

Theseus and the Minotaur – Geraldine McCaughrean and Tony Ross pages 6-11

There used to be a great many kings in the world, because every city and island called itself a kingdom. But one island and one island struck fear into all the rest. King Minos of Crete so terrified his neighbours that they paid him tributes every year to be left in peace. It was King Minos who built a palace with a cellar like a maze. It was King Minos who kept a monster called the Minotaur in his famous Labyrinth and fed it on human flesh.

"Why do we send tributes to Crete every year?" Prince Theseus asked his father, the king of Athens.

"To keep King Minos from sinking our ships or making war on us," said King Aegeus (though he did not like to talk about it.)

"And what do we send?"

"Seven men and seven women," said the King.

"As slaves?"

"Not as slaves," said the king reluctantly. "To feed the Minotaur."

"How revolting! Never again!" Theseus vowed. "This year I'll go as one of the fourteen, and kill this Minotaur!"

Nothing the king could say would change his mind. As the tribute ship set sail, the old man called from the dockside, "Good luck, Son! I shall watch on the cliff top every day. If you succeed, raise a white sail. If you shall fail, raise this black one."

"I shall succeed!" called Theseus.

King Minos laughed to see the prisoners arrive from Athens. "Who'll be the first into the Minotaur's den?" he asked.

"I shall," said Theseus, stepping forward. "I, Prince Theseus of Athens, claim that honour!"

"You boasting young puppy," snarled Minos. "My Minotaur will make short work of you. Guards! Put the prince into the Labyrinth!"