with the subtext of the play and the possibilities for political commentary that it holds.

"I think it's great to come at a classical Greek story from a such different perspective," actor and University senior Eli Levine said.

"It's interesting to show a take on a famous myth in a way that makes it still relevant to today's politics," actress and first-year graduate student Connie Hymer said. "This play deals with how governments use fear as a way to control, how they create an enemy to keep people subservient."

The original myth told the story of a half-man, half-bull called the Minotaur that was kept in an inescapable maze called the Labyrinth on the island of Crete. The hero Theseus

entered the maze and killed the creature and was able to find his way out using a ball of thread given to him by Ariadne, daughter of the king of Crete. In Haase's retelling of the myth, Ariadne is the central character. Her decision to expose the truth about the Minotaur, which her father uses to keep his subjects frightened, has become the central source of drama.

"I love the way all the classical structures and archetypes are used to this end," Helman said. "I was also drawn to the strong female protagonist. The character of Ariadne becomes a form of political activist. The play also raises many interesting questions, such as what is the relevance art has to politics."

Working with a play which much of the audience will not be familiar with also gives Second Season the freedom from any preconceived notions, Helman said. The black-box style of the Arena Theatre, where the seats rise above the sparsely decorated stage, also allows the seven-person cast to be close to the audience.

And over the course of the play's six performances, the cast is looking forward to the challenges the production presents.

"A Thread in the Dark" will be playing Feb. 4-7 and Feb. 12-14 at 8 p.m. Tickets are available at the EMU Ticket Office. Prices are \$4 for students; \$5 for seniors, faculty and staff; and \$6 for the general public.

Contact the senior Pulse reporter at ryannyburg@dailyemerald.com.



Lauren Wimer Photographer

(Left to right) Margie Kment, Connie Hymer and Erica Smith perform a scene from their upcoming play "A Thread in the Dark," which opens at the Arena Theatre Feb. 4.

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Mario and Luigi reunite for enjoyable plot

At long last, Nintendo has paired up the Mario Brothers again for Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga

By Travis Willse
Editorial Editor

In an Apollonian blend of the familiar and the foreign, the sacred and the profane, Nintendo has crafted a unique gaming experience in the recently released role-playing game Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga.

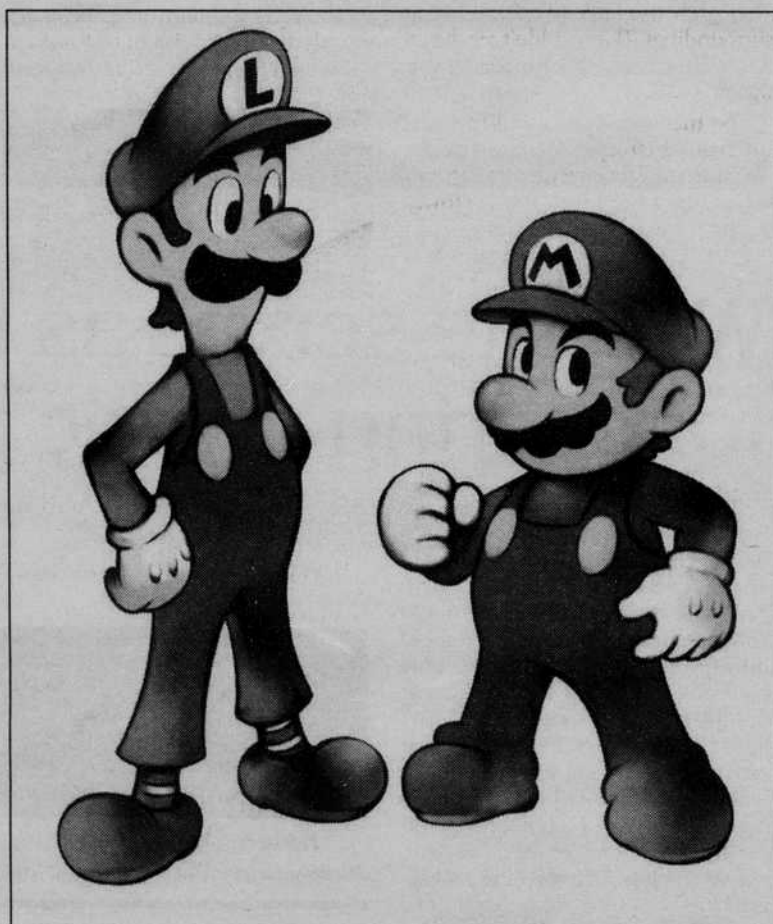
First off, Mario & Luigi is just that: It's the first Mario game in a long, long time to feature both brothers (with the exception of racers like Mario Kart: Double Dash!! and the Super Smash Brothers fighting game series). And the game reaches much deeper than controlling two identical and separate characters: Players use the pair in tandem, utilizing each brother's unique abilities to surmount obstacles. Need to get to a high ledge? Use Luigi's high jump. Need to light a fire? Use Mario's firebrand (fire elemental) power. The combinations of abilities are robust, and players will have to learn and use all of them throughout the game.

The convoluted but enjoyable plot is definitely a variant on a familiar theme. During the introduction, on an otherwise idle day in the Mushroom Kingdom's court, an emissary from the neighboring BeanBean Kingdom — presumably, these non-democratic governments haven't faced regime change — visits under the guise of diplomacy, only to steal Princess Peach's voice

and disappear, replacing it with an "explosive vocabulary." Mario and Luigi set out to the BeanBean Kingdom (with perennial Mario villain Bowser, who briefly teams up with the duo) to steal it back. Once there, they get entangled in an offbeat, epic opera of good versus evil, entertaining side games, goomba-smashing and occasional cross-dressing, all centered around control of the powerful Beanstar artifact.

Combat in the game mostly follows the generic RPG formula: During each battle, Mario, Luigi and their enemies take turns attacking, until one side's characters all run out of hit points (health). Nintendo affords small, very welcome breaks from the traditional turn-based formula: By pressing buttons at just the right moment, the brothers can do more damage with their attacks and avoid (or even counter) their enemies' attacks. And by expending so-called Brothers points, the two brothers can team up and execute a powerful attack that requires precise button timing. As Mario and Luigi fight more battles, they gain experience points, paving the way for increased power, defense, speed and more. The game proceeds at the perfect pace, too; the brothers pick up skills speedily enough to keep play fresh, but not so quickly the player can't keep pace. Players can customize their heroes, too, by purchasing various clothes and "badges," each of which offer various offensive and defensive benefits.

For those familiar with the expansive Mario canon, exploring the BeanBean Kingdom and spotting similarities to the more familiar Mushroom Kingdom proves very rewarding. Familiar enemies, like bobombs, spinies and cheep-cheeps, roam the land and seascapes, but so do tanoombas (goombas with raccoon-like ears and tails, a la Super



Courtesy

Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga, the latest Nintendo game to feature the brothers, has some features from games past including yoshis and Birdo.

Mario Bros. 3's tanooki suit) and troopeas (variants of the Mushroom Kingdom's koopas).

Great cameos and nods to earlier Mario games are ubiquitous, too: A mission has Mario and Luigi collect beanfruits to feed to yoshis (dinosaurs who first appeared in Super Mario World), Birdo of Super Mario Bros. 2 lore shows up in side-splitting plot-twists, and even primary-colored

viruses from the sublime puzzle game Dr. Mario make an appearance.

The recommended Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga, which was released in November, makes an excellent addition to a Game Boy Advance collection, even for RPG greenhorns.

Contact the editorial editor at traviswillse@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

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