TO SAVE HIS KINGDOM, JASON MUST FACE A DEADLY DRAGON

BASED ON THE GREEK MYTH OF JASON AND THE GOLDEN FLEECE

BY SPENCER KAYDEN | ART BY ALLAN DAVEY
SCENE 1

N1: The Argo sails through the Black Sea.
N2: The Argonauts push their 50 oars through the choppy waters.

All Argonauts (straining): Heave! Ho! Heave! Ho!

Atalanta (pointing east): Look there! Land!

N1: Jason rushes to the bow.

Jason: I will return to Greece with the Golden Fleece, or I will not return at all. Now row, Argonauts. Row!

All Argonauts (straining): Heave! Ho! Heave! Ho!

N2: Jason makes the Golden Fleece yours.

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

What Is the Golden Fleece?
The story of the Golden Fleece goes way back. It all started when Jason’s ancestor arrived in Colchis on a magical flying ram with golden wool. Then King Aeetes sacrificed the ram to the gods and hung its fleece—that is, its wooly coat—in a sacred grove. The Golden Fleece was a symbol of kingship and was believed to bring prosperity. No wonder Aeetes gave a dragon the job of guarding it!

Adventures at Sea

Jason is a Famous Hero In Greek mythology, stories of his adventures aboard the Argo (at right) have been told for thousands of years. Why might this story be so enduring?

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PROLOGUE

Atalanta: We are a band of heroes sailing on the mighty ship the Argo.

Nestor: Jason, our leader, is on a dangerous quest.

Jason: We seek one of the most extraordinary objects on Earth: the Golden Fleece.

Nestor: Your enthusiasm may be premature. Have you forgotten that a dragon guards the Fleece?

Atalanta: A fire-breathing dragon that never sleeps.

Atalanta: A dragon whose 40-foot forked tongue is always ready to strike.

Jason: That is why I have gathered the bravest and strongest young men—

Atalanta: —and woman—

Jason: —yes, and woman—to join me on my quest.

Atalanta: Have you not considered that your uncle, King Pelias, wants you to fail?

Nestor: He did send you on the most difficult and perilous quest in the world.

Jason: Maybe he does want me to fail. Pelias did murder my father and steal the throne from me. But he also swore he would make me king if I proved myself worthy.

Nestor: If we succeed, Jason will become a king. If we fail, Jason will die.

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Jason (firmly): I will succeed, King Aeetes.
N2: Aeetes snaps his fingers. A servant brings Jason a helmet filled with dragon’s teeth.

**SCENE 3**

N1: On the Argo, Jason tells the crew what Aeetes has asked of him.
Nestor: It is impossible, Jason.
Heracles: You will be incinerated.
Atalanta: Is the Fleece really worth dying for?
Jason: My uncle is a merciless ruler. I must do this for my people.
Nestor: Then let us slay King Aeetes and take the Fleece.
Jason: No. I will not spill blood.
Heracles: Why should you care about Aeetes? He will not shed a tear when you are savagely killed.
Nestor: Yes—if there must be death, let it be his.
Jason: My dear Argonauts. Do we not have the gods on our side? I will accept this challenge and face my fate.

**SCENE 4**

N2: That night, a messenger arrives at the Argo.
Atalanta: Who goes there?
Medea: I bear a message for Jason.
Jason: Medea? What are you doing here?
Medea: I have come to warn you. My father will never give up the Golden Fleece. Not ever.
Jason: I do not understand.
Medea: Long ago, an oracle foretold that my father would lose his kingdom if he lost the Golden Fleece. Not ever.
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WHERE DO DRAGONS COME FROM?

Nearly every culture on Earth has stories and myths about fire-breathing lizards. In some cultures, a dragon is a symbol of luck or good fortune; in others, a dragon is a symbol of doom. This got us thinking: Where do these stories come from? They may have been inspired by real-life animals. Here are three possibilities.

THE DINOSAUR?

To our ancestors, dinosaur fossils may have looked like the corpses of dragon-monsters.

THE WHALE?

Whales are massive creatures, and if you had never encountered a living one, as few ancient people had, it would be easy to mistake its skeleton for that of a fantastical dragon.

THE NILE CROCODILE?

At 18 feet, these creatures are the largest crocodiles on Earth. Some historians believe that they inspired dragon legends.

SCENE 6

N2: Hundreds of armed soldiers spring up.

Soldier 1: We are thirsty for battle!

Soldier 2: Show us the enemy!

Soldier 3: My sword is at the ready!

N1: Jason remembers Medea’s instructions. He picks up a large stone and hurls it into the field.

N2: It hits one soldier in the helmet, bounces off another’s shield, and smacks into the face of a third.

N1: The soldiers turn on each other.

Soldier 1: You hit me, you brute!

Soldier 2: I didn’t hit you. He did!

Soldier 3: I did not!

N2: The soldiers begin to attack each other. Soon, every last one is dead.

All Argonauts: Cheering.

N1: Medea approaches Aeetes. She boils with rage as he walks onto the field.

Aeetes: Congratulations, Jason. You have proven yourself a powerful warrior. Tonight, the Golden Fleece shall be yours.

N2: As the crowd disperses, Medea approaches Aeetes.

Medea: Father, it is right to keep your word and give up the Golden Fleece.

Aeetes: I have no intention of giving up anything, foolish girl. Tonight, we will kill them all.

SCENE 7

N1: The Argonauts celebrate on the shores of the sea.

Heracles: A remarkable feat!

Jason: We shall soon set sail for home.

N2: Medea rushes up to them, breathless.

Medea: It is just as I feared: My father does not intend to keep his word.

Jason: What do you mean?

Medea: He intends to slaughter you and your men.

Nestor: The villainy!

Medea: You must get the Fleece and leave—now.

Nestor: Greece will be your home.

Nestor: May I touch it?

Medea: I have only put it to sleep. Now go quickly!

Nestor: We shall soon set sail for home.

N2: The dragon’s eyes droop; its jaw thuds to the ground.

Jason: Stop!

N1: It is too late. The dragon has seen him.

N2: It stretches out its long neck and, in a flash, its massive jaws open.

N1: It unleashes a horrible hiss. A wave of heat emanates from its mouth.

N2: Medea rushes forward and sinks to her knees. She begins to chant a magic song.

N1: The dragon’s eyes droop; its jaw thuds to the ground.

Jason: You killed it with . . . song?

Medea: I have only put it to sleep. Now go quickly!

N2: Jason climbs the tree and snatches the Fleece.

N1: Then he and Medea run back to the boat.

SCENE 8

N2: The Argonauts crowd around Medea and Jason.

Atalanta: The Fleece gleams like Zeus’s lightning!

Nestor: May I touch it?

Heracles: Throw it over my shoulders!

Medea: Jason, look! It’s my father!

Heracles: The villainy! Hurry men, or I shall make you wish you had never been born!

N1: Through the darkness, they see Aeetes and a small army racing toward them, torches raised.

Nestor: Argonauts, grab an oar, each of you. Quick!

N2: The Argonauts are escaping!

N1: The Fleece gleams like Zeus’s lightning!

Atalanta: I am your family.

Nestor: We will be your family.

N2: Jason climbs the tree and snatches the Fleece.

Nestor: Then he and Medea run back to the Argo.

WRITING CONTEST

Jason is considered a hero of Greek mythology. In your opinion, does he deserve that title? Is he the hero of this story? Answer both questions in a short essay. Use text evidence to support your ideas. Send your essay to HERO CONTEST. Five winners will each get The Shadow Thieves by Anne Ursu. See page 2 for details.