

Jason and the Golden Fleece

Jason walked through the marketplace. He had lost one sandal on the long journey to Iolcus and was searching for a new pair. Suddenly, soldiers and King Pelias himself rode their horses into the marketplace.

Pelias spoke. "Few strangers come to my kingdom. I have been warned by the prophets that a visitor with one shoe will come here to harm me."

"Your kingdom, dear Uncle?" Jason answered. "Don't you recognize me? I am your brother's son, Jason. I've come to take back the throne. Even though I was a young boy, I remember the agreement between you and my father. You were to rule until I was old enough to be king. I was sent to another kingdom to live until that time."

"I shall live up to my agreement, but how do you expect the people of Iolcus to follow your rule? They know nothing about you," responded Pelias. "You must win their trust by performing a brave deed. I will send you on a quest so that you can prove your bravery."

"There is some truth to your words," Jason answered. "What will you have me do?"

"There is a ram that was stolen from this country. Its magic Golden Fleece belongs here. If you go to the King of Colchis and demand the return of the fleece, you will be a hero. I will give up the throne if you are successful."

"I shall set out as soon as I build a ship," answered Jason.

Jason hired a master shipbuilder to build a ship for fifty rowers. It was the largest ship that had ever sailed the sea. Jason christened the ship *Argo*. He and his crew of strong warriors, the Argonauts, sailed away.

During the journey they stopped on an island to rest. There they found a man named Phineus being held captive by giant birds called Harpies. The Argonauts rescued Phineus. To thank Jason and his crew, Phineus warned him about the crashing islands that lay ahead.



"When you come to two rocky islands, one on each side of the sea, beware," Phineus said. "The islands crash together when ships sail between them. The ships and their crews are crushed. When you are close to the rocks, free this dove. The islands will come together when the dove flies between them. When the islands are moving apart again, you will be able to pass safely."

When the *Argo* reached the islands, Jason released the dove. The bird flew between the islands before they slammed together. Jason and his crew quickly rowed past the islands while they were opening up again.

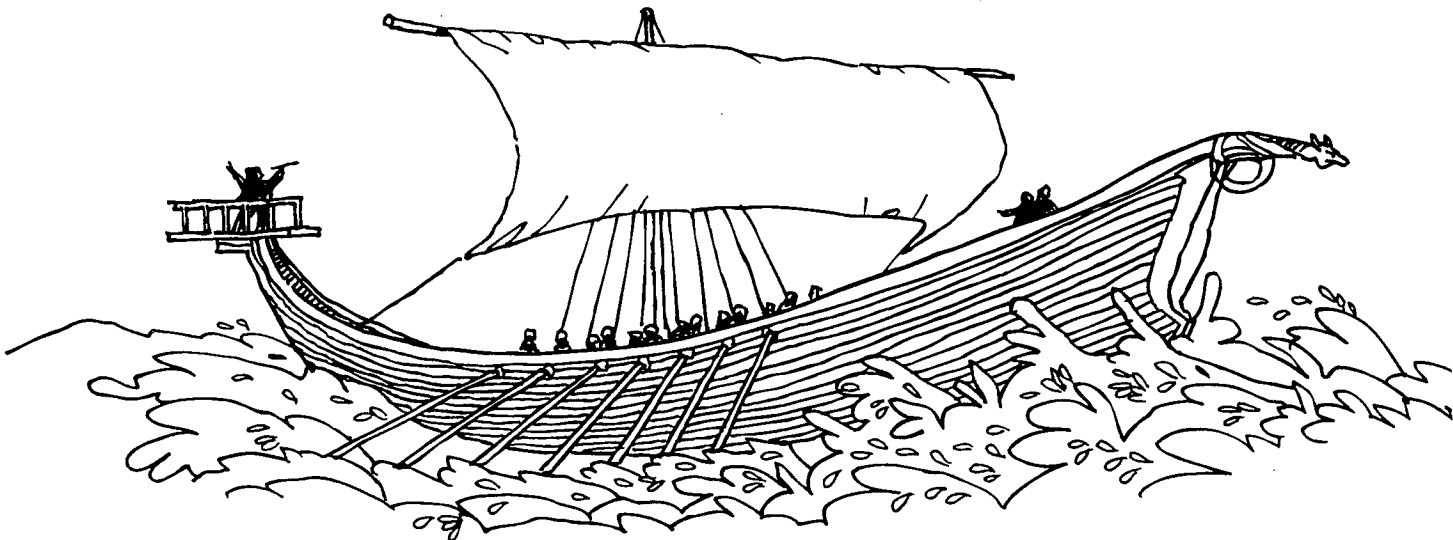
When the Argonauts reached Colchis, the king refused to give up the Golden Fleece.

"You must earn your prize," he said. "First, Jason, you must harness my two fire-breathing bulls and plant my field with these teeth from a dragon. Each tooth will spring from the earth in the form of an armed warrior. You must slay each one as he appears."

It was an impossible task, but Jason decided he must try. It was the only way to regain his father's kingdom. In preparation, Jason offered prayers to the gods.

Hera, queen of the gods and goddesses, heard Jason's prayers and took pity on him. She asked Eros, the god of love, to shoot arrows into the heart of Medea, the daughter of the King of Colchis. When Medea was struck with the arrow of love, she fell in love with Jason. She gave him a magic charm and a special oil that would protect him from the flames of the bulls.

Jason charmed the fire-breathing bulls and hitched them to a plow. Then he sowed the dragon's teeth. He fought bravely, but the warriors who sprang from the ground overpowered him. Quickly he threw Medea's magic charm at them. They turned on each other and fought to the death.



The next task was even more dangerous. Jason had to take the Golden Fleece away from a fierce dragon. Medea gave Jason a magic sleeping potion to pour on the dragon. When the dragon fell asleep, Jason stole the Golden Fleece and sailed away with Medea and the Argonauts.

When King Pelias heard that Jason and the Argonauts had returned with the Golden Fleece, he didn't welcome them. He refused to place the crown on Jason's head.

Medea tricked King Pelias's daughters into killing their father, saying that she would give them magic herbs that would bring Pelias back to life and make him young again so that he would always be with them. But the herbs Medea gave them were not magic, and Pelias was dead.

The people of Iolcus turned on Medea because of her evil deed, and refused to accept her as queen. Jason, too, spurned Medea and asked her to leave so that he could marry the Princess of Corinth. This made Medea so angry, she sent an enchanted robe to the princess. When the princess put it on, she went up in flames, along with the whole palace.

Grieving for his bride, Jason walked to where the *Argo* was resting on the sand and sat beside it. A sudden wind blew in from the sea. A mighty timber broke off the bow of the ship and fell on Jason, killing him.

The god Zeus sent the ship into the heavens to honor Jason's brave deeds. There it became the constellation Argo.

