



## Artemis the Brave (Goddess Girls Book 4)

By Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams

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The *Goddess Girls* series by Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams puts a modern spin on classic Greek myths! Follow the ins and outs of divine social life at Mount Olympus Academy where the most privileged godboys and goddessgirls in the Greek pantheon hone their mythical skills.

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### Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

Authors Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams put a modern spin on classic myths with the Goddess Girls series. Follow the ins and outs of divine social life at Mount Olympus Academy, where the most privileged godboys and goddessgirls in the Greek pantheon hone their mythical skills.

About the Author

**Joan Holub** is the author of over 125 books for young readers, including *Groundhog Weather School*, *Vincent van Gogh Sunflowers and Swirly Stars*, *Zero the Hero*, *Who Was Marco Polo?*, *Bed Bats & Beyond*, and the *Doll Hospital* chapter book series. Of the four goddessgirls, she's probably most like Athena because she loves to brainstorm new ideas for books. But she's very glad her dad was never the principal of her school! Visit her at [joanholub.com](http://joanholub.com)

**Suzanne Williams** is the author of over 30 books for young readers, including *Library Lil*, *Mommy Doesn't Know My Name*, *My Dog Never Says Please*, and the *Princess Power* and *Fairy Blossoms* series. Her husband says she's the Goddess of Annoying Questions. (Most having to do with why her computer misbehaves.) That makes her kind of like Pandora except that Pandora never had to deal with computers. Suzanne lives near Seattle in Washington state. Visit her at [suzanne-williams.com](http://suzanne-williams.com)

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### The Hunting Game

ON SILVER-WINGED MAGIC SANDALS, Artemis zoomed through the Forest of the Beasts, her feet gliding just inches above the mossy forest floor. "Come out, come out, wherever you are," she singsonged under her breath.

Dodging tree trunks and ducking under low-hanging vines, she listened carefully for any unusual sounds. Her keen dark eyes searched the dense woods. Her favorite bow—its limbs made of curved, polished olive wood—was at the ready. A tooled leather quiver of arrows was slung across her back. She could pull one out and have it nocked and aimed in a split second, as soon as it was needed.

Behind her, Artemis heard Athena whizzing along in winged sandals as well. And following her were Aphrodite and Persephone. All four goddessgirls wore ankle-length flowing gowns called chitons, and their skirts whipped in the breeze as they zipped through the forest of olive, fig, and pomegranate trees, their feet never quite touching the ground.

They had come here this afternoon for one purpose: to duel with some of the slimiest, smelliest beasts ever to roam the Earth. Armed with magic-tipped arrows, the goddessgirls had already defeated a she-dragon called Echidna and bested a goat-headed Chimera. Now they had only ten minutes left to find the third beast they were tracking.

Winning this one final battle of good versus evil was critical. Something very important hung in the balance.

Their grades.

The first Friday of every month, all the goddessgirls and godboys in their Beast-ology class left Mount Olympus Academy and came down to Earth. Here in this forest, for an entire hour, they played games of skill that Professor Ladon had created to test them. How lucky that she and her best friends were in the same class and that they'd all been assigned to this section of the woods!

Defeating three beasts today would mean an A for each of the four girls. Getting only two was a B, one a C, and coming up empty meant having to repeat the test until they got it right. Artemis had never ever gotten less than an A in the Beast-ology games, and she didn't want this to be an exception. Today was her birthday, after all. Another A would be the perfect gift to herself.

As she entered a clearing, Artemis heard a snuffling sound. The gray-green leaves of a nearby grove of olive trees rustled, disturbing finches and warblers, which flew away in a great flutter of wings. She slowed, motioning silently to her friends to alert them that something was up.

"It's lurking. Over there!" Artemis called softly as the others drew up beside her. Just then the wind changed direction, and she got a whiff of the creature. *Ugh*. It smelled like swamp gas, wet dog, and cow patties all rolled into one.

Persephone groaned and fanned her hand in front of her naturally pale face, causing the bangs of her curly red hair to flutter. "Doesn't exactly smell like flowers, does it?" A skilled gardener, she could make anything bloom at the touch of a finger.

Athena wrinkled her nose. "Maybe like skunkweed."

"I hope it doesn't turn out to be something that slings slime this time," whispered Aphrodite. Flipping her long, shiny blond hair over one shoulder, she touched the gold braid edging the neckline of her chiton. "This outfit is new and I don't want it ruined." The goddessgirl of beauty, she liked to dress well. She had an outfit for every occasion. This one was a bright robin's egg blue that matched her eyes. Circling her slender waist was a belt made of woven grapevines. Since Aphrodite set most fashion trends at Mount Olympus Academy, every goddessgirl at school would probably be wearing a belt just like it before the week was out.

*Stomp. Stomp. Stomp.* The ground shook as the beast lumbered closer. Goose bumps rose on Artemis's arms. She'd rather eat a scarab beetle than admit it aloud, but she was scared. Because she was goddess of the hunt and was skilled at archery, everyone at school assumed she was brave. Her friends depended on her to lead them in these hunts. Even now the others were waiting for her to tell them what kind of beast they'd found. And she had a hunch she knew what it was!

Raising her left hand overhead, she held up one finger. Then, after a moment's pause, two fingers. Another pause. Three fingers. And finally, four. Then, holding up her other hand she showed two more fingers to make six in all. This signaled to the others that they'd probably found a one-headed, two-armed, three-bodied, four-winged, six-legged beast. Just in case they hadn't gotten the message, she silently mouthed the beast's name: *Geryon*.

At the news, Athena got the determined look on her face that she always did just before taking a test she wanted to ace. Persephone pinched her nose closed, as if preparing for the worst smell ever to get even worse as their opponent came closer. And Aphrodite glanced down at her stylish blue chiton, looking more than a trifle concerned.

Seconds later a giant creature jumped out of the woods into the clearing. At the sight of it, goose bumps rose on top of the goose bumps Artemis already had. The Geryon was big. It was bad. It was beastly. It looked just like the one whose features she'd memorized from her Beast-ology textscroll.

Although she loved to hunt, she wished they'd shoot at regular targets. Sometimes the beasts Professor Ladon designed for these tests seemed so . . . so *real*. She had a hard time remembering they were fake.

"You called this one right as usual," confirmed Athena from behind her. "Watch out, the class textscroll says they have particularly vicious talons and wily ways."

"And bad breath," added Aphrodite, holding her nose now along with Persephone.

The Geryon licked its green lips, eyeing them each in turn. Then it turned and wagged its three rear ends so its trio of long tails swept back and forth in the leaves. "Nah nah nuh *nah* nah," it taunted softly. All the while, its blazing red eyes watched them over its shoulder to see if they'd take the bait and move closer. When they didn't, it held a hand toward them. It poked one foreclaw out and curled it over and over, beckoning them to follow it into the intricate maze of bushes beyond it known as the labyrinth. There was rumored to be some sort of fantastical beast-making machine in the center, which Professor Ladon had specially designed to spawn their opponents for these games.

"Ye gods," Athena whispered. "Does it really think we'll fall for that?"

"No way we're following it into that maze," Artemis agreed, her voice shaking. Then, worried that her words might have sounded cowardly, she added in a confident voice, "Let's try to lure it closer. I'd like to get a good shot at that big green patoot."

Persephone giggled, but with her nose pinched tight, it sounded more like a snore.

"Okay, but not too close," said Aphrodite, glancing nervously down at her chiton again. The beasts couldn't harm the goddessgirls, who were immortal, after all. Still, these horrible creatures had ways of making students . . . uncomfortable. Artemis had had her hair singed once in third grade and had gotten a rash from a poisonous dart shot from a serpentine tail in fifth.

"Let me try something," said Persephone. With that, she bent low to a bed of weeds, then blew across it. Seeds encased in fluffy puffs of white whooshed toward the beast. As if on cue, the creature began sneezing. And with each sneeze, it bounced a little closer to them.

Persephone grinned. "Dandelions. Geryons are allergic to them. Works every time."

Suddenly the beast stopped sneezing and let out a huge triple snort from its three giant, hairy nostrils. It planted both hands on its hips. Its eyes flashed red and beady on each of the goddessgirls in turn, as if it was trying to decide who to gobble up first.

"Uh-oh," said Athena. "Somebody looks annoyed."

"Quick! Fan out. As a group, we're too easy a target!" Artemis told them, trying to keep the panic she felt out of her voice. Not seeming to notice how breathless she sounded, the others took her direction and fanned out around the beast in a semicircle.

Persephone, who'd probably seen far more fearsome varmints when she visited the Underworld with her friend Hades, kept her cool. "Got this one?" she called softly to Artemis.

Hovering just inches above the ground in her magic sandals, Artemis's fingers trembled as she slipped an arrow from her quiver. "Yeah, under control," she murmured with her usual show of bravado. She nocked the single arrow in her bow but didn't pull back the string quite yet. She didn't want to shoot one of her friends by accident! "C'mon, just a *little* closer," she crooned, eyeing the beast.

The Geryon's eyebrows bunched together like angry caterpillars. It gnashed its five green teeth and pawed its clawed hooves in the grass. But because they'd spread out, it couldn't seem to decide who to attack first.

That is, until Aphrodite piped up. "It's going to charge!" Even when she was terrified and shouting, her voice as beautiful as she was. Drawn by its lovely sound, the Geryon's frightful gaze focused on her. Its lips curved in a gruesome grin. It gnashed and pawed a little more, but this time it was just for show. Clearly, it had chosen a victim. With a mighty lunge, it charged toward Aphrodite. She shrieked again, so scared that she dropped her bow. "It's c-coming!"

Artemis zipped toward her, moving sideways, always facing the Geryon head-on like Professor Ladon had taught them. *Never turn your back on a beast.* This was one of Mr. Ladon's top ten rules. As the Geryon loomed closer, she pulled back her bowstring, aiming.

*Oomph!* Before she could shoot, she bumped into something. A tree? No, it was Aphrodite! In a tangle of arms and legs, they tumbled to the ground. Although their sandals would whisk them away to safety once they stood, their flight-magic could only flicker listlessly as long as the girls lay sprawled on the moss.

Beside her, Aphrodite whimpered, totally vulnerable to attack without her bow. Artemis had managed to hold on to hers, but in the confusion, her arrow had popped from it to land a few feet away. She heard Athena and Persephone calling to them to get up. But for the moment she was frozen, too scared to move. Her eyes locked with the Geryon's as it loomed closer. And closer. Its smell was even more horrific now, and she could feel the heat of its breath even from two dozen yards away. She'd once read somewhere about a mortal who'd died of fright. Even though she knew that couldn't happen to her, at the moment it seemed very possible. Her heart pounded. A fine sheen of perspiration prickled the back of her neck. She had to do something!

From then on things began to happen quickly, yet they seemed to her to move in slow motion. The Geryon was only three yards away now. It leaped in the air, preparing to ruin Aphrodite's new chiton, lower the goddessgirls' grades, and generally wreak havoc.

Fighting down feelings of terror, Artemis sat up, nocked a new arrow, and squinched one eye shut to aim. She straightened her shaking fingers to release the bowstring.

*Zzzzzing!*

*Poof!* The second her arrow reached it, the monster disappeared into thin air.

"Yes!" Artemis exclaimed, her confidence flooding back. "Right between its four eyes!"

Seconds later the Geryon sprang up again at the entrance to the labyrinth, an arrow sticking from its forehead. Grinning now, it calmly plucked out the arrow, tossed it away, and bowed to them.

“Congratulations, goddessgirls,” it said in a tone that was almost friendly. “You have now achieved the eighth Level of the Arrow. Your excellent progress will be reported to Professor Ladon in your Beast-ology class at Mount Olympus Academy. Until next time . . .”

As its last word died away, the fearsome Geryon disappeared in a puff of purple smoke that hung over the labyrinth for a few moments like wispy fog.

“Another save by Artemis the brave!” Athena quipped, sounding relieved.

“Thank godness!” Aphrodite added gratefully as Persephone and Athena helped her to stand.

Artemis didn’t comment. She was thinking about their praise, quite sure she didn’t deserve it. Her? Brave? Nuh-uh.

“You okay?” Persephone asked.

“Oh, um, yeah, sure,” said Artemis. As soon as she and Aphrodite regained their footing, their sandals’ magic revived and they rose to hover a few inches from the ground like the other girls.

“Well, I’m not,” said Aphrodite, examining her blue-lacquered fingernails with a tragic expression. “I broke a nail. I knew there was a reason Beast-ology was my least favorite class.” Pulling a magic nail file from the cosmetic bag in her quiver, she held out her hand and let the file whisk expertly around her fingertips, making repairs.

“It’s important, though,” said Artemis. “Immortals have to learn this kind of stuff.” It was true. Even if her courage did sometimes desert her without warning, she was glad the class was required. Putting two fingers between her lips, she whistled for her dogs. A bloodhound, a beagle, and a greyhound came bounding toward her out of the forest.

“Good boy, Suez!” she told her bloodhound, who had retrieved one of her arrows. She’d named him for Principal Zeus—Suez was Zeus spelled backward—because like Zeus, Suez was big and blue-eyed. She hover-knelt a couple of inches from the ground to roughhouse with her dogs, and they bounded around her happily, their tongues hanging out.

Persephone hunkered lower too and joined in the pooch-play. “Beast-ology is exciting. I’ll say that for it,” she said, as Amby, the beagle, gave her a slobbery kiss. “Even though I know the mythical beasts aren’t real, they look, smell, and act so much like real monsters that it’s hard to remember this is a class and they’re only made of magic.”

Athena held up both of her hands. “You got that right. Look at my hands. They’re still shaking. I was terrified, even though I knew that Geryon was a fake.”

“But that’s the whole the point of Mr. Ladon’s game! He created the beasts to challenge our skill and bravery,” said Artemis. She longed to admit that *her* hands had trembled too. It would have been a relief to share her fears, but the others had such confidence in her fearlessness that she was too embarrassed to do so. “It’s great practice. You never know when a real beast will come along and need to be put in its place.”

“Oh, come on. Have you ever seen even *one* real beast in your whole life?” asked Aphrodite. Studying her nails in satisfaction, she tucked the file away in her quiver. Then she pulled out a hand mirror and began

primping, smoothing her hair and touching up her makeup.

“Well, no,” Artemis admitted, standing again. In fact, she often wondered if she’d be up to the challenge of fighting a real beast, if she actually saw one. It was easy to appear brave and stay relatively cool when faced with *fake* beasts. But what if, when it really mattered, her bravery seriously failed her?

Just then a crooning sigh rippled over the forest, causing leaves to rustle and the moss that hung from the trees to sway. It was the gentle sound of the nymph girls who dwelled in the hawthorn, oak, and willows. One by one, the nymphs began to peek out from behind the tree trunks and between branches, their pale faces glowing like fairy lights.

“The godboys must be coming,” said Artemis, rolling her eyes. Nymphs were notoriously boy crazy—the complete opposite of Artemis, who’d never crushed on a boy in her entire life.

A soft smile curved Persephone’s lips. “You’re right. Here comes Hades.”

Seconds later he appeared along with Artemis’s twin brother, Apollo. Both had bows and quivers slung across their shoulders, since they were in the girls’ Beast-ology class.

“How’d your hunt go?” called Apollo. Cruising closer on his winged sandals, he leaned in, banked, and did a dramatic swish that landed him next to Artemis.

“Nailed it,” she assured him.

“Yes! Us too,” said Apollo. They grinned and bumped knuckles.

The other goddessgirls might not be as into sports as Artemis was, but her twin loved archery just as much as she did. Unlike some siblings she’d read about, like Medea and Absyrtus or Romulus and Remus, the two of them had always gotten along. Probably because Apollo thought of her like a brother instead of a sister. Ever since she could remember, they’d played on all kinds of MOA sports teams together. They’d even trained for the Olympic games!

“Is Daphne here?” Apollo asked, eagerly looking around for the pretty nymph.

Artemis frowned at him. “Not you, too.” Lately it seemed like everyone at school was falling in love, or at least in *like*. She lifted a brow in Aphrodite’s direction. “This is all your fault.” As the goddessgirl of love, as well as beauty, Aphrodite had a hand in just about every romance on Earth and on Mount Olympus.

Aphrodite flashed her a smile. “What can I say? It’s spring! Love is in the air!” She leaned closer, her bright blue eyes gazing straight into Artemis’s blue-black ones. “One of these days, you’ll meet a boy you like, and then you’ll see for yourself how wonderful romance can be.”

“Hah! I may be the goddess of the hunt, forest, and moon, but I wouldn’t be caught dead mooning over any godboy.” Digging in her quiver, Artemis located a bag of dog treats and tossed them toward her hounds. All three scrambled to get them, managing to scarf the biscuits down in record time.

“You’ll never be caught *dead* doing anything,” Persephone reminded her, laughing. “We’re goddessgirls. We’re immortal!”



Hades smiled down at the petite, pale Persephone, looking amused by her little joke. Earlier in the school year, he'd been all frowns and troubles, but he seemed happier now that he and Persephone were such good friends. Maybe romance did work for some people, but Artemis just wasn't interested.

"See you back at school!" called Persephone. Holding hands, she and Hades took off together, winging their way up the mountain toward Mount Olympus Academy.

Just then Artemis heard a soft *ping! ping! ping!* sound. From far away, the voice of MOA's herald floated to their ears. "Period four at Mount Olympus Academy will commence in ten minutes."

"Oh no! I can't be late for Hero-ology class!" said Athena. "And I need time to fix my hair."

"We all do," Aphrodite added. Putting her mirror away, she pointedly looked Artemis up and down.

"Let's take my chariot," said Artemis, oblivious to the hint. "It's faster than our sandals." None of the other students kept chariots at school, but Zeus had made an exception for her after four deer had followed her back from a second-grade field trip to Mount Parnassus in southern Greece. They'd become her pets and pulled her chariot ever since. Animals were always befriending her like that. Boars, goats, foxes—you name it. She'd even had a pet bear in fourth grade, but eventually Principal Zeus had put his giant gold-sandaled foot down. She could only keep three dogs and four deer as pets, and that was that.

At Artemis's summons, four white deer with golden horns leaped from the forest, pulling her chariot behind them. "C'mon," she called to her companions. Jumping in, she took the reins. Everyone crowded in with her, including her hounds. The chariot lifted off, and together they whooshed from the forest and up the mountainside toward school.

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