

**THESEUS**

Who was it that helped Theseus escape from the Labyrinth?

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# THESEUS

- The story starts with Theseus, a small boy who lives on the coast of Troezen.
- His mother as told him that he really is the son of a king; however, she needed to keep his identity a secret so that he wouldn't be killed by people who wanted the king's kingdom.
- She tells Theseus that he will be able to join his father when he learned to fight his enemies.
- As a small kid, Theseus is determined to work hard to become stronger.
- One day Theses goes to the beach to sulk after getting beat up again.
- He cries out to the wind, swearing he will be king one day.
- The sea then sings him a little lullaby, and Theseus sees a talking bird who tells him a riddle.
- Through the bird's riddle, he learns to use the strength and size of an opponent to his advantage.

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- After this new-found knowledge, Theseus goes back to the bully and beats him and some other guys up.
- He returns to the sea and the seagull finds him again. This time the bird tells him that his real father is none other than Poseidon.
- The bird also tells him that the next day he will receive an unexpected gift and will go to visit King Aegeus who lives in Athens.
- However, the catch is that Theseus must travel by land not by sea.
- The next morning everyone is excited about this stone with a sword in it that appeared overnight.
- The oracle of Delphi had prophesized that whoever pulled the sword from the stone will join Aegeus in Athens and claim his rightful place by his side.
  - Kind of a weird way to make up for being a deadbeat dad.
- After many failed attempts by the people, Theseus steps up to the plate and pulls the sword from the stone.

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- He then begins his long journey to Athens. He can either go to Athens by sea or by land.
- The sea route would be a pretty leisurely pleasure cruise, while the land route is full of thieves and all sorts of bad people.
- He follows the bird's instructions and hits the road.
- The trip to Athens is definitely full of craziness.
- First, Theseus runs into a bad guy named Corynetes who likes to kill people with his massive club.
- Theseus turns the table on Corynetes by taking the bandit's club and killing him by bopping him on the head.

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- Next, Theseus meets a guy named Sciron, an old guy with a battle-ax who tricks people into washing his feet on the edge of a cliff.
- As soon as people to wash his feet, Sciron kicks them over the cliff where they are eaten by a giant turtle. (Seriously)
- Of course, this didn't work on Theseus.
- Our hero chucks Sciron over the cliff, and he too suffers the ultimate indignity of death by turtle.
- Next, Theseus comes upon a dude named Pityocampes, the Pine-Bender.
- Pityocampes has a nasty habit of getting people to hold a bent pine tree, and then letting the pine tree go so that the victim goes flying.
- Once again, Theseus give Pityocampes a taste of his own medicine and gives the dude somewhat of a split personality.

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- The last villain that Theseus meets on the way to Athens is a super-weirdo named Procrustes. The name alone ought to gross you out.
- This guy offers strangers his bed for the night.
- Then when they're asleep, he either cuts off their feet, or stretches their bodies to make them fit the bed exactly.
  - Talk about a perfectionist.
- As you might expect, Theseus gives Procrustes the old "you've made your bed, now sleep in it" treatment.

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- At long last, Theseus makes it to Athens only to find out that it is Aegeus's cousin who is running the show.
- This means that although Theseus may be the prince of Athens, he doesn't get any of the cool benefits of being a prince.
- Theseus is ready to overthrow Pallas and his fifty sons, but King Aegeus is too afraid for his son's life.
- Theseus then decides to pick a fight abroad in Crete.
- There's a ton of bad blood between Athens and the island kingdom of Crete.
- See, a while ago, Crete defeated Athens in a war, and King Minos of Crete demanded that every year Athens send some fresh young Athenians to be sacrificed to the monstrous Minotaur.
- The Minotaur was a monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man, who is locked in the Labyrinth, a deadly maze on the island of Crete.

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- Escape from the Labyrinth is almost impossible, and the Minotaur has a taste for human flesh, so all the young Athenians were doomed from the moment they got on the boat for Crete.
- The time has come once more for the young people of Athens to see who has to go be devoured by the Minotaur.
- Theseus decides that he's got to do something to stop this.
- The eager young hero tells his father, King Aegeus, that he'll voluntarily go to Crete and face the Minotaur.
- Reluctantly, the King agrees, but tells Theseus to change the black sail of the ship to white when he returns. That way, Aegeus will know that his son survived the adventure.
- Theseus says, "No problem, Pops," and sails away to Crete.
- Once he reaches the island, the Cretan Princess Ariadne totally flips for Theseus.
- The beautiful young girl agrees to help Theseus as long as he promises to take her to Athens.
- Ariadne advises that Theseus unwind a spool of string behind him as they creep through the Labyrinth so that the young hero can find his way out again.

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- Ariadne and Theseus make their way into the Labyrinth, trailing string as Theseus searches for the Minotaur.
- Eventually, he and the bull-man collide and a fierce battle ensues.
- Theseus end up kicking the Minotaur's rump and the beast is slain.
- Theseus and Ariadne follow the trail of string out of the Labyrinth and round up the other Athenian youths.
- Theseus, Ariadne, the other princess Phaedra, and the other Athenians set sail.
- Theseus is floating on air over his defeat of the Minotaur.
- He's so happy, in fact, that he totally forgets that he's supposed to change the sail from black to white.
- When Aegeus sees the ship approaching with a black sail, he thinks his son has been devoured by the Minotaur.
- The old King Aegeus is so depressed that throws himself into the sea and drowns.
  - (Ever since then that body of water is know as the Aegean.)
- And so, through triumph and tragedy, Theseus becomes the new king of Athens.

# HERO'S JOURNEY—THE MINOTAUR

## 1. Ordinary World

- Theseus starts off in Troezen, He discovers he's the son of Poseidon, a prince, and heir to the throne of Athens.

## 2. Call to Adventure

- The young hero finds out that every few years, young Athenians must be sent off to the island of Crete to be sacrificed to the man-eating Minotaur, who lives in an inescapable Labyrinth.

## 3. Refusal of the Call

- Theseus doesn't refuse the call at all. He jumps at the chance for adventure.

## 4. Meeting of the Mentor

- Theseus convinces his father, King Aegeus, to let him go. Unlike a lot of mentors, King Aegeus doesn't really give Theseus any advice to help him along the way, and he doesn't even encourage his son to go on the dangerous voyage.

# HERO'S JOURNEY

## 5. Crossing the Threshold

- Despite his father's reservations, Theseus hops on the boat to Crete determined to slay the Minotaur and save the young people marked for human sacrifice. He promises Aegeus that he'll change the black sail of the ship to white on his return to Athens to show his father that he made it back alive.

## 6. Tests, Allies, Enemies

- Theseus makes a great ally in the Cretan Princess Ariadne. The beautiful maiden falls in love with him and tells him how to escape the Labyrinth by trailing string behind him.

## 7. Approach to the Inmost Cave

- Theseus prepares to enter the Labyrinth and battle the Minotaur.

## 8. Ordeal

- Theseus fights the ferocious Minotaur and defeats him.

# HERO'S JOURNEY

## 9. Reward (Seizing the Sword)

- The young hero takes the Princess Ariadne with him as he sails back to Greece with the young Athenians.

## 10. The Road Back

- Theseus sails back to Greece
  - In some myths he decides to abandon the Princess Ariadne on an island on the way back to Greece. Unlike a lot of heroes, who become better people over the course of an adventure, Theseus becomes more of a jerk.

## 11. Threshold Crossing “Resurrection”

- This section of the story veers away from the Hero's Journey formula. Theseus is so busy thinking about how awesome he is that he forgets to change the sail to white. When Aegeus sees the black-sailed ship approaching Athens, he thinks Theseus is dead and kills himself. So, Theseus doesn't face another obstacle from which he barely emerges alive. Instead, he actually causes the death of his own father.

## 12. Return with the Elixir

- Theseus is now a totally famous hero, because of his defeat of the Minotaur. Because of his father's death, he's also the King of Athens. Theseus's reward is bittersweet, since it was accomplished (literally) over his father's dead body.

# THEME: STRENGTH AND SKILL

- To the ancient Greeks, nothing said strength and skill like a little monster slaying. It seems like it was a requirement that a hero prove himself by slaughtering some monster or another. Perseus beheaded Medusa, Heracles hacked up the Hydra, Odysseus blinded a Cyclopes... the list goes on and on. Even though Theseus defeated a bunch of bad guys in his early adventures, none of his earlier enemies compared to the bull-headed, man-eating Minotaur. So, when Theseus slays the terrible creature, his reputation for strength and skill truly reaches mythic proportions.

## Questions About Strength and Skill

- What makes Theseus stronger than normal men?
- Would Theseus have been able to complete his quest without Ariadne? Did he have the skills necessary? Why, or why not?
- What do you think is Theseus's greatest strength? His greatest skill? Why do you think so?
- In what ways is Theseus weak?

# THESEUS

- In his early adventures, Theseus showed everyone that he was a hero to watch.
- But when he slew the brutal Minotaur, he proved to the world that he belonged on the permanent Who's Who list of Geek heroes.
- Like many of his fellow heroes, he showed that he was brave and totally capable of slaying even the most terrifying of foes.
- However, Theseus also proved on his Minotaur adventure that he was a flawed human being. When he carelessly caused his father's death, he showed he was far from perfect.
- Of course, he was not alone in this. Many of the other famous heroes like Heracles and Jason had some not-so-cool episodes in their lives.

# THE MINOTAUR

- The Minotaur is probably one of the most well known of the many famous Greek beasties.
- This monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man is the biggest and baddest of Theseus's many foes.
- Back in the Heroic Age, a hero just wasn't a hero without a monster to slay.
- The Minotaur is part of a long list of slaughtered monsters.
  - Medusa, the Hydra, the Nemean Lion and more all fell to one hero or another.
- In a way, Theseus owes everything to the Minotaur.

# ARIADNE

- A princess of Crete, she makes it possible for Theseus to escape the Labyrinth.
- There are a lot of variations on the story of what happens to Ariadne after Theseus takes her from Crete.
- Most versions agree that she is abandoned by Theseus and ends up marrying Dionysus, the god of wine. The two have lots of babies and end up living on Mt. Olympus.
- Some say that the constellation Corona is named after the crown that Dionysus placed on her head.
  - So, yay, not everything in Greek mythology is tragic.

# KING MINOS

- Minos, son of Zeus and Europe, was the mythical King of Crete.
- Though he's depicted as a bad guy a lot of the time, he also had a reputation as a capable ruler who transformed Crete into one of the major naval powers of the Mediterranean Sea.
- Mythology says that after Minos died he became a Judge of Dead and decided which souls were rewarded and which were punished in the dark pit of Tartarus.

# KING AEGEUS

- Aegeus is the King of Athens and the mortal father of Theseus.
- The hero ends up causing his father's death when he forgets to change the black sail of his ship to a white one upon returning to Athens from Crete.
- The black sail misleads Aegeus into thinking that Theseus was killed by the Minotaur and so the grief-stricken Aegeus hurls himself into the sea which to this day is called the Aegean.
- Besides the myths of Theseus, Aegeus also pops up as a character in *Medea*, the tragedy by Euripides.

# STORIES THAT MATTER

- To the folks of ancient Athens, Theseus was the absolute *man*. They thought of him as the great king who brought law and order to Athens.
- Theseus was the guy who helped pave the way for civilization.
- He's also credited with spreading the influence and power of Athens throughout Greece.
- Tales of his daring adventures were popular subjects of sculpture, pottery, and other art forms, and the myths surrounding him were the subject of many ancient writers.
- The great warrior-king makes an appearance in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- He's shown up in everything from cartoons, to TV Shows, and video games like *God of War 2*. He's even got his own movie: the 2011 epic adventure, *Immortals*.
  - This movie doesn't have a whole lot to do with the original Greek myths, but hey, it's from the guys who made *The 300*, so maybe it's good?