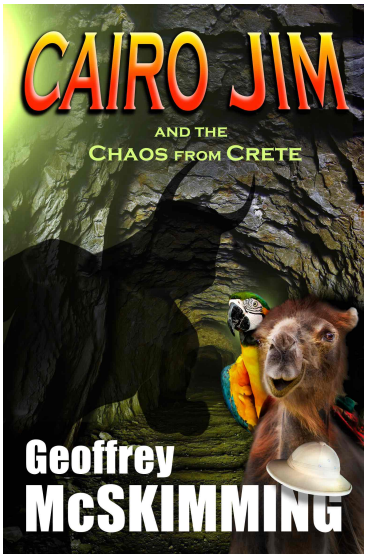
Ben Gooley, "Entry on: Cairo Jim and the Chaos from Crete (Cairo Jim, 10) by Geoffrey McSkimming", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/124. Entry version as of August 26, 2026.

Geoffrey McSkimming

Cairo Jim and the Chaos from Crete (Cairo Jim, 10)

Australia (2002)

TAGS: Archaeology Daedalus Knossos Labyrinth Minoan Civilization Minos Minotaur Poseidon Talos (Automaton) Theseus Zeus



Courtesy of © 9 Diamonds Press.

General information	
Title of the work	Cairo Jim and the Chaos from Crete (Cairo Jim, 10)
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2002
First Edition Details	Geoffrey McSkimming, *Cairo Jim and the Chaos from Crete.* Sydney, N.S.W.: Hodder Children's Books, 2002, 244 pp.
ISBN	9780733612251
Official Website	cairojim.com (accessed: August 3, 2018)
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Fiction, Humor, Magic realist fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Children (ages 9–14)
Author of the Entry	Ben Gooley, University of New England, ben.gooley@une.edu.au
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators

Portrait of Geoffrey McSkimming, courtesy of © 9 Diamonds Press.

Geoffrey McSkimming , b. 1962
(Author)

Geoffrey McSkimming is an Australian writer of children's fiction and poetry, best known for his *Cairo Jim* series. Born in and a resident of Sydney, Australia, he has travelled widely in researching his novels. McSkimming is married to Sue-Anne Webster, a professional magician. He is employed on the staff of *The School Magazine*, the oldest continually published magazine in Australia and the longest running literary magazine for children in the world (published since 1916). Some of his Cairo Jim and Jocelyn Osgood books have been published in many different languages. His writing is comedic and features frequent wordplays and occasional high-level vocabulary for books aimed at the children's market.

Source:

Official website(accessed: August 4, 2017).

Bio prepared by Ben Gooley, University of New England, ben.gooley@une.edu.au

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Additional information

Adaptations

Available as an audiobook through Bolinda Audio, read by Geoffrey McSkimming, 2002. ISBN: 174093136X, playing time, 4 hours 30 minutes.

Summary

Cairo Jim is a young archaeologist who is already an established member of the fictional Old Relics Society at the commencement of the series. He is always seen wearing a pith helmet and his desert sun-spectacles.

Cairo Jim and the Chaos from Crete is located in mid-to-late 20th-century Knossos, in Crete. It is a whimsical adventure in which the hero and his companions (a talking macaw named Doris and a telepathic wonder-camel named Brenda) travel to the Palace of Knossos after learning that the villainous Captain Neptune Flannelbottom Bone is lurking there and keeping visitors away with noxious gas. Captain Bone and his companion crow, Desdemona, are the antagonist for most of the books in the series.

In Knossos, Cairo Jim gives his companions a history lesson by telling the story of King Minos (as a son of Zeus) and Queen Pasiphaë, explaining how Poseidon's jealousy caused him to make Pasiphaë fall in love with a white bull and later give birth to the Minotaur. He told of Daedalus' construction of the labyrinth beneath the Palace, and of Theseus and Ariadne. Cairo Jim's party then discovers a secret entrance into the labyrinth in pursuit of Captain Bone. Captain Bone is seeking the fabled Talos, a giant bronze automaton which King Minos had reportedly used to defend Crete from attack. Bone hopes to use the Talos to further his quest for greatness and power.

After evading various dangers, Cairo Jim and his companions reach Bone just as he has reached the Talos, but the ancient "creature" is frail and brittle, toppling and being destroyed as it tries to move. As Bone then tries to harm Jim, they are joined by the Minotaur, who being partially a god has stayed alive through the ages. The Minotaur has been watching them in the maze and rescues Cairo Jim as someone of noble character, with Bone and Desdemona fleeing.

The Minotaur explains that he has never harmed the people sent into the maze, but that they died for being lost in the maze. The Minotaur

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

explains that it had agreed with Theseus that if Theseus could escape he would tell people he had killed the Minotaur so that the creature could be left alone. Cairo Jim offers to help the Minotaur leave with him but it chooses to stay behind where it feels it belongs.

Analysis

Cairo Jim and the Chaos from Crete contains both explicit mythological content and includes stories and locations within a mythic framework.

The world of Cairo Jim is one in which the world of "historical fact" and the "mythic world" weave together so that the mythic and magical tropes work their way into the contemporary world in various ways throughout the book. Although the stories are not clearly dated, their use of plane travel locates them in the second half of the 20th Century. As an archaeological adventure story, the Cairo Jim series sees possible influence from the Indiana Jones stories, although Cairo Jim is less swashbuckling.

The story's placement in the Palace of Knossos and the mythical labyrinth underneath provides a strong physical locus for the classical and mythic elements to emerge. Finding the Talos automaton is a key driver of the plot, and the Talos is itself a briefly active character in the plot. The Minotaur also features at the end of the narrative as an active player, though the original myth is amended to make the Minotaur non-violent.

The original classical myth itself is provided in the narrative, as spoken by Cairo Jim, thus introducing many mythical characters to the text.

Although all the major characters are adults, the frequent whimsical wordplay, talking animals, and the classical and adventure themes make the books appealing to children.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Archaeology Daedalus Knossos Labyrinth Minoan Civilization Minos Minotaur Poseidon Talos (Automaton) Theseus Zeus

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Friendship Good vs evil History Magic Talking animals
Further Reading	Sykes, H., "Novels for the Classroom" [Book Review], *English in Australia,* 137 (2003): 57. Saxby, Maurice, *Books in the life of a child: Bridges to literature and learning,* South Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia, 1997, pp. 238, 314.

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.