Perseus and Andromeda

Once upon a time, King Acrisius of Argos was told by the oracle that he would be killed by his grandson. He had one daughter, Danae, who he promptly locked away once she reached child-bearing age. Zeus, always on the prowl, found Danae, and entered her cell in the form of golden raindrops. There, despite all of Acrisius’ precautions, Zeus impregnated Danae.

Determined to protect himself from the prophecy, but unwilling to slay his progeny, Acrisius cast Danae and her son Persus into the sea in a box. They washed ashore on the coast of Seriphos, where they were found by the fisherman Dictys. Dictys reared Perseus as his own son.

By the time Perseus was full grown, Dictys’ brother, King Polydectes, met Danae, and coveted her. But Perseus was protective of his mother. So, in order to get rid of Perseus, King Polydectes hatched a plot. On the pretense of wedding someone else, King Polydectes asked Perseus to fetch him a wedding present. Now this was not your run of the mill wedding present - King Polydectes requested the head of Medusa, the mortal one of the three Gorgons - women with hair of snakes, whose visage was so hideous that anyone seeing them would turn instantly to stone.

Having Zeus as a father has dividends. Before setting out on his perilous journey he was given a helmet of darkness by Hades, god of the underworld, to make himself invisible. Hermes (Mercury) gave him a pair of winged sandals, and Athena gave him a polished bronze shield.

Hermes and Athena took Perseus to the Graeae, three old women with one eye which they shared. Perseus stole their eye, returning it only after they told him where he could find Medusa.

Sneaking up on the sleeping Gorgons, Perseus looked at their reflection in the shield and slew Medusa. The flying horse Pegasus sprang from her body. Perseus fled the other two Gorgons under his helmet of darkness.

On his way back to Argos, Perseus came upon a beautiful woman, Andromeda, chained to rocks, about to be sacrificed to the sea monster Cetus. Andromeda was the daughter of King Cepheus and Queen Cassiopeia, of Ethiopia. It seems Queen Cassiopeia had affronted the Nereids, or sea-nymphs, by her great beauty and vanity. The Nereids appealed to their father, Poseidon, god of the sea. He sent the sea monster Cetus to ravish the land. Cepheus consulted the oracle, who told him that he must sacrifice his daughter Andromeda to the sea monster.

Perseus inquired of Andromeda as to why she was bound to the rocks, and then, leaving her, proceeded to Ethiopia where he made an offer to Cepheus and Cassiopeia. He would save their daughter, and slay the monster, but only if they offered Andromeda’s hand in marriage. They agreed. Persues flew back to Andromeda, slew the monster, rescued her, and they were married. They begat Perses, the ancestor of the Persians, and 5 other sons.

Eventually Perseus made his way back to Argos, where he uncovered Polydectes’ duplicity, and slew him.

But not everyone lived happily ever after. Perseus visited an olympic competition, where unknown to him his grandfather Acrisius was in attendance. Perseus killed him accidently with an errant javelin throw.