

# MYTHWAKERS



The Minotaur

Kate Ristau

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## THE MINOTAUR

**H**! My name is Asterion! I am a minotaur. You may recognize me from such books as *Clockbreakers* by Kate Ristau, or from old-timey poems and epic stories written by guys like Ovid and Plutarch. Those authors got some things right, but they got more than a few things wrong, and I'm here to set the historical record straight.

My life is pretty a-maze-ing. Get it?

That joke never gets old, even after all these years. I mean, you could almost get lost in it.

Like a maze.

Moving on, I am so glad you are here. I am a Mythwaker — a legendary character from an ancient myth that has come to define an entire generation. What? You



*1. You are going to see lots of awesome photos of me in Mythwakers. Each one of these museum photos has a number so you can find more information about that image in the back of the book.*

don't know what a myth is? Dude. You're going to love this. Pull up a chair, get comfortable, and we'll explore myths, mazes, and most importantly: me.

## Myths

A lot of people use myth to mean a fake story. That's one meaning of the word myth, but the kind of myths I am talking about are **mythology** — the foundational narratives, or stories, of a particular culture.

Sorry. I used a lot of big words there. All those centuries trapped in the labyrinth were SUPER BORING, so I read a lot of scrolls.

Back to **myths** — just think of them as the important beginning stories of a group of people.

The group of people — or **culture** — that we will be talking about today is the Greeks, and a little bit about those Minoan dudes too.

Here's an important thing for you to know: people argue a lot about my story. Some people think it happened. Other people think it didn't. Some people think Theseus was a hero, while smart people know that he is a ding-dong.

That's the thing about myths — they are around for a long time, passed down from one person to the next, so not all the versions are the same. Think about if your best friend told you a story, which you turned around and told your grandma. Would you tell the same exact story your friend told you to your kind, gentle grandmother? Would you keep all the bloody parts or would you clean things up a bit? You would probably make a few changes, right?

Most of us do, and that is why myths are never told the same way twice.

**Best friend story, now featuring:**

- Blood and guts!
- Nasty villains!
- Mean kids!
- Burps and farts!
- Tacos!

**Grandma story, politely exploring:**

- Talking animals.
- Snuggly kittens.
- Flowers and smiles.
- Five guys named Alfred.
- Hard candy.

Stories change depending on who is telling them and who is listening to them. If you're talking to your best friend, you might be shouting about fiery salsa and guacamole. If you are sweetly sitting beside your grandma, you could be whispering about butterscotch and rainbows.

That's the thing about myths: the audience matters.

How we remember myths has a lot to do with who was telling the story and who was listening. The stories were constantly changing, but the ones that hung around were the ones that people remembered. They appealed to

the culture. They mattered to the listeners. In this way, the audience and the storytellers can change myths for the good, for the bad, and for the tacos.

## Folklore

Tacos are good, but they aren't folklore. **Folklore** is the stories, art, and culture we create and pass down to one another.

Sometimes, we write our stories in books — like this one! Other times, we share our stories in plays or over dinner. Sometimes we text stories to our friends, or flood them with a never-ending stream of emojis. Folklore is a word we can use to explain all those artistic things we share that are so important, well, we do them over and over again!

Myths are folklore, too — they are stories that have been told and retold again and again. They are shared because they are stories that matter to us and to our community.

All right. That's enough from me. You think you already know what folklore is, so it is time for a super easy test! Ace it, and you'll be a legend too.

**Circle the examples of folklore below**

Tacos - Riddles - Folk art

Rhyming games - Fairy tales - Mustard

Jokes - A license plate - 2+3

Street art - Folk music - Your phone number

Tacos, Mustard, A license plate, 2+3, and Your phone number are not folklore, but folk music definitely is, and so are all those fairy tales your mom told you. Everything else on that list above is also folklore — artistic things that we do and share with each other a lot.

What about you? What are some things that you create and share with your family and friends? Do you tell stories? Make memes? Sing songs? Tell jokes? Draw comics? What do you love to do?

### **Things I love to create and share**

1

2

3

4

5

If you said design punk rock posters, high five! If you said paint pet rocks, high hoof! You rock, and clearly, you make and participate in folklore all the time.

### **Folklore matters**

A myth is a kind of folklore, too, but not everything is folklore. For something to become folklore, it has to really matter to us. The things that last — the things that

stick around and that we want to share over and over again with our family and friends — there’s a reason they have that staying power. It’s because they show who we are and what is important to us.

For example, I really like hoof rubs, but did that make it into my myth? No! That’s because me getting awesome hoof rubs didn’t matter as much to the people telling my story, the Greeks.

Enough about folklore! Let’s talk about me.

## The Man, the Monster, the Myth



2. William Blake, a poet and printmaker, made me look super intimidating in this illustration. He understood the assignment.

Now, some people say I have the body of a man and the head of a bull. Others say I am half-cow and half-man. I say they are half-rude and I am one-hundred-and-eighty-nine-percent awesome.

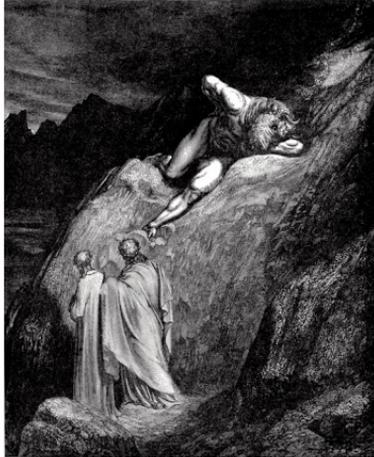
I was born this way, with spectacular horns, furry ears, and muscles for days. I also have a nice long tail like any decent minotaur.

I know. This is where the arguments begin. Some people think I have brown eyes. Some people think they are blue. Some people think smokes pours out of my nostrils — I wish! That would be epic! Except when I was blowing my nose. I would keep lighting all the tissues on fire.

Achoo! AHHHHH!!!

It's a good thing I don't have a fire-nose. Or feet. Can you imagine? Some people think I have feet — like toes and stuff. This is SO TOTALLY NOT TRUE. I don't have feet! I have hooves — long, sharp, glorious hooves.

Honestly, if the stories had included nice, long hoof rubs, we wouldn't be having this discussion, would we?



3. Here I am in an engraving by Paul Gustave Louis Christophe Doré. Are those toes? Ewww. Gross.

Ah, well. Not very many people survived the labyrinth (super not my fault), so they don't really know what I look like, I guess.

What? No! I don't look like a horse! Neigh, I don't! Why would you say that? Fine, maybe, when you see super-old drawings of me, sometimes I maybe look just a very tiny bit like a possible horse, but clearly, I am not a horse.



4. *I am not a horse in this photograph of a shallow bowl with an illustration of Theseus poking me. Super impolite, Theseus.*

Sorry, touchy subject. You see, those paintings make me look like I'm a horse because those people don't know how to draw a bull.

As a side note, if you ever see a statue of me without

any hands, that's because it's an old statue and the hands broke off. I have awesome hands. Amazing hands. Unbelievable hands. Monstrous hands!



5. *This statue used to be on a fountain. It also used to have hands.*

On the other hand (ha!), while I am the minotaur from all the stories, it's rude to call someone by what they are, as opposed to their name. I mean, I don't go around calling you a scrawny human, do I?

Should I?

No? Okay. Then, you can call me by my real name, which is Asterion, as opposed to Manly Minotaur, Bull Guy, or That Cow Man over there.

Asterion means starry. You can find **constellations**, or groups of stars, that tell my story. Look up into the sky for the Corona Borealis, or the northern crown. It is the crown of my sister, Ariadne. Every time I look up, I am reminded of her long golden hair. She shines so bright.

You don't need to get out your telescope, though, and be all space-y. I'll stick around and tell you lots more about me, including why they keep retelling my story, from Hollywood to the heavens and beyond.