Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

Legends! Battles and Quests

written by

Anthony Horowitz

published by

Macmillan Children's Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

THE MINOTAUR

Greek



The Minotaur

There was a time when Athens was not the major city that it is today, but a small town perched on the edge of a cliff some three miles from the sea. King Aegeus was on the throne and he was a good ruler. There were no wars, there was plenty of food to go round and no plagues or monsters inhabited the land.

And yet, once every seven years, something strange would happen. There would be no alarm, no signal, but suddenly the streets would empty. Men and women would hurry home, avoiding each other's eyes, gathering up their children and taking them indoors. It would seem as if Athens had been deserted. And inside their homes, families would sit together, hiding in the shadows, and nobody would speak.

A stranger, walking through the town, might think that some terrible catastrophe had just occurred. And yet there would be no sign of any damage, like that caused by an earthquake or a fire. The streets would

be clean and orderly, even if all the shops were closed for business. Trees carrying the first spring blossoms would surround him if he strolled into the parks.

A mystery.

Standing there, the stranger might feel a cold wind whisper through the streets and, if he listened carefully, he might just be able to hear what it was saying.



'Minos is coming. Minos will soon be here . . . '

And hearing that, he would understand. He would turn and hurry out of this accursed place, leaving the wretched people to their fate. Throughout Ancient Greece everyone knew what had happened to the son of King Minos and the cruel revenge that he had demanded. They also knew the terrible secret that lay hidden deep underneath his palace.

The Minotaur.

But even the breeze was too afraid to speak that name. It would rush through the streets saying nothing more, twisting round the corners as if it too was in a hurry to get away.

The Birth of the Minotaur

Minos was the king of Crete, the Island of the Hundred Cities. He was one of the most powerful sovereigns in the world and his

island was one of the most magnificent. Its harbour was huge, built to hold a hundred ships and surrounded by towering walls and guarded by turrets that were manned twenty-four hours a day. The capital – Knossos – was a mass of colour and life. The Cretan people, all too aware of their status, loved to wear expensive clothes and to eat the most luxurious food, brought to them from the furthest corners of the civilized world. The market stalls, jammed together in the narrow streets, were always piled high with the finest goods, including silks and satins, exotic spices, ivory and jewels, rare parrots, performing monkeys and much, much more. While the sun shone, the buying and selling never stopped and even at night, once the torches had been lit, dancers and fire-eaters, snake charmers and magicians would come out to entertain the crowds.

And yet there was a darker side to Crete. And even Minos, for all his wealth and

success, could not escape from its shadow.

The Minotaur. It was like a cancer beneath the skin, the unpleasant truth that spoils everything that is exposed to it. Minos would have gladly emptied the markets and thrown all the riches into the sea if he could have got rid of it. And the worst of it was – it was all his fault. If it hadn't been for his own greed and stupidity, the Minotaur would never have existed. He had made one mistake. He had been paying for it ever since.

This is how it had happened.

Every year, for many years, Minos had sacrificed the best bull from his herd to Poseidon. Crete depended on its sea power and Poseidon was, of course, the god of the sea. One year, however, acting in a moment of madness, Minos had decided to hold back his best animal . . . a huge white bull, the like of which he had never seen before. From such a beast he could breed a whole herd of prize cattle. It would be a complete



waste to slaughter it and then burn its remains on an altar. Surely Poseidon wouldn't notice if he sacrificed another, slightly less magnificent bull in its place.

That was what Minos thought, but of course Poseidon did notice and his anger was as terrible as his revenge was strange and cruel. He left Minos untouched, but turned his

powers on the king's wife, the young and innocent Queen Pasiphaë, making her fall in love with the white bull. Not knowing what she was doing, the queen stole away one stormy night to the stables and it was from this unnatural union that the Minotaur was born.

Minotaur means, simply, Minos bull.

King Minos and his wife looked after the ugly creature for as long as they could, trying to keep it away from prying eyes. But the moment it was strong enough to walk, the Minotaur broke free and left the palace. In the days that followed, it went berserk, destroying much of Crete and killing many of its inhabitants. It was as if a psychopathic murderer had arrived on the island. It didn't kill for any other reason than because it had to.

Minos was filled with shame and horror. In desperation, he turned to the Oracle to find out what to do. He couldn't kill the creature. It was, after all, his wife's child.