Chloe Roberta Sadler, Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Simply the Quest (Who Let the Gods Out?, 2) by Aleksei Bitskoff, Maz Evans", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy, Elżbieta Olechowska, Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/425. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Aleksei Bitskoff , Maz Evans

Simply the Quest (Who Let the Gods Out?, 2)

United Kingdom (2017)

TAGS: Aphrodite Ariadne Athena Cerberus Charon Erebus Hades Harpies Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Hestia Hypnos Immortality Jason Nyx Pegasus Persephone Sisyphus Styx Tartarus Thanatos Theseus Underworld Virgo Zeus Zodiac





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

General information	
Title of the work	Simply the Quest (Who Let the Gods Out?, 2)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom; United States; Germany; Czech Republic
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Maz Evans, *Simply the Quest: Who Let the Gods Out?* Frome, Somerset: Chicken House, 2017, 373 pp.
ISBN	9781910655511
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Fantasy fiction, Humor, Illustrated works, Magic realist fiction, Mythological fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Crossover (Children: 9–12 reading bracket; chapter book; suitable for reading to younger audiences, or for independent reading in 9–12 group; Young adults)
Author of the Entry	Chloe Roberta Sadler, University of Roehampton, sadlerc2929@gmail.com Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.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.

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Creators



Aleksei Bitskoff by Wa88kazza. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 (accessed: February 2, 2022).

Aleksei Bitskoff (Illustrator)

Bitskoff is an Estonian-born British illustrator, character designer and children's book illustrator. He received his Master of Arts degree in Illustration from Camberwell College in 2010. He is also the author of a number of children's books.

Source:

Official website (accessed: July 4, 2018).

Bio prepared by Chloe Roberta Sadler, University of Roehampton, sadlerc2929@gmail.com

Maz Evans (Author)

Maz Evans is a British author who began her career as a TV journalist. She has also worked as a lecturer of creative writing and a lyrics writer for the stage. Her first children's novel *Who Let the Gods Out* was published by Chicken House in February 2017, with the sequel, *Simply the Quest* published in August 2017. The third instalment of the series, *Beyond the Odyssey* was published in April 2018 and the fourth, *Against All Gods*, in 2019.

Who Let the Gods Out was selected as the Waterstone's Children's Book of the Month; it also entered the best seller list (according to davidhigham.co.uk, accessed: October 5, 2018). Evans was also shortlisted for the BAFTA Rocliffe New Writing Forum and the Scriptangel contest with her television script AFTER LIFE.

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Evans is also the founder of Book Buddy whose aim is "to help schools match up with interested donors to get books into their libraries" (cited from here, accessed: October 5, 2018).

She also writes for stage. Her original musical, *H. R. Haitch*, co-created with composer Luke Bateman, is being produced by Iris Theatre in London, and she has won a number of awards for her song-writing. Evans also runs creative writing events, which have been featured in many literary festivals, including Hay and Latitude. Evans also takes these creative writing events into schools.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: February 8, 2021).

Profile at the chickenhousebooks.com (accessed: February 8, 2021).

Bio prepared by Chloe Roberta Sadler, University of Roehampton, BA and MRes graduate, sadlerc2929@gmail.com

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

Who Let the Gods Out?, 2017;

Beyond the Odyssey, 2018;

Against All Gods, 2019.

Summary

Simply The Quest picks up the story of Elliot and his mortal and immortal companions, a few months after the end of *Who Let The Gods Out*.

In this instalment, the English boy Elliot Hooper's troubles seem to haunt him still. Thanatos reawakens and wishes to get the Earth stone Elliot managed to take a hold off last time. Elliot's mother is still sick, his history teacher is still out to get him and a mysterious incident on Christmas Eve has left the gods on house arrest. The Olympian gods, Zeus, Athena, Aphrodite, Hephaestus and Hermes are still stuck in his farm and Hera makes it even more difficult for them to return to Olympus. Virgo, Elliot's friend and youngest member of the Zodiac Council, has lost her Kardia, the magic necklace that gives her and all of the other gods and heroes their immortality as punishment for rescuing Elliot from Thanatos' Cave of Sleep and Death, making her a mortal. To regain the necklace she must become the hero that earth needs to defeat Thanatos.

This time the gang is on the hunt for the wind stone which is hidden in the natural history museum. On the path to recovering the stone Elliot and Virgo are introduced by Hermes (the only god not on house arrest) to Jason, Hercules and Theseus who all have jobs in our world. Elliot succeeds in collecting the stone but not before much of the displays at the Natural History Museum are destroyed by Hermes bringing them to life to help in the battle against Nyx, Thanatos' mother.

On top of that, Elliot's mother's, Josie, condition continues to deteriorate and Elliot finds out the truth about his absent father, Dave. He discovers where his father has been all these years: Prison! This raises a lot of difficult questions for Elliot. Additionally, Elliot's 'dark voice', the voice that articulates all of his anger and frustration, is getting louder and turning up more often. Elliot needs to fight for

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his life against Thanatos and his mother Nyx, as well as tries to keep his small family together. After the gods forget his birthday and ruin a special moment with his mother during one of her rare lucid moments, Elliot gets so angry he goes to meet Thanatos to trade the Stones for his mother's health. When Elliot realises Thanatos cannot really help his mother it seems as though it is already too late, and in the altercation Hermes becomes gravely injured. The gods believe he will not recover and ready themselves to remove his Kardia to allow him to pass away, but at the last moment Josie comes out and sings the song she used to sing to Elliot to make him feel better, and Hermes improves a little.

Evans ends the book on a cliff hanger: Hypnos is waking up after his mother and brother attacked him and whose side is he really on?

Analysis

Maz Evans is known for her quick and witty writing style which is evident on every page. This is a comic intrusion-fantasy novel, in which a teenage boy's coming of age is complicated by the Greek gods. The dialogues are quick, using a lot of slang and jokes. This comic and fast-paced wrapping cannot however hide the fact that there is a very dramatic and tragic story behind it and very serious messages. The author uses humour to make the story lighter yet she does not avoid confronting serious issues. Elliot is facing the hardships of caring for his mentally ill mother and he is just a 13-year old boy. He is the adult in the house who needs to take care of all the house chores, as well as his school and the fantastic quest he got involved with. It is a lot to ask from a teenager. We witness Elliot's difficulties through his "dark voice" conversation. Elliot's inner voice which bluntly tells him the truth he tries to repress: how difficult his mother can be, or how it would be better to cut a deal with Thanatos and save his mother against the cautions of the Olympian gods.

The classical elements of *Simply the Quest* are readily accessible for many young readers. Primary aged children in the United Kingdom will be familiar with names such as Zeus and Athena, from the Key Stage Two curriculum. Evans' modernisation of the classical characters aims to emphasise the primary role of each deity, communicating the role each of them would have had within both the pantheon and classical life.

It is the focus on heroes in Evans' second instalment of the *Who Let*

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the Gods Out series that offers a dynamic way of furthering young readers' engagement with the classical gods and mythology. The gods themselves are more a liability than a source of comfort, since they can hardly tend for themselves without their powers. This creates countless comical situations in the story. By making the gods helpless and the boy resourceful, the author helps children identify with our hero and gain courage and confidence. The author does not make the gods larger than life as one might expect, but rather a helpless bunch. For example, Zeus cannot even iron his clothes. Hades is described as 1930's mobster and Persephone as an aging showgirl who cannot stop bickering. The exception is Hermes who is the constant guardian and companion of Elliot and saves him several times; he even sacrifices his life for the boy at the end of the book, showing Elliot the true meaning of friendship and heroism.

Throughout the book, the concept of what constitutes a real hero and what defines heroism is closely tested. Heroes are supposed to be good and heroic, yet *Simply the Quest* is full of unheroic heroes and its main character has "dark thoughts" and is tempted by the story's "baddie." Evans uses seemingly simple classical ideas, such as "hero" which many young readers will be familiar with from the primary school curriculum as well as popular culture references including Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series and Disney's *Hercules*, and uses them to discuss complex issues.

Virgo has been informed that she must become a hero and save Earth in order to regain her Kardia and subsequently her immortality. According to Virgo's magic scroll *What's What*, which functions much like a voice activated search engine such as Siri, with all of its flaws, Virgo discovers that in order to be a hero she must either complete a quest or win a reality TV contest. Opting for the quest she researches the great heroes: Hercules, Jason and Theseus. *What's What* informs her of the quests that these heroes are famous for, and taking everything very literally as she always does, she boils down "hero" to: risking one's life, finding the way out of a maze and completing the quest. Through Virgo's over simplification of what it means to be a hero Evans opens up the topic to her young readers, inviting them to think about what makes a hero, what makes a person good or bad or special, and what role intention may play in being heroic.

The heroes of Evans' second instalment, Jason, Theseus and Hercules have all been awarded immortality for their heroic feats in antiquity, Evans does not mention at any point who is it that awards the heroes

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their Kardia/immortality. The best estimate – though this can only remain my inference, would be the Zodiac Council, as they are able to take away Kardias as a punishment and they are the ruling body in the immortal realm. To stave off boredom or help them cope with the trauma of their heroic experiences they have all turned to other careers. Jason has become a musician, this draws on Jason's association with his lyre which is still present in Evans' reimagining of Jason, and indeed plays a major role in the retrieval of the Air Stone. Hercules is a hapless party planner who organises sky diving for retirement parties and horror houses for little girls (another example of Evans' unfortunate missed opportunities to send positive gender messages). Hercules' connection to party planning is less clear than Jason's affiliation with the Lyre. Theseus is overly aggressive and innovative when it comes to cooking, much like celebrity chefs such as Gordon Ramsey. Again, Theseus' modern job does not seem to draw on his classical associations. They do not miss their former hero status and are fed up with their former life, yet these great heroes are deliberately depicted as comic and even pathetic. What does it say about heroes?

It seems as if the author is deliberately and shrewdly contrasting the conventional hero concept. In fact, the real hero, as is surmised from the plot even if not expressively written, is Elliot who does not possess any special power and needs to take care of his mother. Real heroism is not necessarily attributed to half-gods and mythological beings, but can be found in anyone, from the queen of England to a security guard to a teenage boy – everyone and anyone can be a hero and that is the lesson Virgo learns. You cannot "take notes" on becoming a true hero. You simply become one when the occasion demands it – if you are built up for it. Virgo helps Elliot when it matters and not through any grandiose act. Yet her act is still heroic, as Hermes' rescue of the boy. Heroes come and go, they do not stay heroic forever, as Hercules and the rest of them, yet it does not mean one cannot perform small heroic acts in one's daily life. Even Elliot's father was trying to act heroically, even though his judgement was wrong and he paid a heavy price for his decisions. Every story has two sides as Elliot learns and one should not be too quick to judge.

However, Evans' divergence from the tropes usually associated with Hercules and Theseus does allow her to explore elements of PTSD and the exhaustion of being in the public eye, and the weight of other people's expectations. This is also explored through Jason who only produces depressing and sad songs about the futility of life. This

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	enables Evans to use these characters to introduce big and complex topics to her readers. Through raising questions about why heroes might not want to be famous or heroic any more, Evans invites her young audience to engage actively with both classical topics and contemporary concerns. In a similar way Evans makes use of the mythological characters to discuss the very distressing and emotional topic of letting someone die. By introducing the topic through Hermes rather than through a human, the theme of allowing someone to die out of kindness is made easier to contemplate for a young audience. In using the gods to talk about death, Evans places death in a mythical context allowing for a deep, yet safe engagement for young readers. To conclude, this children's comic novel offers a new presentation of the Greek gods and heroes – not as all powerful but rather as incompetent at times, unable to understand simple tasks and even a bit pathetic; and of course – funny. However the gods at least show real care and love for Elliot. They are not the remote gods up on Olympus, but a loving family.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Ariadne Athena Cerberus Charon Erebus Hades Harpies Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Hestia Hypnos Immortality Jason Nyx Pegasus Persephone Sisyphus Styx Tartarus Thanatos Theseus Underworld Virgo Zeus Zodiac
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Character traits Child, children Conflict Emotions Family Friendship Good vs evil Heroism Humour Magic powers Parents (and children) Relationships Sacrifice Small town life Teachers Values Violence
Addenda	A chapter book for confident readers of Primary school age about an ordinary boy who discovers that the Greek myths are all true and he is the only one who can save the world. Funny, action packed but covers difficult and meaningful topics.

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