



Chapter Two: The Children of Minos

In honor of King Minos, archaeologists today call the ancient people of Crete the “Minoans.” At the time our story takes place, 4,000 years ago, Ariadne's father was a very famous, very powerful man.

But he was not a very happy man.

In those days, the Romans were not yet born and the Greeks were rough people living in crude homes. Even Zeus and Poseidon and Hera and the other gods of Olympus were just beginning their reign, after defeating the Titans who had ruled the heavens before them.

But the people of Crete already had a great fleet of ships and a beautiful city called Knossos.

They loved art and theater, kept fit and healthy with sports and lived comfortably in beautiful houses around the great palace of King Minos.

The Minoans had no army, because nobody would attack them on their island. And the sailors on their trading ships could defend themselves against pirates, but the nation had no navy. Who would want to make war upon the merchants who brought such fine things to trade with everyone all around the Mediterranean?

Minoan ships sailed everywhere in the great inland sea, and everyone welcomed them. Well, nearly everyone welcomed them. But not the Athenians, and here's why:

The gods had given King Minos three children, but one of them, a great, handsome son, had been mysteriously killed while on a trading voyage.

The gods had given Minos another son, too, but this son brought him no joy at all.

The truth was, Minos was a greedy man with a terrible temper, and, if he was not happy, it was his own fault.

King Minos had done something very foolish: He had cheated Poseidon, the Earth-Shaker, the mighty god of the sea.

Minos had said he wanted to make a gift to Poseidon. He said he wished that he could give the Earth-Shaker a great, beautiful bull, if only he had such a bull to give.

Poseidon was pleased, so he ordered that a wonderful bull should come out of the sea at Knossos, walk straight across the beach and trot up the Royal Road to the palace of King Minos.

But when the greedy king saw this amazing bull, he decided to keep it for himself, and, instead, he gave Poseidon a bull from his own herd. It

was a good bull, but it was not the wonderful, enchanted bull Poseidon had expected.

The Earth-Shaker was angry.

And so, when the queen gave birth to the second son of Minos, the midwife and nurses ran screaming from the room, for the creature had the body of a man, and the head, hooves and tail of a bull.

This horrible thing grew up to be a terrifying monster, and Minos had to create a special place where the people of Crete would be safe from the frightening, flesh-eating creature they called the Minotaur - "The Bull of Minos."

He called upon the Greek genius, Dedalus, to build the Labyrinth, a great stone maze made up of hallways and doorways so twisting and confused that nobody on the outside could ever find their way to the center, and nobody in the center could ever find their way to the outside.

Then, in the middle of the Labyrinth, King Minos placed his son, the monster known as The Minotaur.

This was the monster that Princess Ariadne tended each day.

Ariadne was the bright spot in the life of unhappy King Minos. She was a beautiful daughter, with long hair the color of blackest coal and eyes as clear and bright and brown as bronze.

Ariadne could spin thread and weave fabric as well as anyone in Crete, and she was also smart and worked hard at her lessons. One day, Ariadne wanted to be a captain in her father's merchant fleet, for Minoan girls could grow up to be whatever they wanted to be, and Ariadne knew how much her father wanted one of his children to travel and trade and help to build the wealth of Crete.

Meanwhile, she had an important chore each day, taking care of her father's monster, the Minotaur.

Ariadne tended the Minotaur because someone had to tend the Minotaur, but she was frightened of him, as any sensible person would be. The Minotaur did not just eat the flesh of sheep and goats. He also ate people.

Occasionally, someone would wander into the Labyrinth, and that person would never be seen again. But there weren't very many Minoans foolish enough to do that.

No, the Minotaur's terrible meals came once a year, on the day that 14 young people, seven boys and seven girls, arrived on a ship from Athens.

These hostages were sent to Crete because of the oldest son of Minos, the son who was dead.

He had been killed in Athens, and so Minos had sent his palace guards to make war upon Athens. When he had defeated their poor army, the angry king forced them to pay with the lives of their own children for the son who had been killed in their city.

So every year, a special ship brought those 14 young hostages from Athens to Crete, as food for the horrible Minotaur.

And every year, on the day the hostage ship arrived, Princess Ariadne went down to the harbor in the city of Knossos to meet those frightened, doomed young people and walk them to the special prison built for them just outside the Labyrinth.