Can one young hero save his people from a deadly monster?

BY SPENCER KAYDEN
SCENE 1
THE ISLAND OF CRETE

N1: In a gloomy dungeon, several teenagers are curled up on a cold dirt floor. A guard pokes Theseus.

Guard: You there—get up.

N2: Theseus rises slowly.

Guard: Time to face your doom.

N3: Theseus stands tall and proud. He turns to the other prisoners.

Theseus: Friends, I will see you again.

Guard: Not likely. No one has ever come back from where you are going.

N1: The guard takes Theseus away.

Damia: Do you think he will survive?

Liontis: I don’t see how he can.

Borus: And we are next.

N2: The guard leads Theseus down a long corridor. Finally, they arrive in a chamber where King Minos and members of the royal court have gathered.

N3: Minos smiles menacingly at Theseus.

Minos: Good morning. Did you enjoy your breakfast?

N1: Theseus glares back.

Minos: You call it torment; I call it a fitting punishment.

N2: Minos turns to his daughter.

Minos: It is time for this prince to enter the maze and meet our monster. Wouldn’t you agree, Ariadne?

N3: Ariadne locks eyes with Theseus. She takes a deep breath.

Ariadne (quietly): Yes, Father.

N1: The guard opens a big iron door. Air rushes in. The guard opens it wide, and a young man steps through the door.

N2: The guard pushes the door open. Theseus is taken away.

Minos: He is feasting on a leg of lamb when his son Theseus came to Athens to compete in our sporting games. A strong and graceful young man, he won almost every contest. I am ashamed to say that some Athenian youths were jealous. There was a fight and... King Minos’s son was killed.

Theseus: How terrible!

Aegeus: Indeed. Minos threatened war. But he agreed to peace under one condition: Every nine years, we must send 14 youths to be sacrificed to his horrible Minotaur.

Theseus: What’s a Minotaur?

Aegeus: A violent beast—half bull, half man—that feasts only on human flesh.

Theseus: Surely there would be more honor in going to war than in sending our own people to be eaten.

Aegeus: Minos’s army is powerful. It would destroy us.

Theseus: So instead you condemn innocent young Athenians to death?

Aegeus: It is not a decision I make lightly, Son. The youths are chosen randomly. I sacrifice a few for the good of the many. This is the burden of being king.

Theseus considers this.

Theseus: Send me to Crete as one of the 14.

Aegeus: Absolutely not!

Theseus: How can you ask your people to sacrifice their children when you are unwilling to sacrifice your own?

Aegeus: I will not send you to your death!

Theseus: I am strong and clever. Let me reason with King Minos. And if he will not end this horrible custom, then I will slay the beast so that no others must die.

Aegeus: Softly? I could not bear to lose you.

Theseus: Let me do this, Father. For Athens.

SCENE 2
ATHENS, A MONTH EARLIER

N1: King Aegeus sits at a long table covered with trays of fruit and roasted meats.

N2: He is feasting on a leg of lamb when his son Theseus approaches.

Theseus: Father, why is all of Athens shrouded in black?

Aegeus: Are we in mourning?

Theseus: Father, what is going on?

Aegeus: What knowledge? Father, what is going on?

Minos: Good riddance!

Minotaur (off-stage): ROAR!

Aegeus: Theseus must you delight in the torment of others?

Minos: It is time for this prince to enter the maze and meet our monster. Wouldn’t you agree, Ariadne?

N3: Ariadne locks eyes with Theseus. She takes a deep breath.

Ariadne: Father, what is all of Athens mourning?

Aegeus: It is time for this prince to enter the maze and meet our monster. Wouldn’t you agree, Ariadne?

Theseus: Are we in mourning?

Minos: What knowledge? Father, what is going on?

Aegeus: Theseus! Good riddance!

Minotaur (off-stage): ROAR!

Minos: That is the putrid smell of death.

Minotaur: The island of Crete

N3: Minos nods to the guard, who shoves Theseus through the door.

Theseus: How can you ask your people to sacrifice their children when you are unwilling to sacrifice your own?

Aegeus: I will not send you to your death!

Theseus: I am strong and clever. Let me reason with King Minos. And if he will not end this horrible custom, then I will slay the beast so that no others must die.

Aegeus: Softly? I could not bear to lose you.

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SCENE 3
THE SHORES OF ATHENS

N3: A ship sits at the water’s edge. Wailing families are saying their goodbyes.

N1: Aegeus grips his son tightly.

Theseus: How do you know? Can you see the future?

N3: Aegeus wipes his beard with a silk napkin. He sighs heavily.

Aegeus: Many years ago, the son of King Minos of Crete came to Athens to compete in our sporting games. A strong and graceful young man, he won almost every event. I am ashamed to say that some Athenian youths were jealous. There was a fight and... King Minos’s son was killed.

Theseus: How terrible!

Aegeus: Indeed. Minos threatened war. But he agreed to peace under one condition: Every nine years, we must send 14 youths to be sacrificed to his horrible Minotaur.

Theseus: What’s a Minotaur?

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Aegeus: Minos’s army is powerful. It would destroy us.

Theseus: So instead you condemn innocent young Athenians to death?

Aegeus: It is not a decision I make lightly, Son. The youths are chosen randomly. I sacrifice a few for the good of the many. This is the burden of being king.

Theseus: Send me to Crete as one of the 14.

Aegeus: Absolutely not!

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Theseus: I am strong and clever. Let me reason with King Minos. And if he will not end this horrible custom, then I will slay the beast so that no others must die.

Aegeus: Softly? I could not bear to lose you.

Theseus: Let me do this, Father. For Athens.
**Aegeus:** Don’t go, Theseus. I will send another in your place.

**Theseus:** You cannot change my mind. It is my duty to save our people.

**Aegeus:** My son, heroic deeds often come at a great cost.

**N2:** Theseus joins the other youths on the ship. The wind carries them away.

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**SCENE 4**

**THE PALACE OF KING MINOS, CRETE**

**N3:** After arriving in Crete, Theseus and the other youths are brought to a palace.

**N1:** King Minos sits on a golden throne. His daughter Ariadne sits beside him.

**N2:** Minos’s cold eyes scan the trembling youths in front of him.

**Minos:** Athenians, as my son was cut down in the prime of his youth, so too will you be.

**Theseus:** My father’s hatred of Athens was something I never questioned. But now I am old enough to see that the answer to killing cannot be more killing.

**Minos:** Theseus, the labyrinth is as deadly as the monster. Even if you were to succeed in killing the beast, you would need a way out.

**N1:** Ariadne pulls on a loose thread at the bottom of her cloak. She winds it around and around Theseus’s hand.

**Ariadne:** Take this thread. Tie one end at the entrance. Unwind it as you walk, so you will be able to find your way back.

**Theseus:** I admire your courage.

**Minos:** With respect, your majesty, we are not the ones who killed him.

**Minos:** Who is this bold young man who dares to speak?

**Theseus:** I am Prince Theseus, son of King Aegeus.

**Minos:** I volunteered.

**Minos:** A prince with a death wish. How fascinating.

**Theseus:** I am sorry for your loss, but all this killing will not bring your son back.

**Minos:** You know nothing of my pain.

**N3:** Ariadne places her hand on her father’s shoulder.

**N3:** Take them to the dungeon. They will enter the labyrinth at first light.

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**SCENE 5**

**THE DUNGEON, THAT NIGHT**

**N1:** Theseus and the other youths huddle together.

**Liontis:** Why did you volunteer for this?

**Theseus:** I hoped to solve this with diplomacy, but Minos has given me no choice: We must kill the Minotaur.

**Borus:** But its horns are sharper than any blade.

**Theseus:** We will work together.

**Damia:** But we are sent into the labyrinth one by one.

**Liontis:** And it was designed so that it’s impossible to find the way out.

**Theseus:** There must be a way.

**N2:** Theseus paces around their small cell.

**Theseus:** We will work together.

**Liontis:** Why are you here, Princess?

**Ariadne:** I have come to set you free. Take your fellow Athenians back to your ship.

**Theseus:** Theseus is too stunned to speak.

**Ariadne:** Either you are very brave or very foolish.

**Theseus:** Perhaps I am both. All I know is that I could never live with myself if I do not try.

**Ariadne:** Then you will need this.

**Theseus:** My father’s hatred of Athens was something I never questioned. But now I am old enough to see that the answer to killing cannot be more killing.

**Minos:** Theseus, the labyrinth is as deadly as the monster. Even if you were to succeed in killing the beast, you would need a way out.

**N1:** Ariadne pulls on a loose thread at the bottom of her cloak. She winds it around and around Theseus’s hand.

**Ariadne:** Take this thread. Tie one end at the entrance. Unwind it as you walk, so you will be able to find your way back.

**Theseus:** I admire your courage.

**Minos:** My courage! I am not the one risking my life.

**Theseus:** Aren’t you, thought? Defying your father will have consequences.

**N3:** Ariadne smiles sadly. Then she turns and leaves.

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**SCENE 6**

**THE LABYRINTH**

**N3:** The labyrinth before Theseus is dark and cold. Theseus shivers as he ties one end of Ariadne’s thread to its horns.

**Minotaur:** It is a human bone.

**Ariadne:** Take this thread. Tie one end at the entrance. Unwind it as you walk, so you will be able to find your way back.

**Theseus:** I admire your courage.

**Ariadne:** My courage? I am not the one risking my life.

**Theseus:** Why are you helping me?

**Ariadne:** It is my duty to save our people.

**Theseus:** I am Prince Theseus, son of King Aegeus.

**Minos:** With respect, your majesty, we are not the ones who killed him.

**Minos:** Who is this bold young man who dares to speak?

**Theseus:** I am Prince Theseus, son of King Aegeus.

**Minos:** I volunteered.

**Minos:** A prince with a death wish. How fascinating.

**Theseus:** I am sorry for your loss, but all this killing will not bring your son back.

**Minos:** You know nothing of my pain.

**N3:** Ariadne places her hand on her father’s shoulder.

**N3:** Take them to the dungeon. They will enter the labyrinth at first light.

**Theseus:** With respect, your majesty, we are not the ones who killed him.

**Minos:** Who is this bold young man who dares to speak?

**Theseus:** I am Prince Theseus, son of King Aegeus.

**Minos:** The king sent his own son?

**Theseus:** I volunteered.

**Minos:** A prince with a death wish. How fascinating.

**Theseus:** I am sorry for your loss, but all this killing will not bring your son back.

**Minos:** You know nothing of my pain.

**N3:** Ariadne places her hand on her father’s shoulder.

**N3:** Take them to the dungeon. They will enter the labyrinth at first light.

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**ADVANCED CIVILIZATION**

Today, Greece is a country in Europe. When we say “ancient Greece,” we mean a culture that started about 2,800 years ago, lasting from around 800 B.C. to 500 B.C. During that period, Greece was a major world power, and its civilization was one of the most advanced in the world. Ancient Greece consisted of city-states. (Athens was a city-state.) Citizens were extremely loyal in their city-state.

**Scene 5**

**THE DUNGEON, THAT NIGHT**

**N1:** Theseus and the other youths huddle together.

**Liontis:** Why did you volunteer for this?

**Theseus:** I hoped to solve this with diplomacy, but
The beast crashes to the ground and dies.

Spirit: Valiant hero, I have long wished for this impossible day!

Theseus: Limping, Theseus follows the thread back to the entrance and collapses against the door. Ariadne opens it.

Ariadne: You are alive!

Theseus: And the Minotaur is dead.

Ariadne: You must return with us to Athens. We will keep you safe.

Theseus: Will Athens accept me? I am a Cretan, a sworn enemy of your people.

Ariadne: When I tell them what you did for me, they will cherish you as I do.

Theseus: Our work is not finished. We must free the others.

Ariadne: The guards are easily bribed. Follow me.

Theseus and Ariadne run off to the dungeon.

They fling open the doors to the cell. The other Athenians shout with joyful disbelief.

Damia: You are alive!

Borus: How can it be?

Liontis: I never doubted you. I knew you would do it.

Theseus: Come, there is no time to spare. Ariadne will lead us to our ship, and we will sail for home at once.

As Ariadne leads Theseus and the other young Athenians to freedom, a voice echoes above them—a voice that none of them seem to hear.

Spirit: Oh Theseus, you have chosen to be a hero. You will be a great man.

They step out of the dungeon and into the bright light of day.

Stories about your bravery will be told for generations.

They quickly board their ship and prepare to leave.

But the life of a hero is not an easy one.

As the ship sails toward Athens, Theseus and the others hug joyfully.

Heroic deeds come at great cost, young prince.

**THESEUS VERSUS KATNISS**

The story of Theseus and the Minotaur has inspired many modern-day tales, including the best-selling *Hunger Games* books. In that series, children are randomly selected each year to compete in the “Hunger Games,” a brutal battle to the death. The games started after a civil war and were designed to remind people of the absolute power of the government. How is the Hunger Games similar to the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur?

Superheroes are EVERYWHERE these days. But . . . why? **BY KRISTIN LEWIS**

He runs faster than a speeding bullet. He bends steel with his bare hands. He vanquishes the world’s most heinous villains.

He is Superman, America’s first superhero. Superman first appeared in 1938, at a time when comic books were becoming increasingly popular. Kids would save up their pennies and rush off to the corner store to buy the latest comics. There were dozens of characters to follow—magicians, detectives, ancient warriors. But it was Superman who kicked off the golden age of comics.

Superman was invented by two high-school buddies, Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel. Their “Man of Steel” had an ordinary name: Clark Kent. He had an ordinary job at a newspaper. On the surface, he appeared to live an ordinary human life. There was nothing ordinary about Superman, though. He came from the planet Krypton and possessed unparalleled strength. He could fly, withstand bullets, and see through walls with his X-ray vision*. Superman was an immediate hit. Some say he represented how Americans wanted to see themselves: fighting for justice in a dangerous world. And the world

*Some of these powers were added to the character after 1938.

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In the essay, Kristin Lewis writes that heroes inspire us to be “our better selves.” How do superheroes of today and mythological characters from *Into the Maze of Doom* inspire us to be our better selves? Use details from both texts in your response. Send it to HEROES CONTEST. Five winners will get *The Trials of Apollo: The Hidden Oracle* by Rick Riordan.

**Overwhelmed and Powerless**

Consider the nature of a superhero: He or she possesses extraordinary power—whether physical, mental, or technological—and is committed to using that power to help others. Superheroes fight for good, for freedom, for what is right. They risk their own lives to protect the innocent and the vulnerable, often against seemingly impossible odds.

Then consider that today, as in the 1930s, the news is often dominated by frightening reports. Our world has big problems: terrorism, war, disease. It’s easy to feel overwhelmed and powerless. And so we look to the fantastic world of superheroes, where one mighty individual can rescue the entire planet from any threat. How cathartic it is to watch a superhero prevent a war or save a city from alien invaders.

But even more than that, superheroes show us the world as we want it to be—not only a world in which good defeats evil, but also in which it’s usually pretty clear who and what is good and who and what is not.

**Better Selves**

Superheroes also reflect who we want to be. They are the Theseuses and Ariadnes of today. Their stories are modern myths that celebrate qualities we value in our society: selflessness, courage, grit, and resilience.

When we watch Captain America stand up to a corrupt leader, we feel like maybe we can find the courage to stand up to that kid at school bullying our best friend. When we see Thor try to save his brother even after his brother betrayed him, we are reminded of the power of compassion and forgiveness.

In other words, superheroes inspire us to be our better selves, to stand up for what’s right—even if we get nothing in return. •