

Theseus and the Minotaur

PART ONE

King Minos of Crete was a powerful man, feared by the rulers of the lands around him. When he demanded goods or men for his great armies, they felt they had to agree. When he demanded they send tributes to honour him, they sent them without question. It was the only way they could stop him going to war with them. But his demands on Athens became too much for them to bear.

King Minos had a great palace built for himself. Inside this palace, Minos had built a giant maze, a Labyrinth, and, at the centre of the maze, he kept a terrifying creature, - the Minotaur. Now this was no ordinary animal; it was a monster, half man and half bull.

It was powerful, and savage and it loved to eat the flesh of the humans who had been shut into the labyrinth by King Minos. They would wander through the maze, completely lost, until at last they came face to face with the Minotaur. Not a great way to die really.

As for Athens, Minos demanded that every year the King send him seven young men and seven young women.

PART TWO

"Why do we send these young people to Crete every year?" Theseus asked his father, the King of Athens. "And why is it that none of them ever return?"

"Because if we did not send them, Minos would wage war on us and it is a war that we would not win," said King Aegeus. "And they do not return because they do not go to Crete as slaves. They go as food for the Minotaur."

"Father, this is terrible," shouted Theseus, "we cannot let this go on. We cannot sacrifice any more of our young citizens to this tyrant. When it is time to send the next tribute, I will go as one of them and I vow that it is the last time the Minotaur will be fed with the flesh of any of our people."

Try as he might, his father could not persuade him to change his mind. Aegeus reminded him that every year, other young men had sworn to slay this terrible beast and they had never been seen again.

Theseus insisted that he understood the dangers but would succeed. "I will return

to you, father," cried Theseus, as the ship left the harbour wall, "and you will be proud of your son."

"Then I wish you good luck, my son," cried his father, "I shall keep watch for you every day. If you are successful, take down these black sails and replace them with white ones. That way I will know you are coming home safe to me."