

Græsk Mythology

Theseus and the Minotaur



In the ancient lands of Greece, there was once a Prince named Androgeos. He was the son of King Minos of Crete.



The Prince's excellence in valour granted him abundance. He held high hopes of bringing much success and honour to the Cretan people. His feats of strength eventually saw him triumph over champions at the legendary feast held in Athens.



Unfortunately for Androgeos, his success brought him a most significant tragedy ...



Aegeus, the King of Athens, had him assassinated. Aegeus was scornful because the Prince's victories had left nothing for the Athenian heroes.



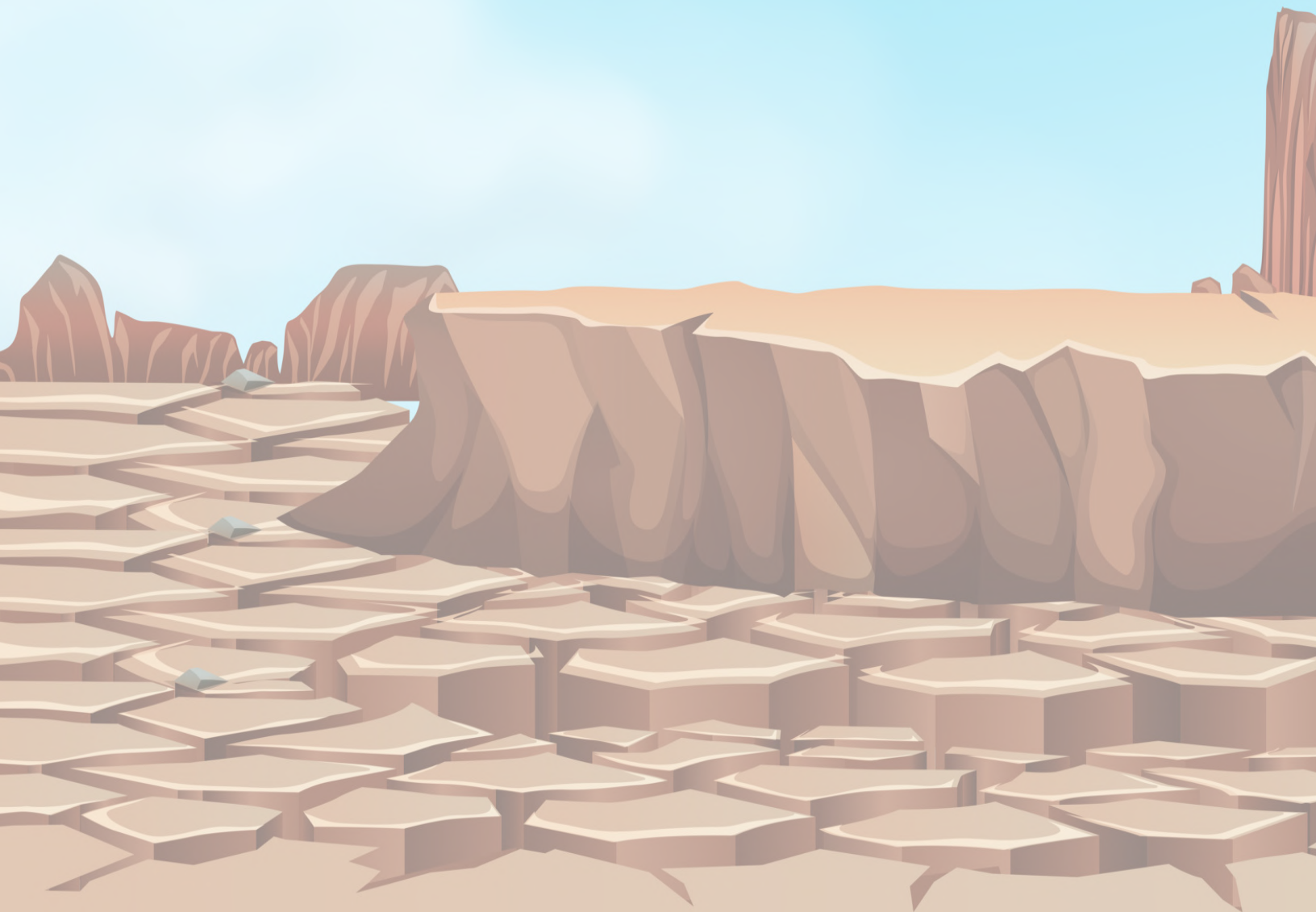
News of Androgeos' murder travelled quickly to his father on Crete's shores, and King Minos mourned the death of his son greatly. He now vowed to seek revenge.



Like Androgeos, many Cretan soldiers were strong. As Crete's armies entered the battlefield, they greatly outweighed Athens in strength, and to make matters worse, the gods were already punishing Aegeus and his people for the dishonourable assassination.



Athens saw many years of the deadly plague. The gods ravished the surrounding lands with drought.



Thinking of no other option, Aegeus pleaded with King Minos—Athens's soldiers were dying! His people were sick! The land's crops were no longer!



After pondering a little while and killing more Athenian soldiers,
King Minos made King Aegeus an infamous offer:

“Give me several youths once every nine years, and I shall take
them as a sacrifice. They will be hunted down and devoured by my
Minotaur!”

Aegeus agreed.



By the time the deal was made, everyone across Greece knew who and what the beastly Minotaur was.

Minos had locked this creature away in an impossibly large Labyrinth. His head was that of a bull's, and his body was that of a man's. Half-bull, half-giant-man: the Minotaur loomed above all and was by all definitions a monster.



Once the Minotaur had locked his gaze, there was little chance of escape for his prey—a genuinely frightening creature indeed!

The people of Athens were horror-stricken. There was no hope: if young Athenians were sent away on a boat to Crete, everyone knew they would not come home.



The Labyrinth was vast, and the Minotaur starved. And now, more than ever, he was hungry for Athenians.

Aegeus's fateful contract with Minos left many Athenians fearful for, and in awe of, the doomed young people sent away.



This year, as King Aegeus looked out at those heading toward the docks, his son Theseus approached him and said:

“I am going with them to Crete to defeat the Minotaur and escape the Labyrinth once and for all!”



Theseus, the son of Aegeus and Prince of Athens, was also an incredible fighter. He was quick and stealthy—often adoringly referred to as “the assassin,” much to the King’s further humiliation. Theseus was, most importantly for this story, smart.



When Aegeus had first seen him approach with a gleam in his eye, he knew there was brilliance behind it. Now, though, Aegeus was appalled to think about his beloved son against the mighty Minotaur. He did not know if he should agree.



He looked back out at the young people now aboard the ship and back to his son. He knew Theseus well and so merely replied:

“If you survive your battle against the Minotaur, fly a white flag on the way home.”



The King and his son embraced one another, and Theseus boarded the boat to Crete. As it sailed away, Aegeus wept and hoped only for his son's return.



Once the Athenian ship reached Minos' shores, soldiers led Theseus and the rest of the youths to a series of holding rooms to await their day of sacrifice. There were still days of celebration for the Cretan people.



As Theseus moved off the boat, Minos's daughter Ariadne noticed him and was immediately interested in this strangely eager hero.



She visited him day after day in the holding rooms, and they fell for each other. Ariadne promised Theseus that she could connect him with the perfect person to help aid his victory against the Minotaur.



Having studied Crete's history for years and with unparalleled access to the kingdom thanks to her status, Ariadne knew the man who built the maze personally.



His name was Daedalus, he was an architect, and after hearing someone's plan to try and escape his marvelled invention, he agreed to help out of sheer curiosity.



Using her quick wit with various Cretan guards, Ariadne finally introduced Daedalus to her beloved Theseus.

However, before she allowed Theseus to meet Daedalus, she made him promise to take her to Athens. The two would have to be married. He promised.



In a private room, Daedalus told Theseus a simple truth:
“The hero to escape the Labyrinth must unspool thread
and follow it to find his way out.”



As guards led the group into the maze, Theseus held this tiny spool of string. (Ariadne had acquired it for him.)



Once the “sacrifices” entered the Labyrinth, Theseus moved quickly from path to path. He was careful not to stir the dusty footing beneath. Other people ran around quickly—some crying or shouting and laughing; some were silent, too.



Theseus was the only person excited as he snuck his way into the Labyrinth: this time, someone was hunting the Minotaur!



It was relatively quick that Theseus found the beast. Ariadne and Daedalus had prepared him well. Theseus drew the attention of the Minotaur and got straight to running.



Many roots were sticking out of the dirt to provoke tripping, and Theseus used these to his advantage. As he moved his way around a corner, he noticed his string and knew he was in one of the architect's roundabout traps.



As Daedalus had told him, the Minotaur would have his prey thinking they were running away, when they would eventually just be running in circles... perfect for capture.



Theseus used his string to his benefit here; as he knew the Minotaur eventually would, he waited until the bull-man was no longer following behind him. Theseus would then attack head-on.



Just as planned, the Minotaur emerged in front of Theseus and was surprised when the hero suddenly charged right back at him.

Startled immensely, the Minotaur stumbled and fell to the ground with his foot catching on a root. Still charging at the beast, Theseus gave the him a swift kick to the back and killed him instantly.



On one of their island-stops on the long journey home, Theseus was so busy rejoicing in celebratory drinks and laughter that he slept the entire next day without realizing that they had left Princess Ariadne ashore.



In Athenian retellings of this legend, however, it is said that Athena came to Theseus with another god of Olympus named Dionysus.

The two gods told Theseus that the gods destined Dionysus to marry Ariadne and would not let Theseus wed her.

Cretans are convinced that Theseus merely abandoned their



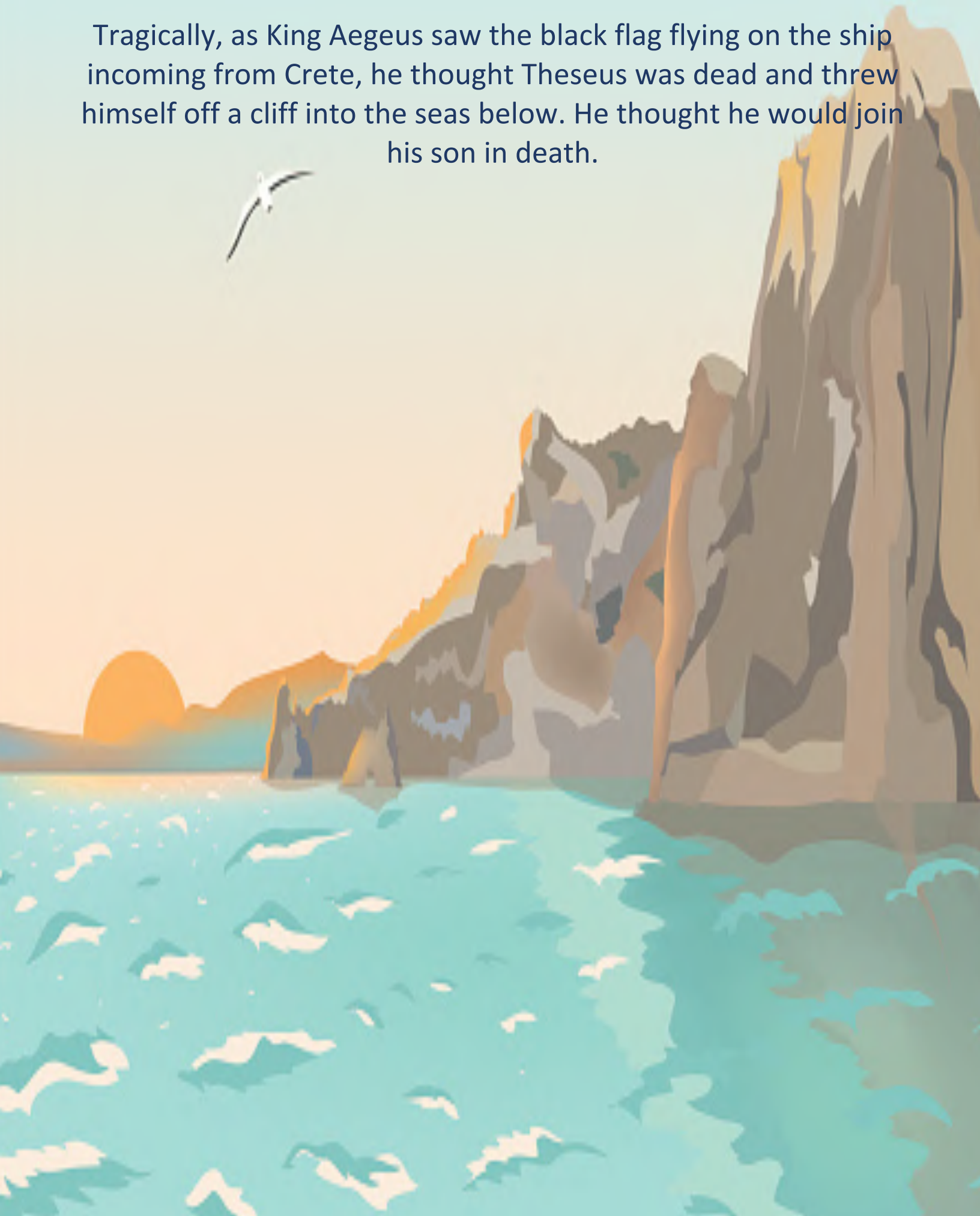
Whatever you believe, Ariadne lived a life of divine treasure and married Dionysus, the god of wine, on the island of Naxos where she was left.



As Theseus neared the end of his journey, he was still so enamoured in celebrations on board the ship that he forgot to fly a white flag.



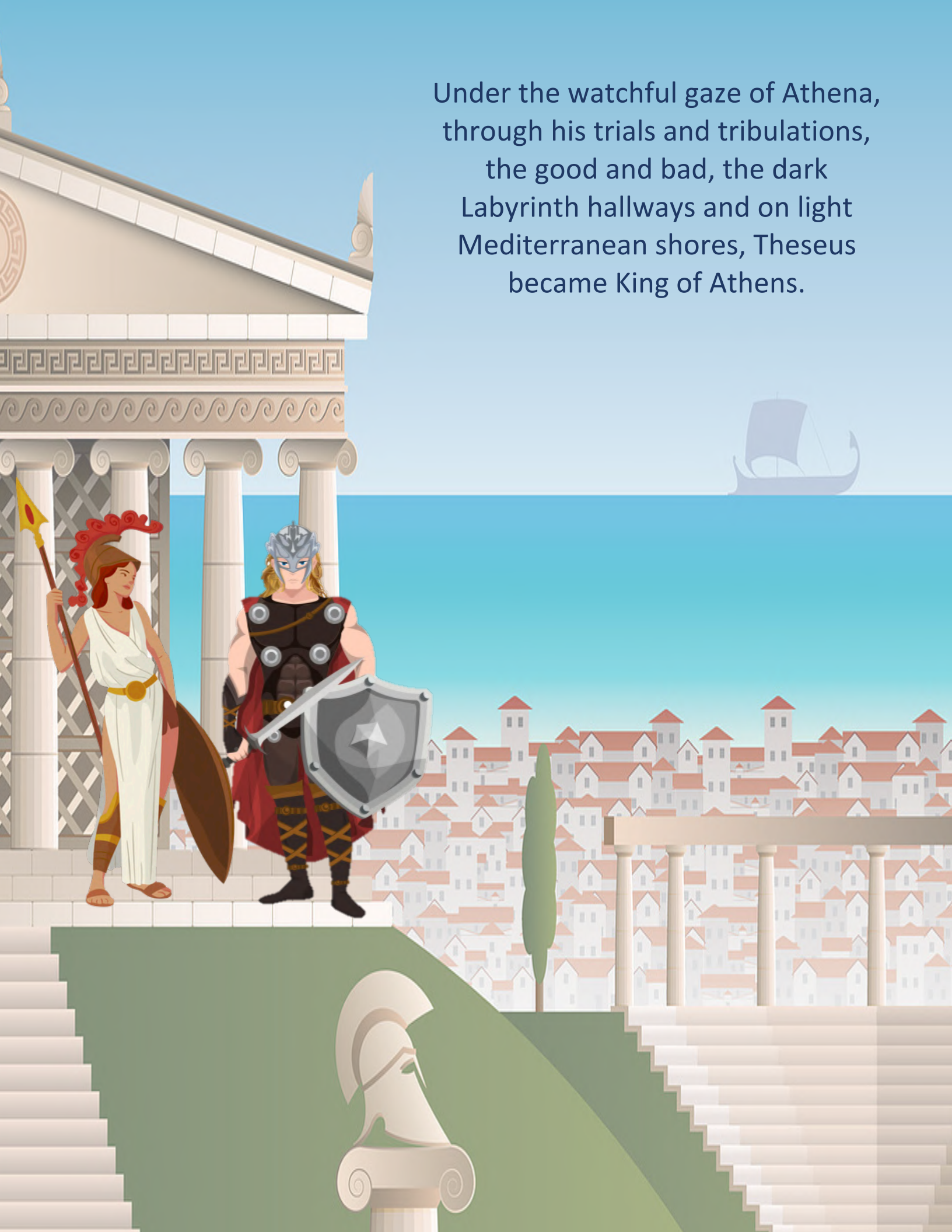
Tragically, as King Aegeus saw the black flag flying on the ship incoming from Crete, he thought Theseus was dead and threw himself off a cliff into the seas below. He thought he would join his son in death.



Theseus then knew how terrible he had become. He honoured his father and named the waters where he drowned the Aegean Sea.



Under the watchful gaze of Athena,
through his trials and tribulations,
the good and bad, the dark
Labyrinth hallways and on light
Mediterranean shores, Theseus
became King of Athens.





THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY

