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Atarax the Wolf Speaks

Come close, my children, and listen, for I am Atarax the Wolf. I know that you have stayed up on many a cold night, listening to the wind whispering through the trees. If you have, you know that the wind holds many secrets and many stories. Perhaps you have caught the edge of a word or the passing end of a forgotten sentence. Perhaps some of you have even heard my brothers and sisters howling at the moon, recalling the legends of the young world. We, the Wolves, hear the wind and do not wonder, for it speaks to us. Listen and I will tell you the secrets that it holds, returning again and again from the depths of time to haunt the soul of Man. Listen, so that you may learn, and bring about a fitting end to the story. For these are the stories of the young West, and they have travelled far and long to get to you tonight. These are the stories of Ancient Greece.

The Greeks were a great people of the ancient world. It is from them that we have many traditions, such as democracy and philosophy. Their traditions were passed on to the Romans, who spread Greek thought throughout the West. The Greeks, like all people, had their own particular set of stories, or myths. Have you ever heard of Paul Bunyan, John Henry, or Rip Van Winkle? Those are American myths. Greek myths were very different, and there were many more of them. Greek myths also often involved the gods. The Greek gods were powerful beings, but in many ways, they were similar to humans, often fighting one another jealously.

Some of the Greek myths tell stories to explain natural events, like summer and winter. Others tell of fantastic creatures like centaurs and Cyclops. Still others bring color to real events like wars. From their stories, we can tell that the Greeks valued honor, beauty, courage, and many other virtues. We can also tell that, like us, the Greeks did not always live up to their values. Of course, there are countless lessons that can be gained from an understanding of the myths, but like most lessons, they are best learned, not memorized, so I'll let you try to find out just what the Greeks are saying with each story on your own. Now get comfortable, for I hear the wind pouring over the plains, and it's bringing a story our way.

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Orpheus

When I told you about the wind, what did you think of? There are many kinds of wind, but I was thinking about a very special one, because not just any wind tells stories. Even rarer is wind that sings. But sometimes, on very special nights, if you're very quiet, you will catch a little piece of it. Can you think of a night where the wind howled through the streets, kicking up leaves, teasing doors open, and sending you running inside to the warmth of a fire? On this night, did you notice a melody in the wind? It's never clear enough to sing out yourself, but deep down inside, it stays with you for the rest of the night, spiraling through the passages of your mind and into your soul. Come close, and I will tell you a story of the most beautiful melodies ever heard, so beautiful that they are still echoed today. This is the story of a man who was able to capture infinity in a song and use its Beauty to triumph over Death itself. This is the story of Orpheus.

Orpheus played a musical instrument called the lyre, which was very popular in Ancient Greece. The lyre looks like a cross between a harp and a guitar, and it was played to accompany singing or storytelling all across the ancient world. Of course, no one could play the lyre as well as Orpheus. He played so well that he charmed the birds, the animals, and even the stones. They would all lie transfixed at his feet whenever he played, forgetting the passage of time while beautiful melodies filled the air. Like all great artists, Orpheus had great love in his heart. He loved his music, he loved the animals that he played for, but most of all, he loved his wife, Eurydice.

Eurydice and Orpheus lived a happy life, as I'm sure you can imagine. However, tragedy struck one day as Eurydice was walking through the woods. You see, back in the days of old, the world was a more magical place. Ancient Romans (and the Greeks before them) also believed in mythical creatures that weren't gods. One mythical creature, important for this story, is the satyr. Satyrs were a mix of man and goat, and they were very mischievous creatures. A satyr saw Eurydice on her walk and thought that it would be good fun to kidnap her. She started running away and fell into a viper's nest, where she received a fatal bite on her ankle.

That night, Orpheus searched long and hard for his beloved wife, but he couldn't find her. The next day he woke with the sun to search for her in the new light, only to collapse with grief when he found her body. I have never seen anyone as despondent as Orpheus was during those dark days. He didn't eat, didn't sleep, and, most importantly, stopped playing his music. After a week of mourning, he decided that life without Eurydice wasn't worth living, and set out to enter the underworld in search of her. The underworld, where spirits went after they died, was also called Hades, after the god that ruled over them. There were many spirits in Hades, some good, some bad—and each received what he deserved, punishment or reward.

To get to the underworld, Orpheus had to cross the river Styx and make his way past Cerberus, a three-headed hell-hound that guarded the gates. Luckily, Orpheus brought his lyre, and even Cerberus was instantly transfixed by the music. Our hero finally arrived at Hades' throne, where he proceeded to put all of his grief into a lament for Eurydice. For the first and only time in history and legend, the god of the dead was moved by grief, and promised Orpheus that he would

let Eurydice's spirit follow him back to the land of the living. If he did not look back at her until they were both out of the underworld, she would be his once again. However, if he turned around, she would fade away forever.

Orpheus was ecstatic, and quickly left Hades' hall. He made his way past Cerberus, crossed the river Styx, and, careful not to look back, walked up towards the land of the living. You can imagine how happy he was to leave the underworld with his wife accompanying him—but then he turned around. Eurydice remained behind him, smiling wistfully before falling back down towards Hades. Orpheus was too eager, and had broken his promise to Hades. He lost his wife forever. He was doomed to live alone, wandering across the land playing music in Eurydice's memory. That's why on those cold, windy nights, you can hear a melody of loss—it's Orpheus' echo, still imprinted in the wind's memory after all these years.

1. What instrument did Orpheus play?

- a. A lyre
- b. A violin
- c. A flute
- d. A guitar

2. Who did Orpheus play for?

- a. Himself
- b. The gods
- c. Kings
- d. Eurydice and the animals

3. What is a satyr?

- a. Half man, half goat
- b. Half man, half wolf
- c. A wild, hairy man
- d. Half man, half horse

4. Who is the god of the underworld?

- a. Zeus
- b. Apollo
- c. Hades
- d. Hera

5. What happened to Eurydice?

- a. She drowned
- b. She fell onto some rocks

- c. She got kidnapped
- d. She was bitten by a snake

6. What did Orpheus do when he found her body?

- a. He played a sad song
- b. He cursed the gods
- c. He killed the snakes
- d. He tried to find her

7. Who/What guards the underworld?

- a. Cerberus
- b. Hades
- c. A big wall
- d. A fire

8. What did Hades say?

- a. Eurydice would never leave
- b. Orpheus could have his wife if he didn't turn around
- c. Orpheus could live in the underworld
- d. Orpheus could trade with Eurydice

9. How did the story end?

- a. They lived happily ever after
- b. Eurydice faded away
- c. Orpheus became a god
- d. Eurydice became immortal

10. Was Orpheus right to try to raise the dead? Why or why not?
