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Crispin Boyer , Andrew Elkerton

The Quest for the Golden Fleas (Zeus the Mighty, 1)

United States of America (2019)

TAGS: Ares Argonauts Athena Demeter Golden Fleece Harpies Olympus Phineus Poseidon Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Quest for the Golden Fleas (Zeus the Mighty, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2019
First Edition Details	Crispin Boyer, ill. Andrew Elkerton, *Zeus the Mighty. The Quest for the Golden Fleas*. Washington D.C.: National Geographic Partners, 2019, 192 pp.
ISBN	9781426335471
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Fiction
Target Audience	Children (8–13 years)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Creators



Crispin Boyer (Author)

Crispin Boyer is an American author. He wrote on various themes, such as nature, history, wildlife and more. Among his books are *That's Deadly!: Fatal Facts That Will Test Your Fearless Factor*, *Everything Ancient Egypt*, *Why?: Over 1,111 Answers to Everything*, National Geographic *Kids Why Not?: Over 1,111 Answers to Everything*. In a podcast, the author explains that his editor wished to have a lighter and funny take on Greek mythology and hence *Zeus the Mighty* was created. The author explains they adapted the myths for children since the original myths are darker.

Sources:

Profile at goodreads.com (accessed: November 11, 2020).

"Author Stories Podcast Episode 776 | Crispin Boyer Interview" at youtube.com Hank Garner channel (accessed: November 11, 2020).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il



Andrew Elkerton , b. 1967 (Illustrator)

Andrew Elkerton is a children's books illustrator from Scotland. He has worked as a graphic designer for over 15 years in the computer games industry. He was nominated twice for the Language Learner Literature Awards and illustrated various best sellers. He is the illustrator of the New York Times bestseller *How to Catch a Leprechaun*.

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Source:

"Andy Elkerton" at shannonassociates.com (accessed: November 23, 2020).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il

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Additional information

Summary

This book follows the adventures of Zeus the hamster, Demeter the grasshopper, Athena the cat, Ares the pug and Poseidon the pufferfish. This merry group resides at Mount Olympus Pet Centre in Athens, Georgia, yet for them, it is Athens, the Olympus, the Aegean sea and Crete. The pets believe and act as gods and goddesses of Greek mythology, although their divine attire, such as helmet or chitons, is unseen by the outside world. Their store's caretaker, Artemis (or Artie), likes to listen to a Greek mythology podcast, "Greeking Out" and so named the pets after Greek gods, yet the pets accept their divine identity and act upon it. The animals eagerly listen to the stories as well and refer to them as the prophetic words of the oracle which dictate or guide them in their adventures.

In this tale, our heroes face two adventures: a dragon (iguana) is set loose in the store and Demeter fears for her life and the life of her bug friends at Bugcropolis. Meanwhile, Zeus the hamster hears the story of the golden fleece (or as he hears it, fleas) and is determined to go on a quest and find it in order to legitimize his rule as the king of the gods, especially to his rival Poseidon, who rules his aquatic domain and challenges Zeus.

Zeus is so focused on the fleas that he ignores and belittles Demeter's fears of the dragon and she decides to set out alone against it. Meanwhile, Artie brings her friend, Callie (Callista) to make some repairs in a remote part of the store, an expansion to the pet and rescue centre.

The animals discover Callie's equipment, especially her robotic vacuum cleaner and use it for their adventure. Athena, the wise cat, quickly learns to control the vacuum cleaner, hence it becomes the group's trusted vehicle, the Argo. Meanwhile, Zeus adopts the measuring tape as his trusted aegis.

During his venture to the "uncharted territory" of the store (the part that is about to be refurbished), while looking for the fleas, Zeus is accidentally locked up and separated from his friends. Now, he must prove his real worth and rescue himself. He suddenly comes across an old hamster whom he names Phineus (after the blind seer from the myth about whom he heard on the podcast) and saves him from lurking bats (or harpies). The old hamster tells Zeus that the dragon

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and the fleece are connected, and Zeus is feeling regret for deserting Demeter. Later, Athena and Ares manage to rescue Zeus and he quickly finds Demeter and the dragon. He explains to her that according to old Phineus, the dragon is vegetarian and so he gives him Demeter's lettuce. Suddenly, Zeus comes across his golden fleece! A cushion covered in golden fabric.

During his heroic saving of Demeter, Zeus falls to the Aegean sea (or fish tank) but is saved by Poseidon. In a happy ending, Zeus' position as king of the Olympians is affirmed due to his courage in saving his friends and the dragon, Kiko, proves to be a good friend to Demeter as well. Phineus, however, mysteriously disappears.

The story is accompanied by cute black and white drawings of the pets in their adventures.

The book contains a list of the cast of characters and a Truth behind the Fiction segment, including information on the Olympian and the myth narrated in the story. There is also a map of ancient Greece.

This book is published by National Geographic kids, and it is accompanied by various online activities on their website. These activities are discussed in our Mythological Education Survey.

Analysis

This charming and heartwarming story proves that Greek myths truly belong to everyone, even to our furry friends. The secret lives of our pets is always an intriguing theme (as the successful 2016 movie *The Secret Life of Pets* showed) and in this story, the talking animals are in fact, Greek gods and goddesses. The pets listen to the Greek podcast "Greeking out" and believe that it is a real oracle that gives them instruction and information on the world. As the author explains in the podcast, hamster Zeus believes that he is on Mt. Olympus since his cage is up on the shelf thus it allows him to exercise his power.

Furthermore, the pets even adopt some characteristics of the ancient deities. Demeter, the goddess of agriculture carries a lettuce, Athena is the wise one and wear an owl necklace, Poseidon is the haughty ruler of the sea and holds a trident and Ares is the rather dim dog whose helmet keeps falling, but unlike his mythological parallel, he is kind and friendly.

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The store caretaker, Artie, named the pets due to her love of myths. It is a lovely attribution that the one named after the goddess of hunting and protector of animals reprises this role in a modern setting. While she named the pets, they seem to encompass the characteristics of each of the ancient deities, yet with more friendly relationships among them and they are completely absorbed in their epic adventures, whether fighting Charybdis in the toilet or searching for a mythical item. They work together as a team, mainly using their minds and ingenuity to solve problems.

The main themes of this story are rather typical of juvenile literature, especially those of friendship and rivalry. The mythological setting offers Zeus an opportunity to show his merits, not just as the almighty king but more importantly, as a caring friend. Even though he appears rather haughty and self-centred at times, in the end, he truly cares for his fellow gods and goddesses. Even his rivalry with Poseidon is in good spirit, both being there for each other when needed. While the golden fleece gave Jason his kingdom but ultimately cost him his life, here the fleece is deprived of any sinister undertones and there is no Medea. Zeus fights the dragon on his own.

Zeus' kindness and respect for the old hamster, whom he calls Phineus, can also be educational. It shows the way in which we should esteem the ancient stories and traditions. Just as the mythological Phineus guided the Argonauts and the hamster Phineus advised Zeus, so the stories of the past can still guide our ways today.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ares Argonauts Athena Demeter Golden Fleece Harpies Olympus Phineus Poseidon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Animals Emotions Friendship Heroism Humour Invention Journeys Learning Reconciliation

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