Shirow Masamune

The Promethean Challenge [□□□□□□□□□ (Purometeusu no chōsen)] (Appleseed [□□□□□□□, Appurushīdo], 1)

Japan (1985)

TAGS: Athena Nike Olympus Prometheus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Promethean Challenge [□□□□□□□□□ (Purometeusu no chōsen)] (Appleseed [□□□□□□□, Appurushīdo], 1)
Country of the First Edition	Japan
Country/countries of popularity	Japan, United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia
Original Language	Japanese
First Edition Date	1985
First Edition Details	Shirow Masamune, □□□□□□□ [Appurushīdo] *Appleseed, Book 1:* □□ □□□□□□□ [Purometeusu no chōsen] *The Promethean Challenge*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985 c. 184 pp.
Genre	Dystopian fiction, Graphic novels, Science fiction
Target Audience	Young adults
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Creators



Shirow Masamune , b. 1961
(Author)

Shirow Masamune is a noted Japanese manga artists. He studied oil painting at Osaka University of Arts. His manga, *Applessed* won the Seiun Award for Best manga in 1986. His most famous manga is *Ghost in the Shell*. Shirow Masamune 's other works include: *Black Magic*, *Dominion*, *Orion*, *Pandora in the Crimson Shell: Ghost Urn* and various art books.

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Additional information

Translation

English (USA): *Appleseed, Book 1: The Promethean,* New York: Eclipse Comics, 1988, c. 184 pp.

Summary

In the aftermath of WWIII in the 22nd century (the story takes place between the years 2125–2127), the former civilized order has crushed and changed. Former soldiers and friends, Duenan Knute and her cyborg partner Briareos (Bri) survive in abandoned cities in desolated places named “Badside”, trying to scrap a living. One day they are confronted by a young woman named Hitomi. She tells them she works for Aegis, the Central Management Bureau. Hitomi was sent from the government of Olympus to persuade the duo to return to the city of Olympus with her and join the ESWAT (Extra Special Weapons And Tactics). Olympus is the most powerful artificial island city which emerged after the war, yet beneath its impressive exterior exist many hidden threats, especially between humans and cyborgs or bionically augmented individuals. In this volume we encounter the characters of Athena, Olympus’ administrative director for the general management bureau and her assistant, Nike. Athena seems to have her own agenda which may be opposite to that of the Olympic council of non-human elders. It still remains to be seen whether Duenan and Bri are merely pawns in a power struggle they are still unaware of. While the two settle down in the seemingly utopian city, Gaia, the massive main computer which runs the city is attacked by alleged terrorists. Hence Duenan and Bri are thrown into the action and Bri even gets hit while trying to apprehend the terrorists.

Analysis

This is a cyber-punk dystopian adventure manga aimed for young adults. The mythological background is delicately alluded in this volume, and the author leaves it to the readers to understand its deeper implications. Olympus is the name of the utopian city which, as the story evolves, is described as being plagued by internal conflicts. Olympus of course has taken its name from the mythological dwelling of the Greek gods, yet the inhabitants of the city are far from being godly. Hence there is a conflict between the city’s alleged perfect exterior and its inner struggles.

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The main conflict of the series, which will progress and develop throughout four volumes, is the tension between humans and the enhanced humans, or bioroids. Hence the allusion to Prometheus in the volume's title. Prometheus was the defender of humans. We may concur that Duenan and Bri might play the part of Prometheus in helping their fellow humans in the city, especially against the mysterious council (which plays the role of gods watching over the humans' lives). In a glimpse of the council's discussions, one elder says: "I feel as if I've sent my only child off on a long journey. Imagine tearing down the barriers between us and the humans." Another member then replies: "We're their children, more like it, and we're planning to murder them in their sleep." (p. 173).

Regarding the council's discussion, there is a deliberate obscurity between the children and the parents, since naturally the humans appeared before their enhanced counterparts. Yet the sentiment of the elder regarding the murder of the parents also carries strong allusions to the Titanomachy, in which the Olympians triumphed over the Titans to rule Olympus and the world. Whether the council are Titans or Olympians is hard to decipher at this point, and the author's deliberate naming them as the Olympic council can be misleading and augment the uncertainty regarding the characters' motives at this early point of the plot. Or perhaps the author himself was not aware of the difference between the two.

The main discussion and concern of the council refers to the survival or destruction of the human race, reminiscent of Zeus' plan to eradicate the human race in the myths (by flood or by the use of Pandora). The emphasis on humans and their fate hints at the connection to Prometheus, who also paid dearly for his protection of humanity. As Lisa Maurice notes, "Prometheus is a popular figure in science fiction. For example in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, for instance – dual ideas of challenging the might of the gods and of playing with fire" (Maurice, peer-review).

Another mythological reference is found in the existence of Gaia. Mother earth and the mother of all creatures is turned in this cyber comic into a large computer which controls the hi-tech city. This may appear as a space-age rendition of the great mother figure, when the earth is replaced with machines. It should be noted that Gaia is the main computer. She/It alone is responsible for the function of the city.

More references to mythological characters are found in the images of

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	Athena and Nike. Athena is strong-minded and clever, as her mythological eponymous. She does not reveal her plan and prefers watching Duenan and Bri from afar. On the one hand, she may be using them as well to see if they suit her purpose but she may also be their guide and mentor. Mythological Athena is the protector of heroes, and Dunean and Bri are indeed the heroes of our story. Athena appears to be concerned about human kind, which corresponds well to her mythological goddess who invented most arts and taught them to humans. Nike accompanies Athena, as she did in ancient mythology. The installation of Nike to the story may allude to the fact that the humans might eventually triumph since victory is on their side. It of course can also be an ironic inclusion since Nike cannot save the humans. Full knowledge of Greek mythology is not necessary for the understanding of this manga, however, if one is familiar with it, then deeper layers of meaning and understanding can be traced in the narrative and add to the complexity of the story and its main themes.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Athena Nike Olympus Prometheus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Conflict Death Friendship Future Journeys War
Further Reading	Nisbet, Gideon, “Mecha in Olympus: Masamune Shirow’s ‘Appleseed’” in Kovacs, G. & Marshall, C., eds., *Son of Classics and Comics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, 67–78.
Addenda	The review refers to the 2007 *Dark Horse* release of the translated

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manga (ISBN: 978-1593076917).

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