

# Tampa Bay Times

## Land O'Lakes teacher's fantasy book inspires students in classroom, beyond

By Megan Hussey, Times Correspondent

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More than two decades ago, a love for reading inspired David Berger to become a teacher. Now it also has prompted the instructor of AP and IB English at Land O'Lakes High School to pursue a second life's passion.

"I was the kid under the covers with a flashlight, reading comic books," said Berger, 46. "Now I've written a story of my own."

A short fantasy story that Berger began in high school has evolved into a successful book series for the Land O'Lakes resident.

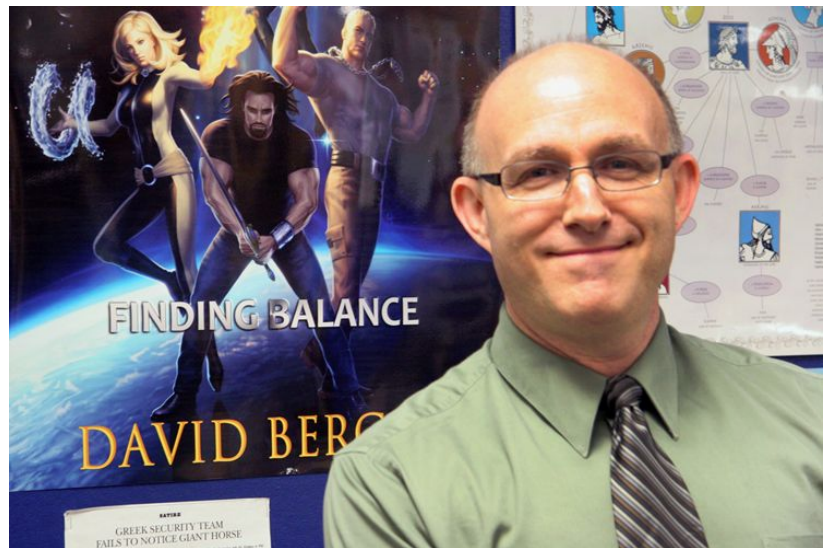
Since its publication early last year, Berger's debut fantasy novel *Task Force Gaea: Finding Balance* — a

self-published work of science fiction that incorporates the figures and legends of Greek mythology into a contemporary adventure — has won an Indie Book of the Day award and claimed second place in the Goodreads Best First Book Award competition. The book has 16 five-star ratings at Amazon and a top 600,000 sales rating, and 34 five-star ratings at Goodreads. The film company 490 Entertainment has bought the rights to the *Task Force Gaea* series, which will produce a second book — *Task Force Gaea: Memory's Curse* — later this fall.

While he says he's pleased with the book's national success, Berger is even more inspired by the local reaction.

"I signed my first autographed books for my students," he said. "And even before my book was published, when I brought a proof copy into class, they all rushed over to take a look. This is just as much of a dream come true for them as it is for me."

Students also have created drawings and dolls based on the four main characters of *Task Force Gaea*; superheroes empowered by ancient gods to fight certain threats to their world, the origins of which can be found in the disruption of ancient, sacred scales and disorder within the universe.



Michele Miller | Times

*David Berger says he was moved to tears when one of his students made a doll based on one of his characters.*

"When a student made a doll based on one of my characters, it moved me to tears," he said.

Two others were so inspired they recently completed their own novels.

Jessica Dorsey, an LOLHS graduate and sophomore at the University of South Florida, credits Berger with inspiring her to write *Hell on Earth (and Other Supernatural Events)*.

"Mr. Berger was my senior year AP English teacher," she said. "... When I saw Mr. Berger had published his book, I saw it as a passionate writer, just like me, finally making his mark on the world."

She came to Berger for help. "He walked me through the steps of publishing it, and even went so far as to help me by editing the entire book for me, purely out of his own selflessness and love of reading and writing," she said. "If it had not been for Mr. Berger, I probably would not have had the inspiration to publish my book."

Robin Hanna is a 16-year-old senior in Berger's AP English class and a participant in the LOLHS Writing Club that he sponsors.

"I thought, 'If he can do it, why I can't I?'" said Hanna, currently completing work on the 50,000-word novel *Darkness Beyond the Blue*. "He inspired my writing skills and showed me I could do anything."

Aside from teaching students about the mythological heroes featured in his books, Berger also shares details of the editing and publishing process.

"Kids don't think that teachers go through the same editing process as everyone else," he said. "We do."

LOLHS students and administrators alike have drawn inspiration from Berger and his book, now featured in the school library.

"I was in Mr. Berger's IB Senior English Class. I was never the kind of person to like English class (until) Mr. Berger," said former student Stephen Burgess. "I can easily say that when I walked into his class, I was excited to learn about English and how to understand books and the world abstractly and concretely."

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## **.fast facts**

### **About the book**

Task Force Gaea: *Finding Balance*, published through CreateSpace, an on-demand printing service, is available through Amazon and Barnes & Noble; both in paperback and e-book forms. David Berger's blog, which offers both practical writing advice and information about his books, can be found at [www.taskforce-gaea.com](http://www.taskforce-gaea.com).

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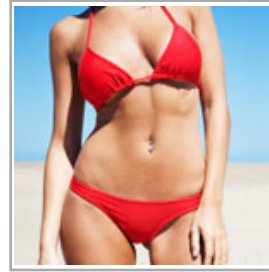
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