

**DAEDALUS**

**WE'RE SOARING, FLYING**



**THERE'S NOT A STAR IN  
HEAVEN THAT - OH**

# DAEDALUS

- Daedalus is an Athenian craftsman, famous for his ability to invent and build things.
  - Think Leonardo da Vinci, but with more powers.
- Unfortunately, he also has a jealous streak. When his nephew (Talos) invents the saw, Daedalus realizes that the boy might be more talented than he is. (Not good.)
- In a fit of jealousy, Daedalus pushes Talos off the Acropolis.
  - That'll teach him not to invent any more carpentry tools.
- Some people say that Athena saw the boy falling, and transformed him into a partridge. But others argue that Talos died and that Daedalus tried to hide the murder by burying him.
  - Well, those are very different endings.
- Athena withdraws her favor from Daedalus.
- Either because he was feeling guilty or because he was banished, Daedalus leaves Athens and heads to the island of Crete.

# DAEDALUS

- While he's hanging out there, Daedalus befriends King Minos, the island's ruler. (It pays to have friends in high places.)
- Daedalus still has the touch in Crete and he continues his building streak.
- He builds a cow suit so that Crete's queen (Pasiphae) can “frolic” with a bull. Yes, a bull.
- Pasiphae's union with the bull results in a horrible half-man, half-beast called the Minotaur.
- Next up, King Minos (the half-beast's step-dad) asks Daedalus to design a maze (the Labyrinth) in which to put the terrible Minotaur. King Minos sends seven young men and women into the Labyrinth to meet their doom.
- One of these victims sent to his death is the hero Theseus. This guy is tough and he decides to fight back and try to kill the Minotaur.
  - But that’s for another story...

# DAEDALUS

- King Minos is not happy with Daedalus, so he locks Daedalus and his son, Icarus, in the Labyrinth. (This seems to be his punishment of choice.)
  - (Some versions of the story say that King Minos actually imprisoned them in a tower. Any way you look at it, Daedalus and Icarus are trapped on Crete.)
- Icarus, Daedalus' son, has a brilliant idea—build wings to fly out of the Labyrinth!
- Daedalus uses feathers and wax to build large wings for himself and his son.
  - (According to Ovid, Icarus goofed around while Daddy Daedalus was making the wings. He played with the feathers and wax and just generally got in his dad's way. Ah, kids.)
- Finally, the wings are finished. Daedalus tries his set on and—OMG—they totally work. Nice!
- Daedalus gives his son some warnings: he should follow him closely and fly at a middle height. If he flies too low, the seawater will dampen the wings, and if he flies too high, the sun will melt them. Got it? Good.

# DAEDALUS

- And off they go!
- A bunch of people on the ground, including a shepherd and a fisherman, stop their work to gaze up at Daedalus and Icarus.
- They're completely blown away at the sight of two people flying in the air—they figure that Daedalus and Icarus might be gods, since no human has ever achieved flight before. What's up now, humans?
- In all the excitement, Icarus forgets his father's warning and starts to fly higher.
- Sure enough, he gets too close to the sun: the heat softens the wax, and his wings fall apart.
- Icarus plummets into the sea, crying "Father, father!" on his way down.
  - (I'll wait while you break out the tissues.)
  - (Okay, I know your version didn't have Icarus crying for his father, but it's still sad!)

# THEME: TECHNOLOGY

- Daedalus loves to invent things. What he *doesn't* love is thinking about the consequences of his inventions. For example, when Pasiphae (King Minos's wife), asks Daedalus to build her a cow suit so that she can seduce a bull, Daedalus does it without pausing to consider the possible outcomes. And guess what? Pasiphae's union with the bull results in the Minotaur, a horrible half-man, half-bull who feasts off human flesh. How's that for unforeseen consequences?
- True, when Daedalus invents the wings made of wax, he briefly considers what might happen if Icarus should fly too close to the sea (damp wings) or the sun (melty wings). But these thoughts sure don't stop him from creating or using his feathered inventions. Ultimately, when Icarus falls from the heavens, Daedalus has no one to blame but himself, since he was the guy who created the devices that allowed the boy to fly so high in the first place.

# THEME: TECHNOLOGY

- Through this myth, we get a glimpse into the dark side of technology—a topic that's still very relevant today. From genetic modification and nuclear weapons to Snap Chat, powerful technologies have powerful and potentially dangerous consequences. Just think about *Jurassic Park* and you'll know what I mean: humankind's curiosity and thirst for invention can lead to awful, scary things.

## Questions About Technology

- Are the benefits of new technology worth the risk of its possible unforeseen consequences? Ultimately, would humans be better off without technology?
- If you were the head of the government, how would you ensure that technology was only used for good? Is this possible?
- Should Daedalus and Icarus have stayed in the Labyrinth, instead of risking their lives? Why or why not?
- Can you think of other instances in the real world when a technology has been used for both good and evil?



# THEME: OBEYING ELDERS

- Is it just me, or does wax wings + hundred mile journey + hot sun seem like a recipe for disaster? Still, maybe this myth would've had a happy ending if Icarus had just listened to his dad. Because really, how hard is it to just fly at a middle height?
- But does Icarus listen? Nope. Once he realizes how fun and easy flying is, he forgets his father's advice and ascends to new stratospheric heights. For a few fleeting moments, Icarus has the time of his life... but then his wings melt and he falls to his watery death. The message about obeying your parents (and using some self-control) is pretty clear here, don't you think?

## Questions About Obeying Elders

- Have you ever disobeyed your parents in order to achieve something great? Was it worth it? Do you think Icarus should have just listened to his dad?
- Was Daedalus' warning strong enough? How else could he have prevented Icarus' death?
- Icarus clearly wasn't mature enough to handle his wings. Should Daedalus have known better than to give him a pair?

# DAEDALUS

- Daedalus is the Steve Jobs of Greek mythology. If something cool and new needs inventing, he's the man to do it. Various Greek writers credit Daedalus with inventing the axe, boat sails, a big maze called the "Labyrinth," and of course, fake wings for humans.
- Unfortunately, in addition to being brilliant, creative, and amazingly logical, Daedalus can also be jealous, cold-hearted, and impulsive. At one point, he throws his nephew (called Talos by some, Perdix by others) off the Acropolis after the poor kid invents a few contraptions that are cooler than Daedalus' (like the saw). After this incident, Daedalus leaves Athens and finds himself in Crete—and we all know how that ends.
- Despite all of his successful inventions, Daedalus' faulty wax wing prototypes have probably gained him the most fame. When his son Icarus sails too close to the sun, the wings melt into puddles, and Icarus falls to his death. Talk about career getting in the way of family. So what do you think: is Daedalus a good dad? He does try to protect his son (helping him escape and giving him those parental warnings we all love) but he also risks his kid's life in the meantime.
- If you think about it, constructing a pair of wax wings and trying to fly a hundred miles over the ocean is a pretty crazy thing to do. Humans, by design, are not meant to fly, so sailing into the air symbolizes a huge act of pride (a.k.a. "hubris") on Daedalus' part.

# DAEDALUS

- Of course, with the death of Icarus, Daedalus pays a steep price for his pride. His reckless wax-wing adventure has since become a cautionary tale, warning others of what might happen if they dare to challenge the laws of nature. It's a common theme throughout a lot of Greek myths—in the battle of mortals versus nature, nature almost always wins. Don't forget it!
- Daedalus is associated with great artistry, which may be the reason why James Joyce named one of his characters (an aspiring artist named Stephen Dedalus) after him. J.K. Rowling also joined in the fun, naming one of the members of the Order of the Phoenix Daedalus Diggle in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.
- This guy also seems to have an astounding number of real and fictional spacecrafts named after him. "Project Daedalus" was a spacecraft project done by the British Interplanetary Society, "Daedalus" was the name of the spaceship in the movie *Space Cowboys*, and Star Trek had a whole category of Starfleet ships called "Daedalus." And in terms of celestial bodies, the inventor has an asteroid and moon crater named after him!

# ICARUS

- The young son of Daedalus, Icarus was curious, adventuresome, and reckless. A daredevil in the making, you can bet that his modern day heroes would have included Tony Hawk and Evel Knievel.
- Like any young boy, Icarus liked to test the limits of his father's patience. According to Ovid, while Daedalus diligently crafted his famous wings, Icarus goofed around, playing with the wax and generally getting in the way. And of course, when Daedalus tells Icarus not to fly too high, what does the boy go and do? He takes the express route towards the sun, and ends up melting his wings. It's kind of like when your dad says "Don't touch the stove, it's hot," and you immediately touch the stove and burn yourself. Lesson learned.
- Not surprisingly, Icarus has become a symbol for excessive aspiration and the danger of ignoring your parents' advice. The lesson is twofold: (1) don't try to reach your loftiest goals too quickly, because you might burn out (this is what people mean when they say, "Don't try to fly too close to the sun!"); and (2) always listen to your parents, especially in situations involving wax wings and celestial bodies.
- Icarus's descent has inspired dozens of poems, songs, and paintings. W.H. Auden and Anne Sexton both immortalized him in short poems, and even Shakespeare namedrops Icarus in *Henry VI, Part III*. *Icarus* is also the name of a publication put out by the American Astronomical Society, in celebration of the boy's adventurous spirit.

# KING MINOS

- King Minos isn't especially forgiving, especially when it came to personal stuff. He and Daedalus were great buddies until the inventor got mixed up in Minos' personal affairs.
- According to different stories, Minos is angry with Daedalus for one of two things:
  - (1) helping his wife seduce the handsome bull by building a cow suit for her
  - (2) aiding Theseus in his escape from the Labyrinth (thanks to Daedalus, Theseus is able to navigate the Labyrinth and run off with King Minos' daughter)
- And of course, rather than have a heart-to-heart with Daedalus to talk about his feelings, King Minos imprisons the inventor and his son.
- King Minos isn't as popular as Daedalus and Icarus, but he does make an appearance as a villain in *Percy Jackson: The Battle of the Labyrinth*.

# PASIPHAE

- Queen of Crete and wife of King Minos
- She boasts of being more beautiful than Aphrodite
  - (We know where this is going...)
- She is later punished when she falls in love with a white bull sent by Aphrodite.
- She has Daedalus build her a cow costume.
- 9 months later the Minotaur was born.

# HERO'S JOURNEY

- The story of Daedalus and Icarus doesn't fit perfectly into the Hero's Journey structure, but here it goes...

## Ordinary World

- Before their big adventure, Daedalus and Icarus are happily hanging out in King Minos's court. Sure, Daedalus is occasionally forced to do unsavory things (like build a maze so that King Minos could feed innocent people to the Minotaur), but overall, life is good.

## Call To Adventure

- Things change once King Minos becomes angry with Daedalus. He imprisons the inventor and his son in the Labyrinth.
- Daedalus loses his freedom, and must use his inventing powers to escape.

# HERO'S JOURNEY

## Refusal Of The Call

- This stage doesn't really apply to the story. Right off the bat, Daedalus knows that he must escape the Labyrinth and the island of Crete. He never doubts the call of his own instincts to get out of there.

## Meeting The Mentor

- Again, not applicable. Daedalus has no mentor, because he is Greece's greatest craftsman. In order to "meet the mentor," all he has to do is check-in with himself and brainstorm a great idea.

## Crossing The Threshold

- Strapping a pair of wings to his back, Daedalus is the first human to cross the threshold of the sky. He flies into the open air, and his wings successfully keep him aloft.



# HERO'S JOURNEY

## Tests, Allies, Enemies

- Daedalus puts a pair of wings on Icarus, and the two take off. Daedalus is worried that Icarus will dampen his wings with seawater or melt them with the heat of the sun.

## Approach To The Inmost Cave

- Enjoying his newfound powers of flight, Icarus starts to push the limits of his wings. He ignores his father's advice to remain at a sensible height, and flies higher and higher, towards the sun. This isn't going to end well.

## Ordeal

- Icarus's wings melt. He plummets to the sea. Daedalus can't make it in time, and Icarus drowns.

## Reward

- If this were a myth with a happy ending, Daedalus would have caught Icarus, or at least rescued him from the sea. Unfortunately, this doesn't have a happy ending.
- The only "rewards" Daedalus gets are (a) a few of Icarus' feathers floating in the water and (b) the realization that great inventions can have terrible consequences, and that trying to overcome nature is sometimes a rotten idea.

# WHY IT MATTERS

- Depending on how you look at it, the story of Daedalus and Icarus is either completely depressing or completely inspirational.
- On the one hand, it's a cautionary tale about what can happen when you disobey your parents and overstep your bounds.
- But on the other hand, it's an examination of **mankind's need to explore**, invent, and be creative, especially when it comes to achieving flight.