



The Fire Thief

By Terry Deary

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International best-selling author Terry Deary reinvents the myth of Prometheus, the Titan who stole fire from the gods and gave it to the human race. To escape the gods' revenge, Prometheus travels through time to a murky metropolis called Eden City. There, he befriends a motley assortment of comic characters and learns what humans have done with his gift of fire.

Enter our narrator: Jim, a young orphan, actor, aspiring novelist, and petty criminal who rids the wealthy of their worldly possessions. With the help of Jim, Terry Deary masterfully interweaves two plots, with the action jumping at a whirlwind pace from Mount Olympus to the seedy taverns and elegant mansions of Victorian Eden City. Prometheus has a soft spot for humans in need, but using his powers to get his new friends out of trouble will betray his hiding place to the gods!

Using humorous footnotes, shameless puns, and literary references to everyone from Dickens to Poe, Terry Deary has created an original work that will have readers laughing out loud.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 4-6—In highly irreverent fashion, Deary retells the myth of Prometheus as a time-travel adventure. After enduring 200 years of punishment for stealing fire from the gods, Prometheus has managed to kill the Avenging Fury. Before he can escape, however, Zeus issues a challenge: find one true hero. Prometheus travels into the future, with the resurrected Fury in pursuit, and arrives in a murky factory town in 1858. He falls in with a pair of itinerant thieves: a young orphan and his Uncle Edward. They gain admittance to wealthy homes, and while Uncle Edward stages a theatrical performance in the downstairs parlor, Jim steals valuables upstairs. The story switches back and forth from ancient Greece to 1858 until the two narratives come together as related by young Jim, who aspires to become a writer. He interrupts the story with footnoted asides that are often funny, but that slow the pace and add to an already complicated plot. Deary crams his tale with wordplay, zany characters, and allusions: Eden City, Dickens (including quotes from *A Tale of Two Cities*), a pathetic match girl hovering at death's door, and a mayor named Wallace Tweed, among others. The characters fail to develop beyond stereotypes, and the plot twists unroll all too predictably.—*Marilyn Taniguchi, Beverly Hills Public Library, CA*

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About the Author

Terry Deary is the author of over 160 books. He writes both fiction and nonfiction to much acclaim and has a hand in the television, theater, and radio worlds as well. His Horrible History series has sold twenty million copies worldwide, and his books have been translated into twenty-eight languages. Deary has won numerous awards, including Blue Peter's Best Nonfiction Author of the Century in the United Kingdom. He was named a Doctor of Education by Sunderland University. For more information please visit www.terry-deary.net.

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Chapter One

Greece—the dawn of time

This is where my story begins. I wasn't there myself in ancient Greece, but one of the actors in this terrible tale told me the story, and I believe him. Let me tell you his story as if I was a writer—I've always wanted to be a writer. Who am I? Wait and see. Let's start at the dawn of time . . .

The bird soared and wheeled in the cloudless sky over the silent earth. Beneath it lay valleys of rich green and white-topped mountains. A crystal blue sea shone in the distance. A deep forest loomed beneath the monstrous bird, and from the heart of the darkness a smudge of smoke rose into the clean air.

"Ahh!" the bird growled. "Fire." It scented the sooty air and climbed away from it. Then it turned and arrowed toward a distant mountain. "Breakfast," it hissed, and then it swooped down. Rabbits froze, terrified as the bird's death shadow passed over them. The bird ignored them and let the warm air lift it up the mountainside.

As it climbed, the shimmering grass below gave way to gray, wind-scrubbed shrubs and then bare rocks, too bleak for even moss to grow. The bird lifted its hooked beak and half closed its curved wings till it dropped toward one massive boulder. On the boulder lay a man. Windburned and sunbaked, he lay there as the bird's claws clattered against his rock and it skidded to a halt. "Oooops!" the bird croaked. "After all this time I'm still not good at landing."

Fine chains had sunk into the rocks, and they wrapped around the man's wrists and ankles. Fine links—but unbreakable.

The bird shook its gold-brown feathers, and its black eyes burned. "Good morning, Prometheus. I hope you slept well," the bird hissed.

The man smiled. His face was as handsome as a god. "I slept very well."

The bird blinked. "You seem cheerful," it snapped suspiciously.

"I slept well," the man cried. "And had such wonderful dreams! I dreamed of freedom."

"You don't deserve it," the bird snarled. "You stole fire from the gods, and you gave it to those crawling creatures they call humans. You sneaked it away, hidden inside a reed—you are no better than some robber on the road." The bird began to screech and ruffle its feathers. "The humans will burn our world and choke us all with smoke. You deserve worse than death . . . Fire Thief."

Prometheus smiled again. "And I have a punishment worse than death, don't I? My cousin Zeus chained me here in the sun and snow, in the wind and hail, always to suffer but never to die."

A big gray tongue rolled from the side of the bird's cruel beak. "And worse, Prometheus, and worse. You have me. The Fury. The great Avenger of the gods."

The bird began to pant. "What am I going to do, Prometheus?"

Prometheus opened his eyes as wide as a baby. "Oh! I don't know! What have you done every day for the last two hundred years, Fury? You have used your little beak to peck into my side and pull out my liver. You have killed me every morning for one hundred years. And every night I return to life to suffer again the next dawn."

"I don't peck," the bird snarled. "I tear."

"Feels like a peck to me," Prometheus said with a sad shake of his head.

The Fury was furious. "I don't pull your liver—I rip and rive it from your body." "Feels like a little tug to me," the man shrugged, and the chains rattled against the rock.

The bird's claws clattered as it stamped angrily. "I wish Zeus would let me tear out your lying tongue and your laughing eyes," it screeched.

"Sorry, just my little old liver," the man sighed. "Come closer, Fury." The bird froze. "What?"

"I want to tell you about my dream."

"Why would I want to hear your dream? You'll be dreaming the dreams of the dead in a moment when I tear and rip your body."

"Ah, it was such a dream, though. The sort of a dream you have once in two hundred years," the man murmured.

The bird edged closer. It wiped its beak against the cold rock to sharpen the tip. "Lift your head, Prometheus," the bird screeched. "Look at the valley. That smoke down there choked me this morning. Smoke from the fires that YOU gave to those pitiful human animals. Your liver will taste all the better this morning."

The bird lunged at the man's side. The hand of Prometheus slipped free of the chain and grasped the bird by the neck. It gave a startled squawk. Its black eyes bulged, and its body struggled. But the more its body writhed, the more its neck ached.

"I haven't finished telling you about my dream," the man said, and his voice was as soft as his hand was hard. "In my dream my friend Hercules came up the mountain. He is the strongest creature in the world. Stronger than me." Prometheus sighed and squeezed the feathered neck a little harder. "Stronger than you. And Hercules snapped my chains like they were made out of grass. Just like I am going to snap your neck now."

The bird writhed and croaked. "You said it was a dream."

"I lied," Prometheus said with a laugh. "I still have friends." He squeezed again. "Strong friends, like Hercules. Good friends who think that I was unfairly treated. Friends who sent Hercules to set me free last night."

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