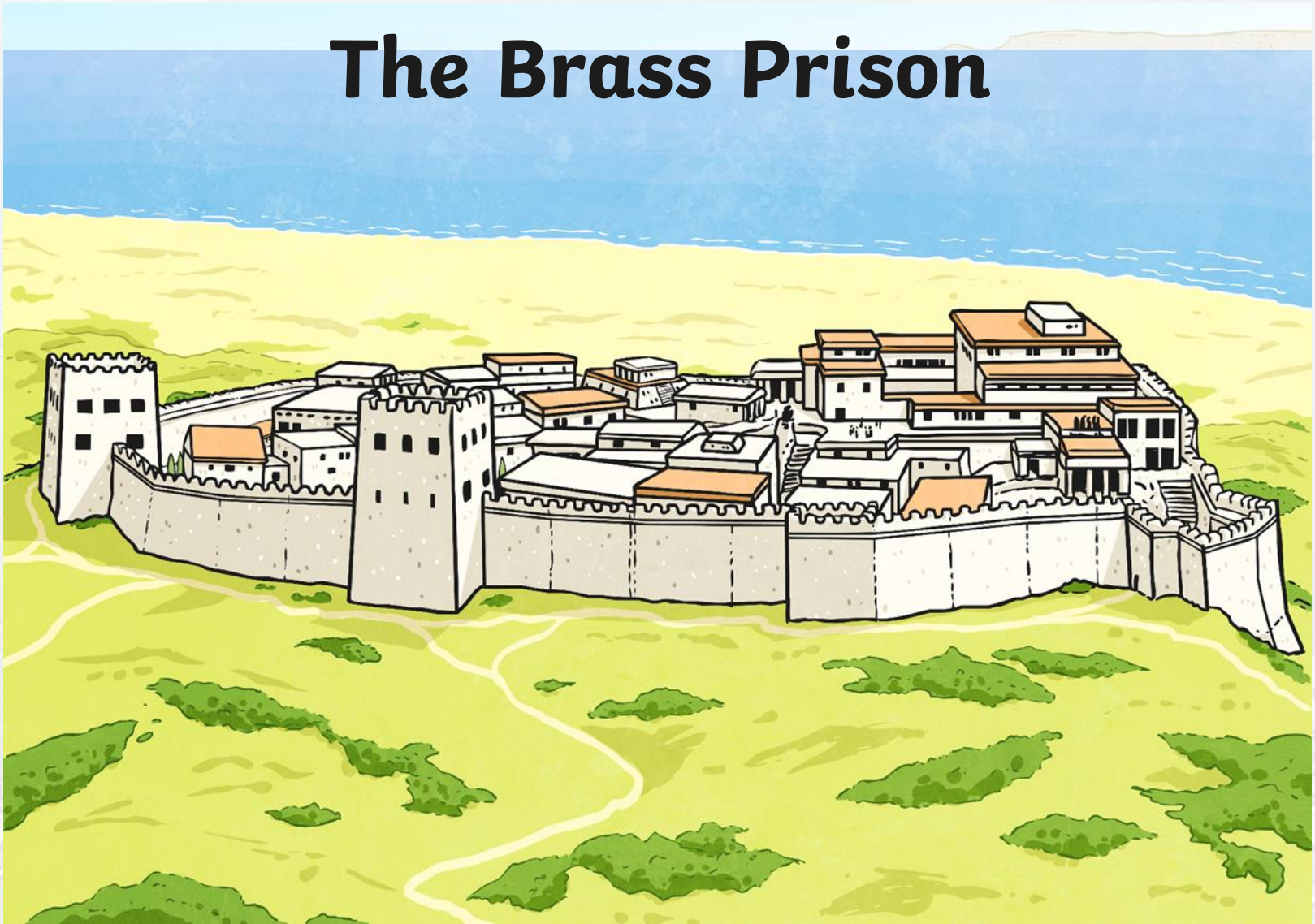


Medusa

The Quest of Perseus

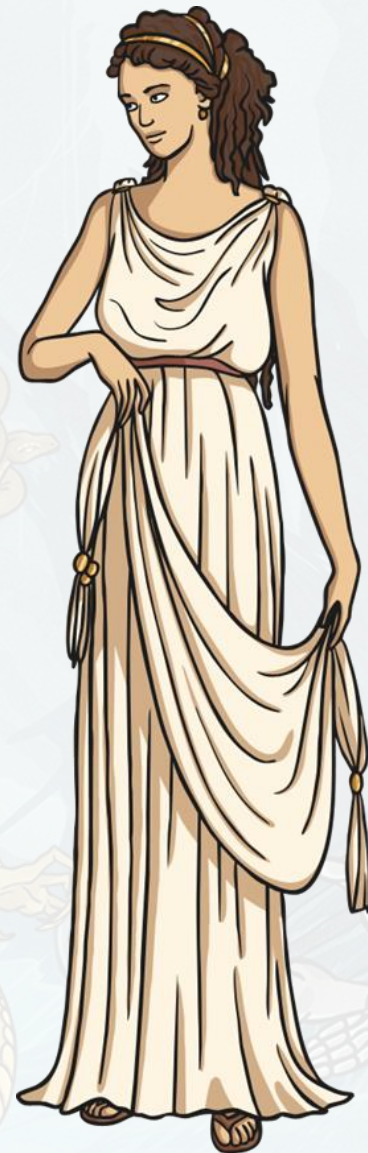


The Brass Prison



There was once a king of Argos who had a daughter, Danaë. She was growing up and the king was growing old. The [Pythia](#) told him that the son of his daughter would cause his death. To prevent this [prophecy](#) coming true, he locked his daughter away in a prison made of brass.

"Now we shall see that the Pythia does not always tell the truth," he said.



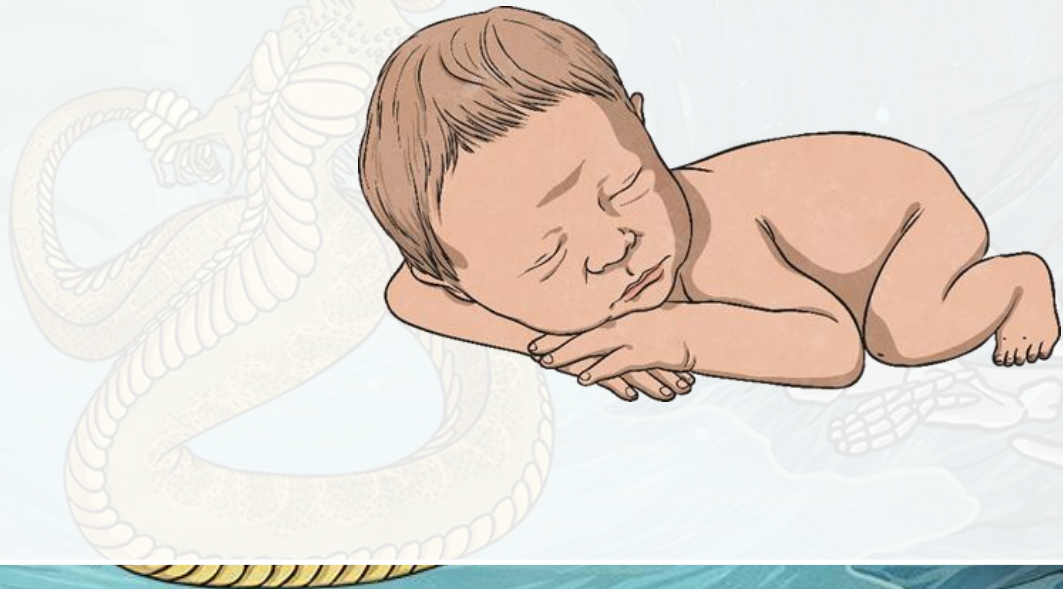


So Danaë was kept shut up in the prison of brass. She had no one to talk to but her old nurse; she never saw the land or the sea but only the blue sky above the open window, and now and then a white cloud sailing across.



Day after day, she sat under the window and wondered why her father kept her in that lonely place, and whether he would ever come and take her out. Time passed by and Danaë grew fairer every day, and by and by she was no longer a child, but a tall and beautiful woman; the god Zeus amid the clouds looked down and saw her and loved her.

One day the god Zeus visited Danaë from the sky and he visited the [imprisoned](#) girl often - always as a tall and handsome youth. They were married and had a son, called Perseus. In spite of all that he had done, Danaë's father began to think the words of the Pythia might come true.



So, Danaë and her son Perseus were put to sea in a wooden chest. The king thought that if they died together, the prophecy couldn't come true. But they didn't die. After several days at sea, they drifted ashore on a distant island and found by a kind man who sheltered and cared for them for many years.



The Magic Sandals



The cruel king of the island wanted to marry the beautiful Danaë and when she refused, he plotted to send Perseus away in revenge. He challenged Perseus to bring him the head of the Medusa. She was one of three monster sisters, with the bodies and faces of women, but with golden wings and terrible brass claws and snakes for hair. Anyone who looked at their faces was instantly turned to stone.





Without weapons or any idea where to find Medusa, Perseus went to the shore to plan his quest. Two mysterious people told him where to set off on his journey and that he must get directions from the Grey Sisters and collect three things from the Maidens of the West before challenging Medusa. He realised the people were the gods Athena and Hermes, although he didn't understand why they were helping him.

The Grey Sisters



Mercury's winged sandals flew Perseus to the sisters. These three creatures were so old that they had forgotten their own age, and nobody could count the years that they had lived. The long hair which covered their heads had been grey since they were born; and they had between them only a single eye and a single tooth which they passed back and forth from one to another.

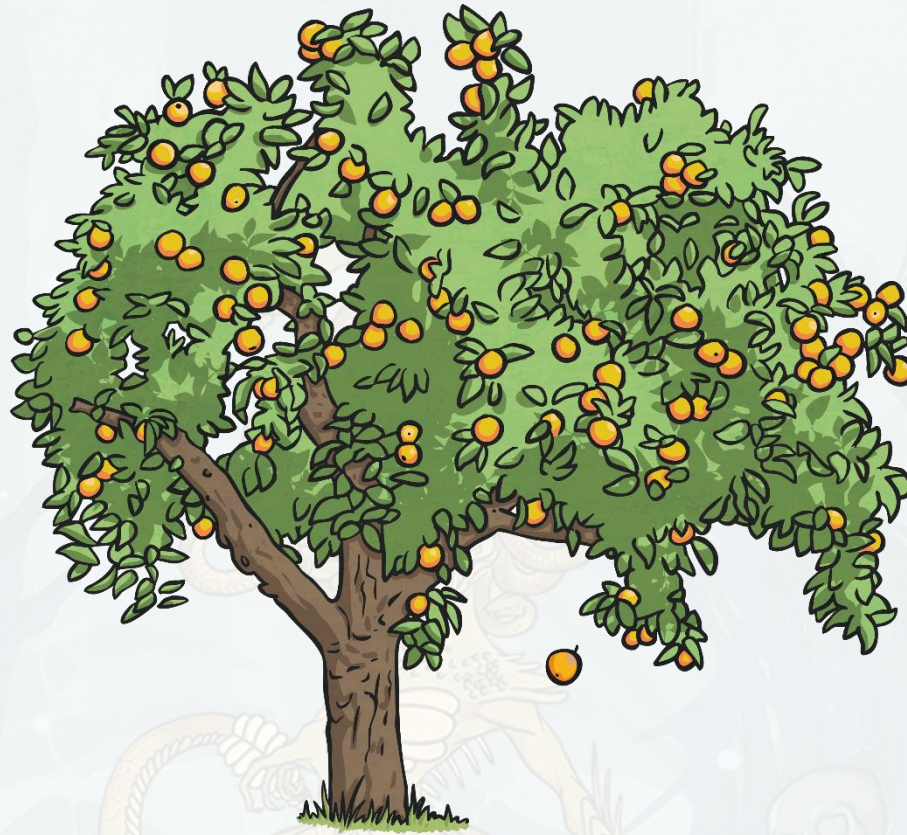


Perseus heard them mumbling and [crooning](#) in their dreary home and he stood very still and listened. Tricking them, Perseus made the old women tell him where to travel to find the Western Maidens.



The Western Maidens





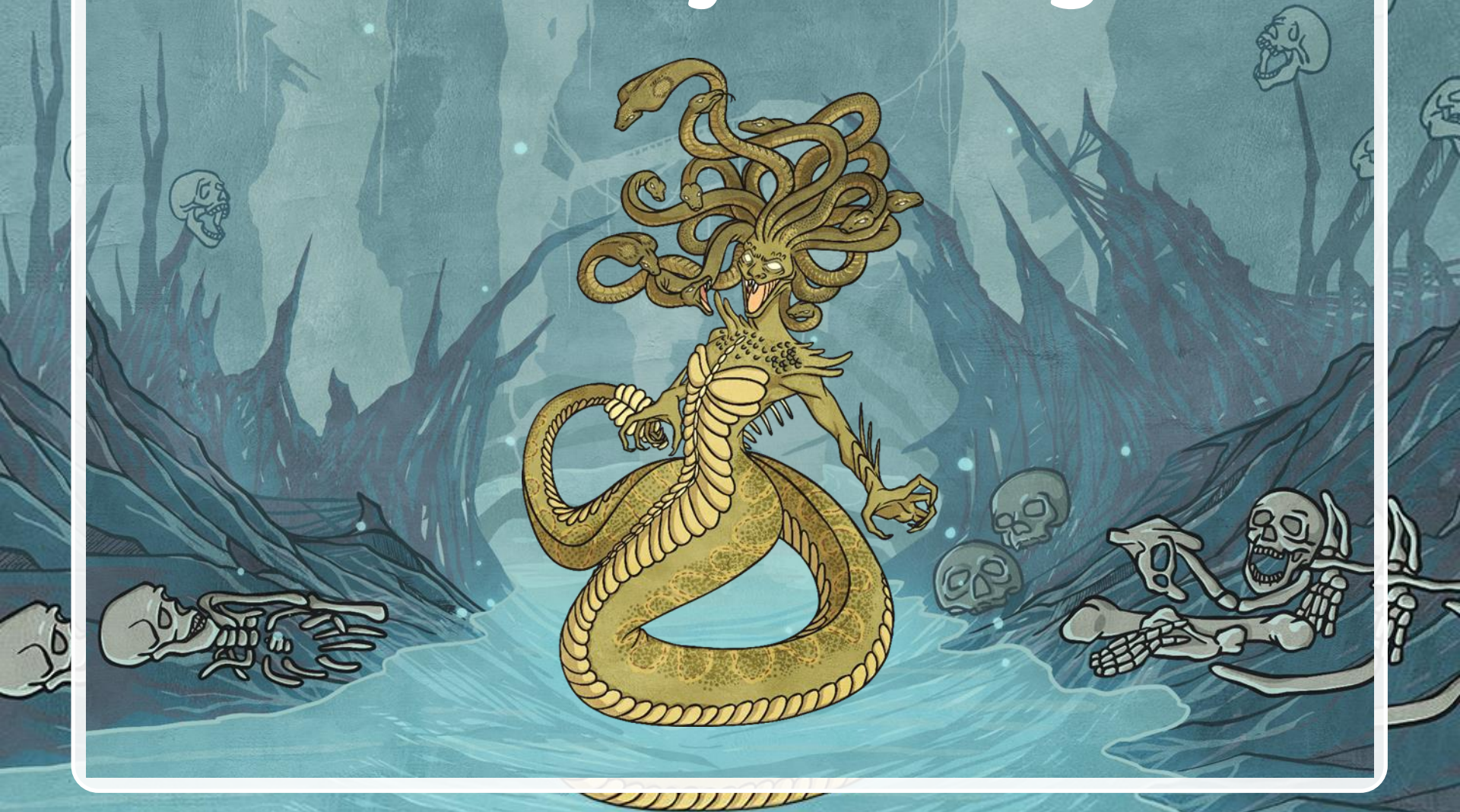
Once more, Perseus put on his winged slippers and set off. When he arrived in the Western Lands, he saw the three maidens of the west guarding a tree which was full of golden apples, and singing as they danced. The tree belonged to Hera, the queen of earth and sky; it had been given to her as a wedding gift, and it was the duty of the maidens to care for it and see that no one touched the golden apples.

Perseus went forward and spoke to the Maidens. Once they heard his [plight](#), they willingly agreed to help him, but they offered not three but four things to help him kill Medusa; a sword, a shield, a magic pouch and a magic cap of invisibility.

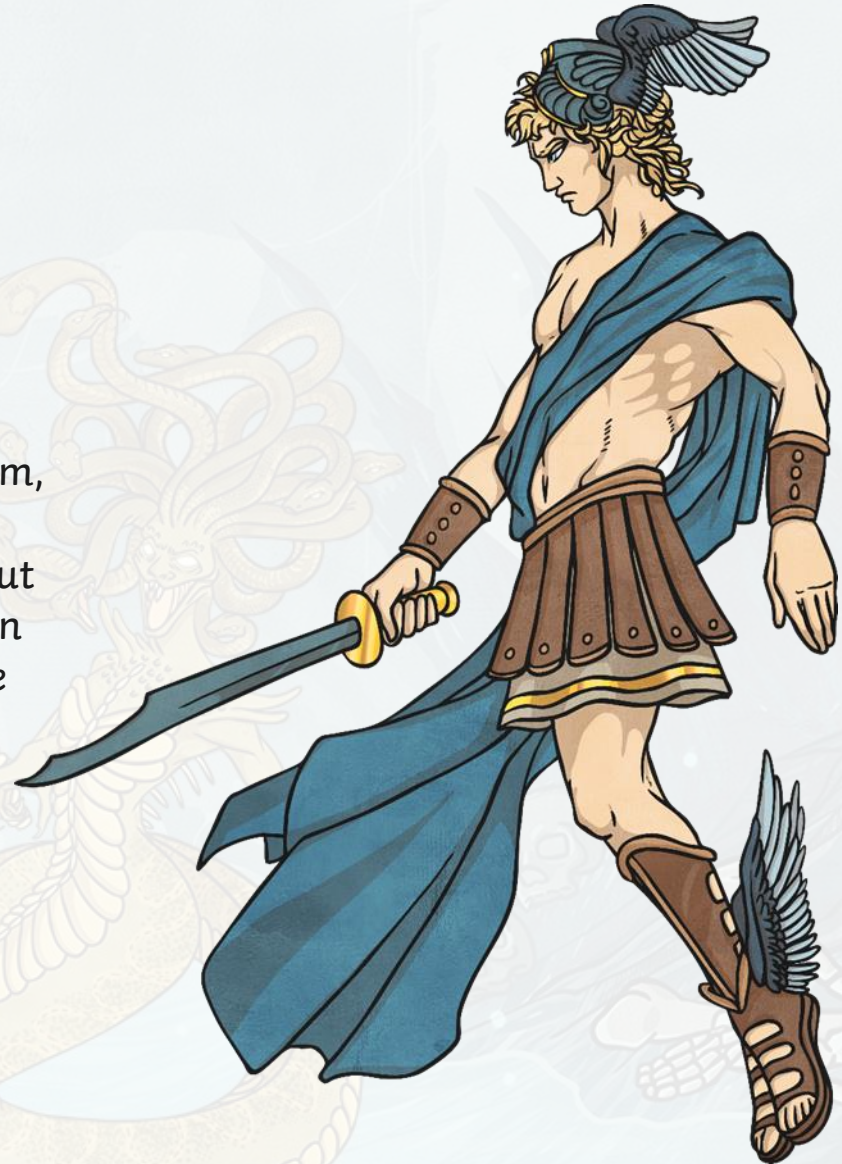
Once more, he put on the magic slippers and flew off to find Medusa and her gorgon sisters.



The Dreadful Gorgons



With the sharp sword at his side and the bright shield upon his arm, Perseus flew bravely onward in search of the dreadful gorgons; but he had the cap of invisibility upon his head, making him as invisible as the wind.



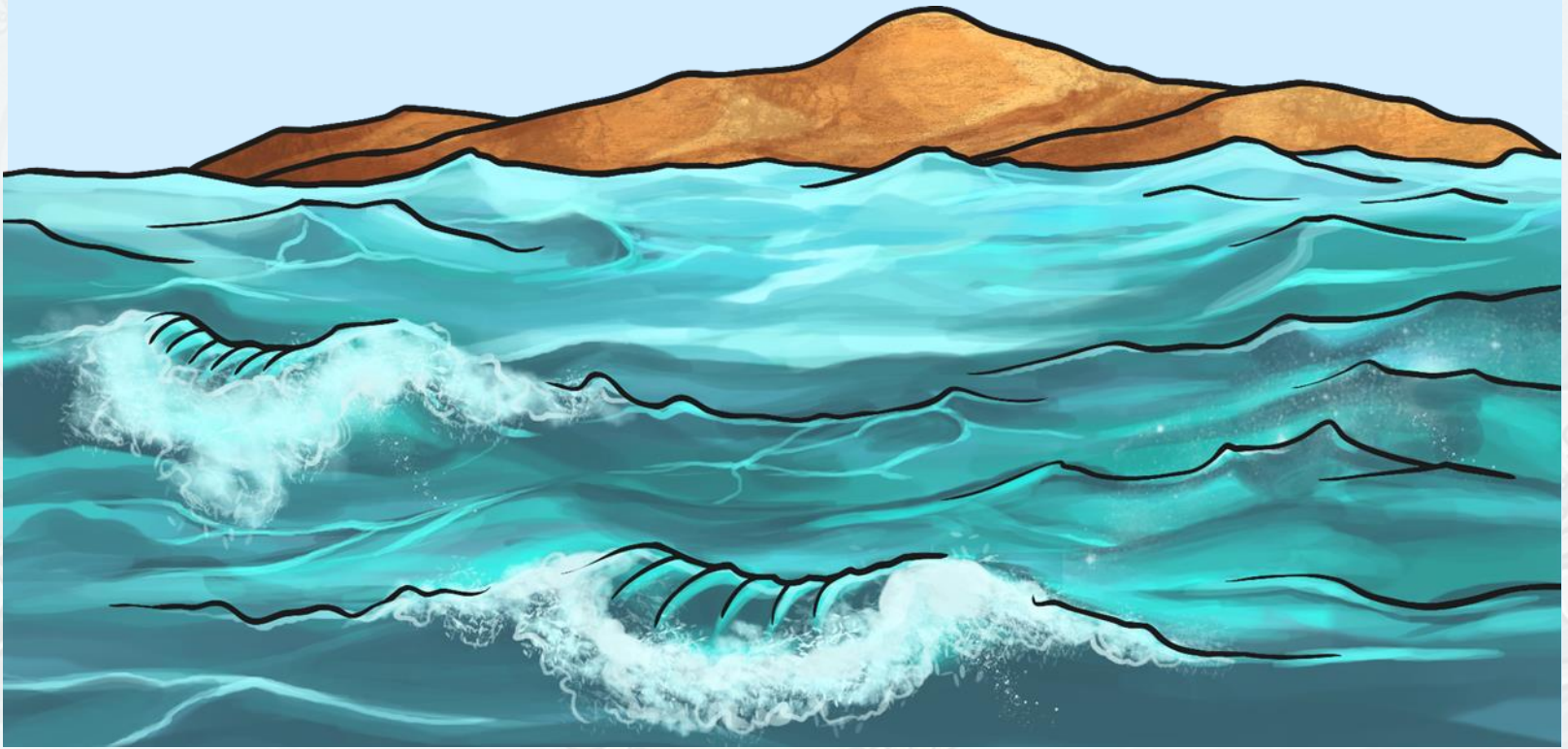


Cleverly using the shiny shield as a mirror, Perseus saw the reflection of the hideous snake-haired monsters while they slept. Very [stealthily](#), he went nearer and nearer, always with his back towards the monsters and always looking into his bright shield to see where to go. He drew his sharp sword and, dashing quickly, struck a blow, so sure, so swift that the head of Medusa was cut from her shoulders and the black blood gushed like a river from her neck.



Quick as a thought, he thrust the terrible head into his magic pouch and leaped again into the air, and flew away with the speed of a lightning flash. Escaping under his invisibility cap and with the help of his magic slippers, Perseus left the [anguished](#) screams of Medusa's sisters behind him as he made his way to safety.

The Great Beast



As Perseus made his way home over the vast oceans, he came across a strange sight. He saw a beautiful girl chained to a rock by the seashore, and far away a huge sea beast swimming towards her to [devour](#) her. Quick as blink, he flew down and spoke to her; but, as she could not see him for the cap of invisibility which he wore, his voice only frightened her.

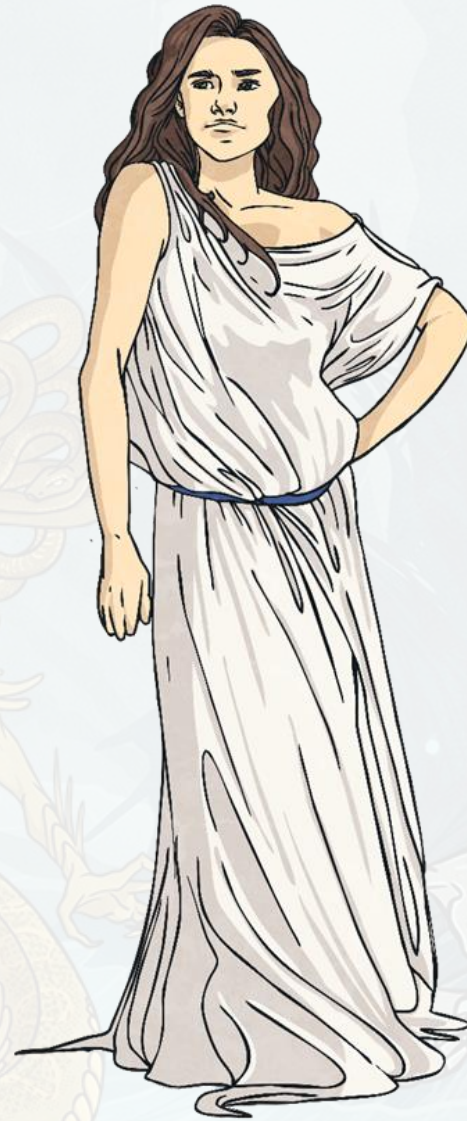


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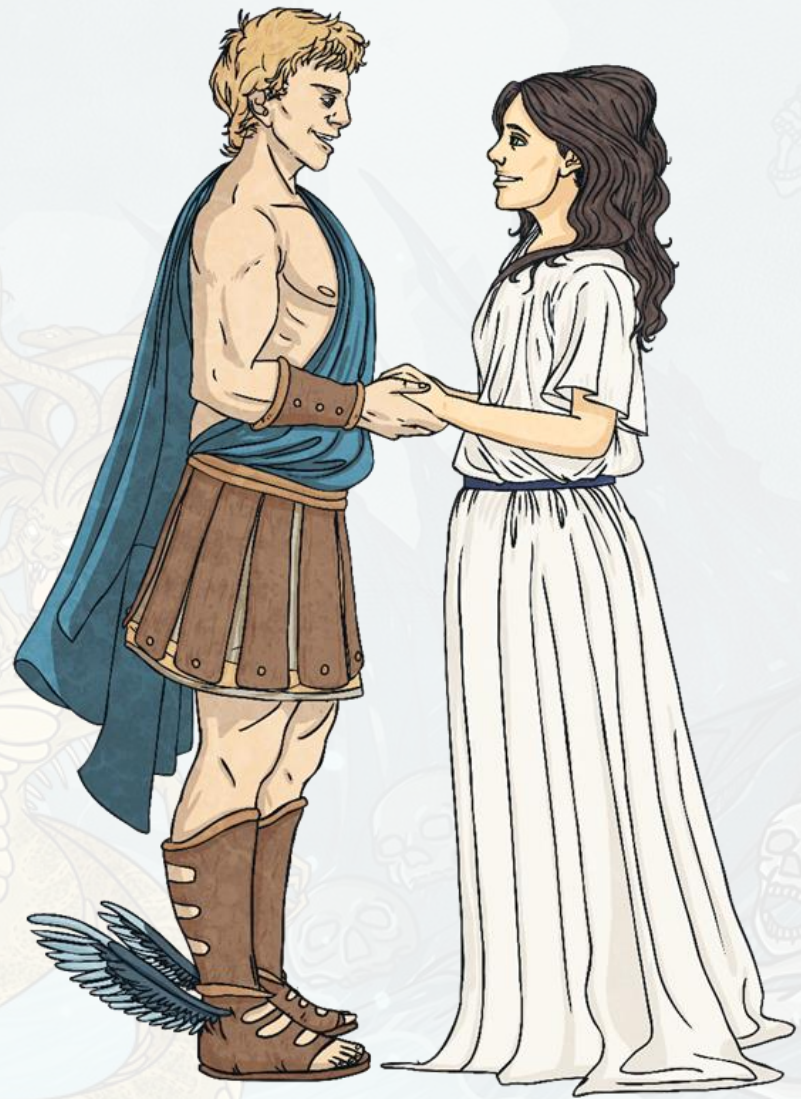
"Oh, save me! Save me!" she cried as she reached out her arms towards him.

Perseus could see the sea monster coming closer, so he took the Gorgon's head out of his magic pouch, held it up high and the [inevitable](#) happened.

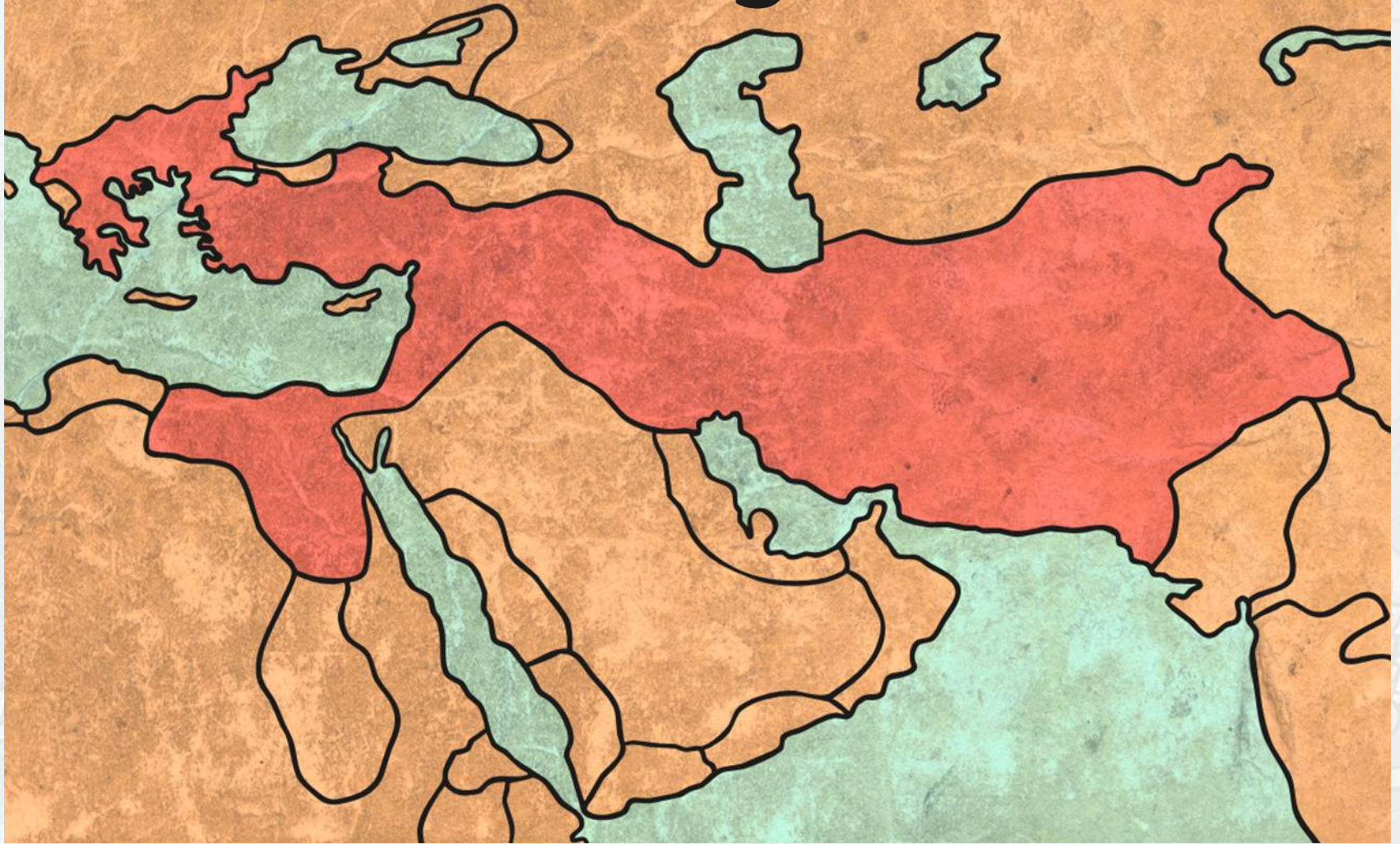
Then Perseus slipped the Gorgon's head back into the pouch and [hastened](#) to speak with the young girl whom he had saved. She told him that her name was Andromeda, and that she was the daughter of the king and queen of that land. Andromeda told Perseus that she was being sacrificed to the sea monster as a punishment for her mother's [vanity](#).



As the pair talked, the king and queen and many people of the land came to see what was happening. As a reward for saving his daughter, the king agreed to let his daughter marry Perseus. Forgetting his [quest](#), Perseus stayed happily with Andromeda and her family for many months.

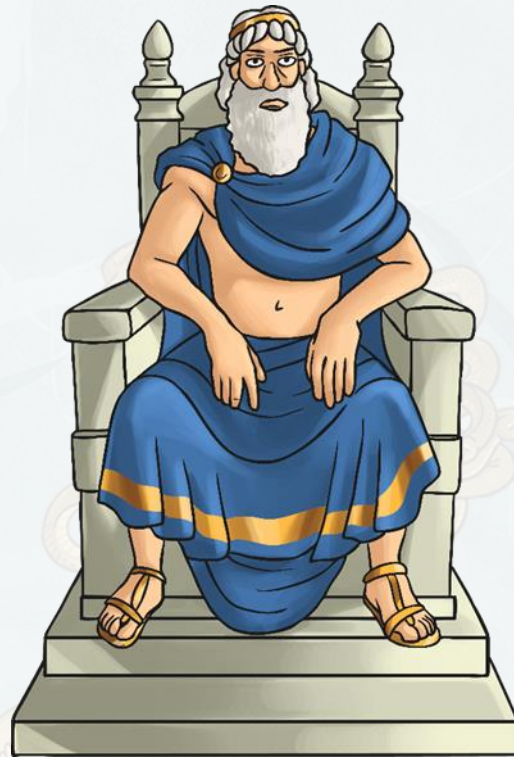


The Timely Rescue



But Perseus had not forgotten his mother; and so, one fine summer day, he and Andromeda sailed in a beautiful ship to his own home; for the winged slippers could not carry both him and his bride through the air. The ship came to land at the very spot where the wooden chest had been cast so many years before; Perseus and his bride walked through the fields towards the town.





Now, the wicked king of that land had never [ceased](#) trying to persuade Danaë to become his wife; but she would not listen to him, and the more he pleaded and threatened, the more she disliked him. At last when he found that she could not be made to marry him, he [declared](#) that he would kill her; and on this very morning he had started out, sword in hand, to take her life.



So, as Perseus and Andromeda came into the town, they were greeted with the scene of his mother fleeing to the safety of the altar of Zeus, and the king following after, [intent](#) on killing her. When Perseus saw the king rushing like a madman after his mother, he again took the head of Medusa from his magic pouch.

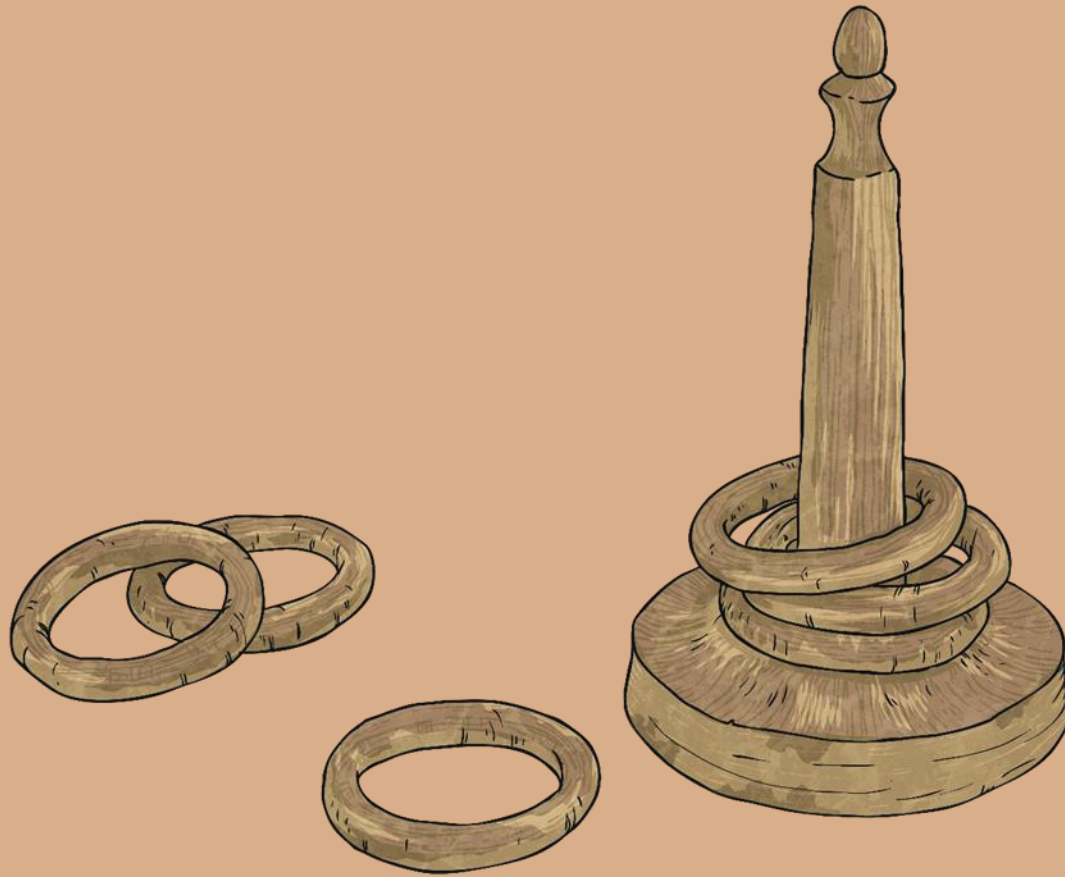


"I promised to bring you a present, and here it is!" he cried.

The king saw it, and was turned into stone, just as he stood, with his sword [uplifted](#) and a terrible look of anger and passion in his face.

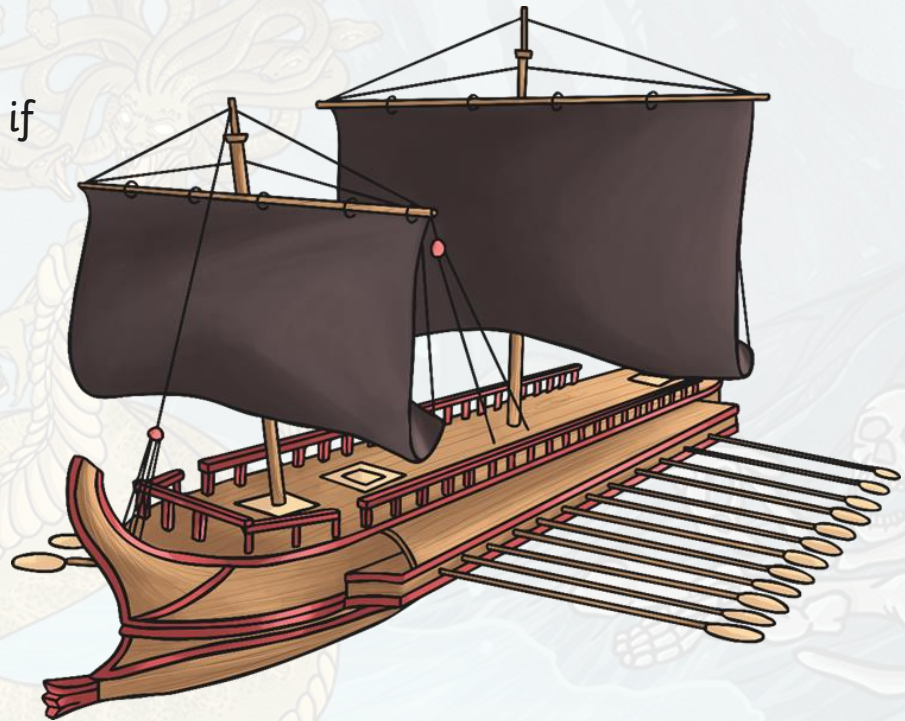
His mother safe, Perseus decided that they should all return home to Argos, so the three of them set sail the following day.

The Deadly Quoit

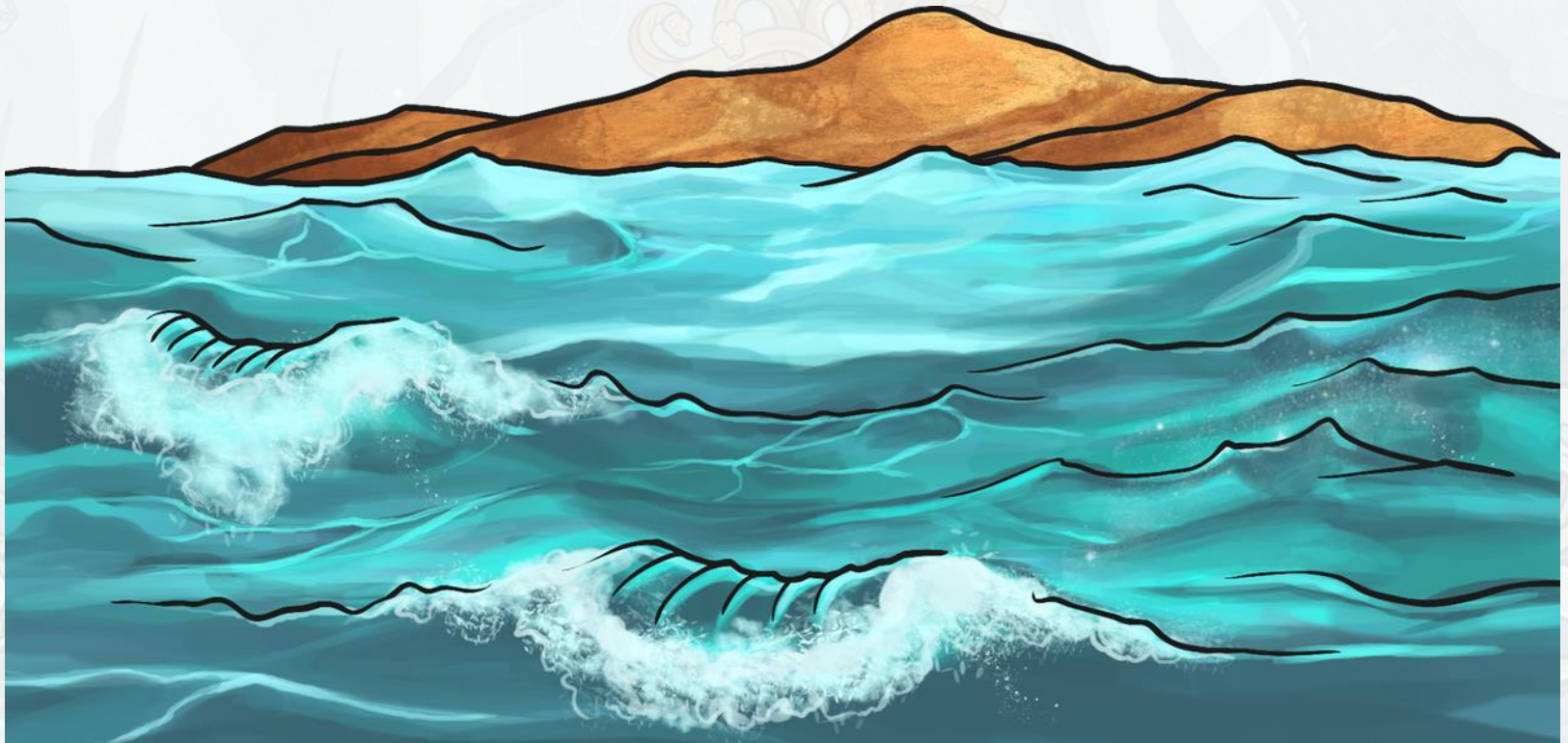


When Danaë's old father, the king of Argos, heard that a strange ship was coming over the sea with his daughter and her son on board, he was in great distress; he remembered what the Pythia had [foretold](#) about his death. So, without waiting to see the [vessel](#), he left his palace in great haste and fled.

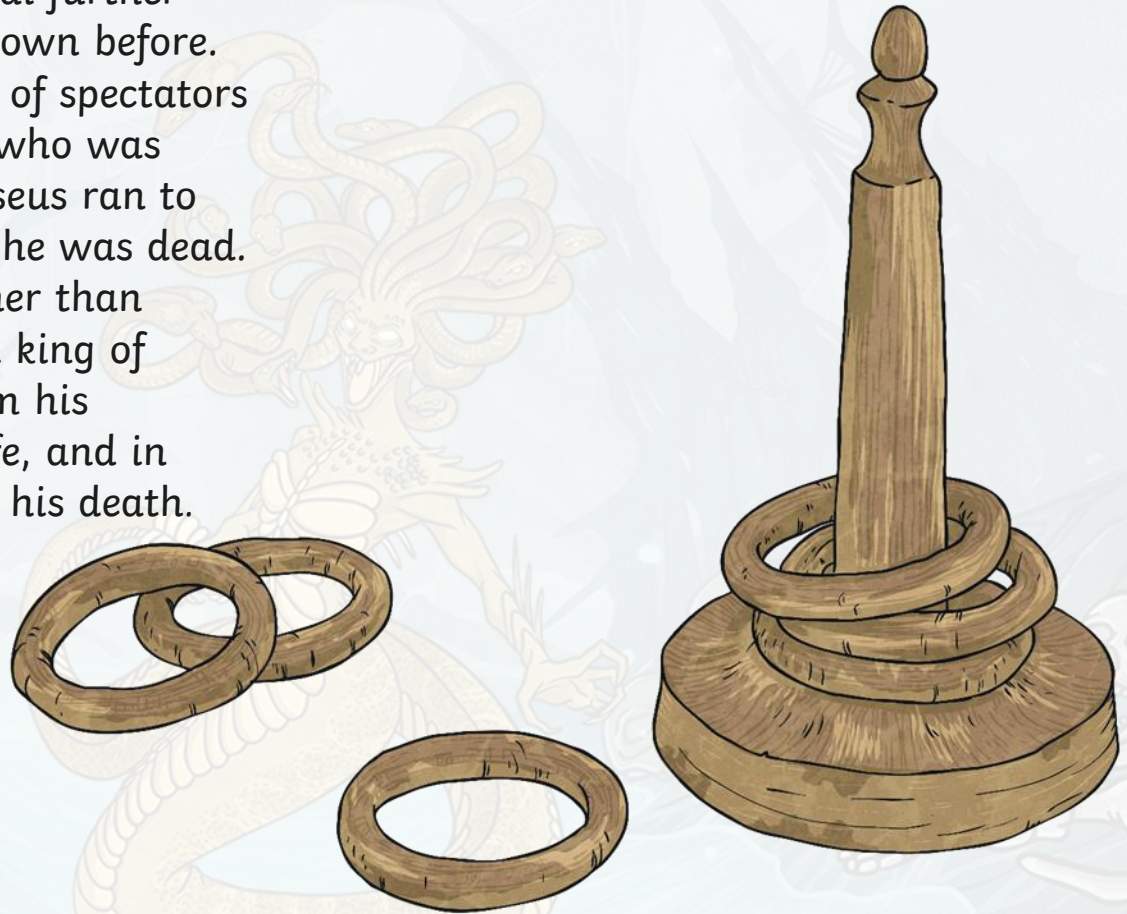
"My daughter's son cannot kill me if I keep out of his way," he said.



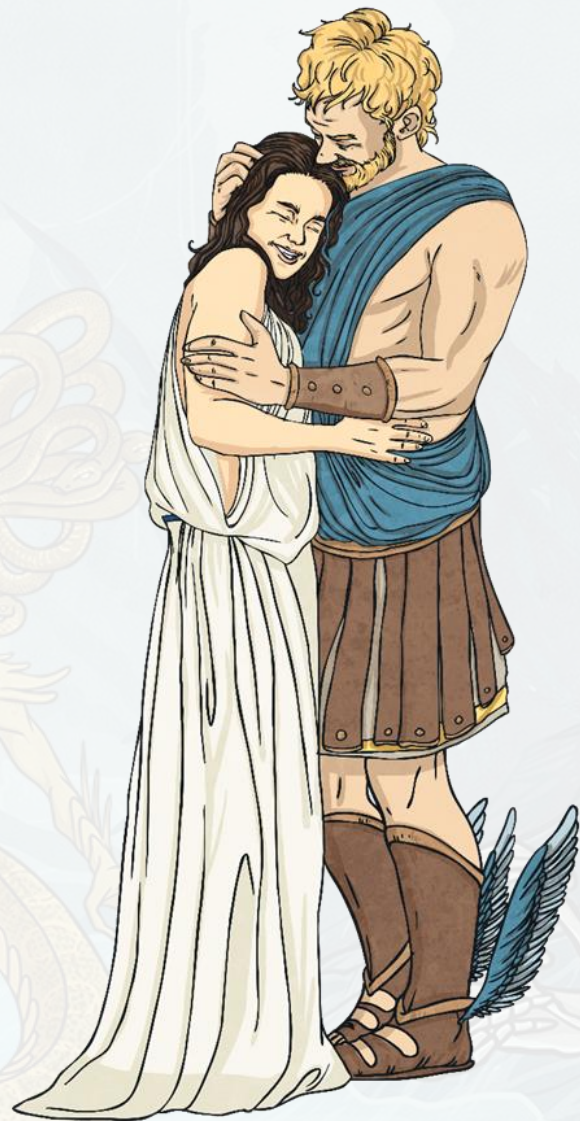
But Perseus had no wish to harm him and was [distraught](#) when he heard what the old man had done. With his grandfather gone, the people of the kingdom wanted Perseus to rule over them, which he did willingly in memory of the man he had never known.



A while later, Perseus was taking part in challenges and games with neighbouring kingdoms. He threw a heavy [quoit](#) a great deal further than any had been thrown before. It landed in the crowd of spectators and [struck](#) a stranger who was standing there. As Perseus ran to help him, he saw that he was dead. The man was none other than Danaë's father, the old king of Argos. He had fled from his kingdom to save his life, and in doing so had only met his death.



Perseus was [overcome](#) with grief and had no wish to continue as ruler of the kingdom, so he and Andromeda left the country and lived happily in the neighbouring kingdom of Mycenae for many years.



Glossary

Click on your word again to return to the page you were reading.

- [pythia](#) - high priestess of the temple of apollo
- [prophecy](#) - a prediction
- [imprisoned](#) - held captive
- [crooning](#) - droning or chanting
- [plight](#) - dilemma or difficulty
- [stealthily](#) - cautiously or carefully
- [anguished](#) - distressed
- [devour](#) - gobble
- [inevitable](#) - expected
- [hastened](#) - rushed
- [vanity](#) - pride
- [quest](#) - a journey with a mission
- [ceased](#) - ended
- [declared](#) - stated
- [intent](#) - determined to do something
- [uplifted](#) - raised
- [foretold](#) - predicted
- [vessel](#) - ship
- [distraught](#) - very upset
- [quoit](#) - a small throwing hoop
- [struck](#) - hit
- [overcome](#) - overwhelmed

