

Why Cats Chase Rats: A Chinese Story

Thousands of years ago, the Jade Emperor of China organized a race for animals. The first 12 animals to finish were to be given a place in the Chinese Zodiac, and have a year named after them.

The cat and the rat, both late-risers asked the ox to wake them at dawn on the day of the race.

Came the day. The ox tried to wake the cat and the rat, but without success. They would open their eyes, turn to the other side and go back to sleep. The race was about to start. Unwilling to leave them, the ox coaxed them onto his back and started running. The rat woke up just as the ox was crossing the last hurdle, a river. The sly rat knew that he could never beat the cat in the race. He took the chance fate offered him and pushed the cat off the ox's back. When the ox reached the other side, the rat jumped off and scampered to victory, just ahead of the ox. The tiger came third, but he cheated. He crossed the river by using the backs of the animals swimming across as stepping stones, leaping from one to another.



So the 12-year cycle of the Chinese Zodiac begins with the rat. After him comes the ox who is followed by the tiger. After them come the rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig, in that order. The cat, it must be noted, has no place in the zodiac. She wasn't among the first twelve. In fact she was lucky to finish, having almost drowned in the river.

So is it any wonder that cats chase rats? They can never forget the humiliation heaped on their ancestor by a tricky rodent!

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