



Perseus

Many years ago, the King of Argos sought the advice of an oracle. These magical witches could see into the future, and often advised the rulers of Greece on matters such as war. This particular oracle had a potent warning for King Acrisius.

“One day in the future, your own grandson will be the one to bring about your death,” the oracle said in hushed whispers.

King Acrisius descended into despair. How could he prevent such a terrible event? The oracle told him that the child would be the son of his daughter Danae, and so Acrisius locked Danae in a room far beneath his palace.

Unfortunately, the will of the Gods is stronger than walls. Zeus fell in love with Danae and visited her in her dungeon. Together, they had a child name Perseus. Acrisius refused to believe that Perseus was the son of Zeus, and cast him and his mother out of the kingdom. Eventually, they washed up on the shores of Serifos island and were taken in by King Polydectes.

Perseus grew to be a strong and handsome man who was fiercely protective of his mother. When Polydectes fell in love with Danae, he knew that Perseus wouldn't allow him to marry her. He needed to get him out of his way.

Far away, on the other side of the world, there lived three sisters. Each one was a gorgon - a winged woman with a tangle of venomous snakes for hair. Medusa was the only one of the three who was mortal. Polydectes knew that anybody who looked into her eyes would be turned to stone.

The king hatched a plan. He spoke at length with Perseus about Medusa, and how she was a threat to their land. The king wasn't completely honest; he failed to mention her power. If Perseus defeated the gorgon, then it was one less problem for the king. He planned to marry Danae while Perseus was away. And if Perseus was to be defeated by the gorgon ... then another annoyance had been removed as well.

Many people in the city had heard about Medusa, and it wasn't long before the secret of her

power reached Perseus's ears. Desperate, he turned to Athena and Hermes for help. They provided him with winged sandals, a cap of invisibility and a mirrored shield. The shoes allowed him to travel to the end of the world quickly, but the mirrored shield was the most important artefact of all.

It didn't take Perseus long to find the lair of the gorgons. Stone statues of previous heroes lined the road to their cave. The screams of the gorgons could be heard from miles away, and Perseus made sure he never looked in their direction. When he drew close, he pulled the cap onto his head and disappeared from sight. He knew that, even though Medusa couldn't see him, one glance into her eyes would turn him to stone.

To avoid this unhappy fate, Perseus used the mirrored shield to look around him. Without ever having to look directly into her eyes, he made his way unseen towards Medusa. With a swift chop of his sword, he removed the monster's head and carried it back to King Polydectes.



VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find a word that tells you that King Acrisius wanted advice.
2. What does the phrase “descended into despair” tell you?
3. How do you know that Perseus cared for his mother?
4. Which phrase tells you that the gorgons had wings?
5. What does the phrase “drew close” mean?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

I

What was the main clue that led to the gorgon's lair?

R

Who was Perseus's grandfather?

I

What “unhappy fate” did Perseus want to avoid?

S

What did Perseus do before he approached Medusa?

P

How do you think King Polydectes felt when Perseus returned?

Answers:

1. Sought
2. King Acrisius became very depressed/sad/worried
3. He was “fiercely protective”
4. Winged woman
5. When he got near

I: The stone statues of previous heroes

R: King Acrisius

I: Being turned into stone

S: Put on his cap of invisibility and used his shield to find the way

P: Angry that Perseus had returned but relieved that he had killed Medusa