

## TALES FROM THE UNDERWORLD:

### Story of Tantalus

Tantalus (TAN-ta-luss) was a Greek king (and a son of Zeus) who thought he could fool the gods. When Zeus invited Tantalus to come up on Mount Olympus and eat dinner with the gods, Tantalus would steal the gods' special food (ambrosia and nectar) to give to his friends back on earth!

And then he did something worse than that. After spending so much time hanging out with the gods he began to get bored with them and think of them as "normal". He didn't think they were all that special. Eventually he decided to "test them" to see if they were really as "all powerful" as they claimed. He had heard that the gods could not eat human flesh as it was believed to be poisonous to them. He wanted to test this idea.

He invited the gods over for dinner at HIS house, and tried to trick them into eating human flesh. Tantalus had his own son, Pelops, cut up into pieces and boiled in the stew. Most of the gods figured out what was happening and didn't eat any, but Demeter was so worried about Persephone, who had recently been kidnapped, that she ate a little piece of Pelops' shoulder

For this crime, Zeus himself killed Tantalus, and this sassy human had to spend his whole afterlife in the underworld, in Tartarus. His torture was that he had to stand forever waist-deep in a pool of water, with a fruit tree dangling branches full of ripe fruit over his head. He got terribly hungry and thirsty, but whenever he bent down to drink the water, it would all magically drain away, and whenever he reached up to pick some fruit, the branches would lift up out of his reach. But no matter how hungry or

thirsty he got, he was already dead, so he could never die.

### Story of Sisyphus (SIS-i-fus)

Sisyphus was condemned in Tartarus to an eternity of rolling a boulder uphill then watching it roll back down again. He was founder and king of Corinth, or Ephyra as it was called in those days. Sisyphus was the son of Aeolus, the king of Thessaly, and Enarete. He was the Greek version of a street thug who made a sport out of robbing and murdering travelers. He even betrayed the secrets of the gods, which is never a good thing. He was notorious as the most cunning criminal on earth.

His greatest triumph came at the end of his life, when the god Hades came to claim him personally for the kingdom of the dead. Hades had brought along a pair of handcuffs, a new invention, and Sisyphus expressed such an interest that Hades was persuaded to demonstrate their use - on himself.

And so it came about that the high lord of the Underworld was kept locked up in a closet at Sisyphus's house for many a day, a circumstance which put the great chain of being seriously out of whack. Nobody could die. A soldier might be chopped to bits in battle and still show up at camp for dinner. Finally Hades was released by his brother Zeus and Sisyphus was ordered to report to the Underworld for his eternal assignment. But the wily one had another trick up his sleeve.

He simply told his wife not to bury him and then complained to Persephone, Queen of the Dead, that he had not been given the proper funeral honors. What's more, as an unburied corpse he had no business on the far side of the river Styx at all - his wife hadn't placed a coin under his tongue to secure passage with Charon the ferryman. Surely her highness could see that Sisyphus must be given leave to journey back topside and put things right.

Kindly Persephone agreed, and Sisyphus made his way back to the sunshine, where he promptly forgot all about funerals and such drab affairs and lived on in happiness for another good stretch of time. But even this paramount trickster could only postpone the inevitable. Eventually he was hauled down to Hades, where his poor choices caught up with him.

For a crime against the gods - the specifics of which are quite many - he was condemned to an eternity at hard labor. And frustrating labor at that. For his punishment was to roll a great boulder to the top of a hill in Tartarus. Only every time Sisyphus, by the greatest of effort and toil, attained the top, the cursed rock would magically be caused to roll back down again to the very bottom thus causing him to start the process all over.

### Story of Ixion

Ixion's first major crime occurred when he took a wife in marriage. As was custom at the time, a husband had to pay his wife's father an amount of money for the "right" to marry the man's daughter, called a dowry. Ixion initially refused to pay this fee due to the fact that he was a jerk. He then came up with a plan to solve his problem and invited his father-in-law, Deioneus, to come and collect the price that was owed him for his daughter. Upon his arrival, Deioneus fell into a pit filled with burning coals Ixion had camouflaged. Needless to say this was quite fatal and was one way to solve the problem.

Zeus was impressed the evil man's creativity, and decided to invite him to Olympus as a guest. Once in Olympus though, Ixion quickly fell in love with Hera, and he desired to be "friendly" with her. Hera refused his advances and reported the behavior to her husband. Zeus did not believe that Ixion would be so stupid and disrespectful as to hit upon the wife of his host. To see if the rumors

were true, Zeus made an image of Hera out of a cloud and had this creation float past Ixion's bedroom. Upon seeing it, and thinking it was Hera enticing him, Ixion ran to the cloud creation and attempt to kiss it. The cloud disappeared as soon as he did revealing an unhappy Zeus staring at him from the other side.

To punish him, Zeus bound Ixion to a winged and flaming wheel, which revolved in the air in all directions while horribly burning and torturing him. Also, by order of the gods, Ixion was forced to call out continuously: "You should show gratitude to your friends." Ixion became one of the more famous sinners on display on Tartarus.

### Story of the Danaides

The story of Danaides begins with the rivalry between two twins, Danaus and Aegyptus, who were unhappy with their kingdoms and were constantly trying to gain control of the other's land. The most interesting fact about these brothers is their children.

The myth says that Danaus had fifty daughters, known as the Danaides, from four different women, while Aegyptus had fifty sons. The intelligent Aegyptus wanted to get his sons married to the Danaides. For Aegyptus, these fifty marriages appeared as an easy route to acquire the land controlled by Danaus. Danaus soon understood the plan of his brother and was not willing to surrender his beautiful daughters to his nasty nephews.

Commanded though by the gods and not intending to cause a war between them, he decided to give his kingdom to his brother and leave the country in search for another life. Danaus built a ship with fifty oars and fled to Argos in Greece with his fifty daughters.

Danaus ruled Argos for many years and was leading a quiet life till one day a foreign ship came. His brother, Aegyptus, had sent his fifty sons to find Danaus and try to take over this new second kingdom. Soon the sons of Aegyptus presented themselves to the palace and asked once more to marry the Danaides.

The climax of the story starts here. Danaus didn't want that his beautiful and prosperous Argos suffer because of a war. Having no other option, he consented for the

wedding and organized a low-profile wedding party. He made a secret plan to get rid of Aegyptus and his sons for good. Before the wedding, he presented each of his daughters a dagger and instructed them to kill their husbands in their wedding night. All his daughters had to obey their father, because disobeying your parents was a great wrongdoing in the ancient world. They indeed killed their husbands and buried their heads. Only one of the girls, Hypermnestra, did not commit this horrible crime. She felt pity for her

husband, Lynceus, and spared his life. Because of her refusal, Danaus brought her in front of the Argos court of law. However, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, intervened and saved her from punishment. Lynceus, the only survivor of the fifty sons of Aegyptus, later killed Danaus to revenge for his brothers.

The story, however, does not stop here. The forty-nine brides who killed their husband were punished for their crime. The myth says that, when they died, they Danaides were forced to a torment for eternity in

Tartarus. They should carry jugs of water and fill a basin. Zeus declared they would be released from this punishment only if the basin was full of water. However, it was a trick to keep them working and this torture would never stop because the basin had hidden holes all over it and water would run out while the girls weren't watching.

## Map of the Underworld

