

TOBIAS DRUITT
CORYDON
AND THE FALL OF
ATLANTIS



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藏书章

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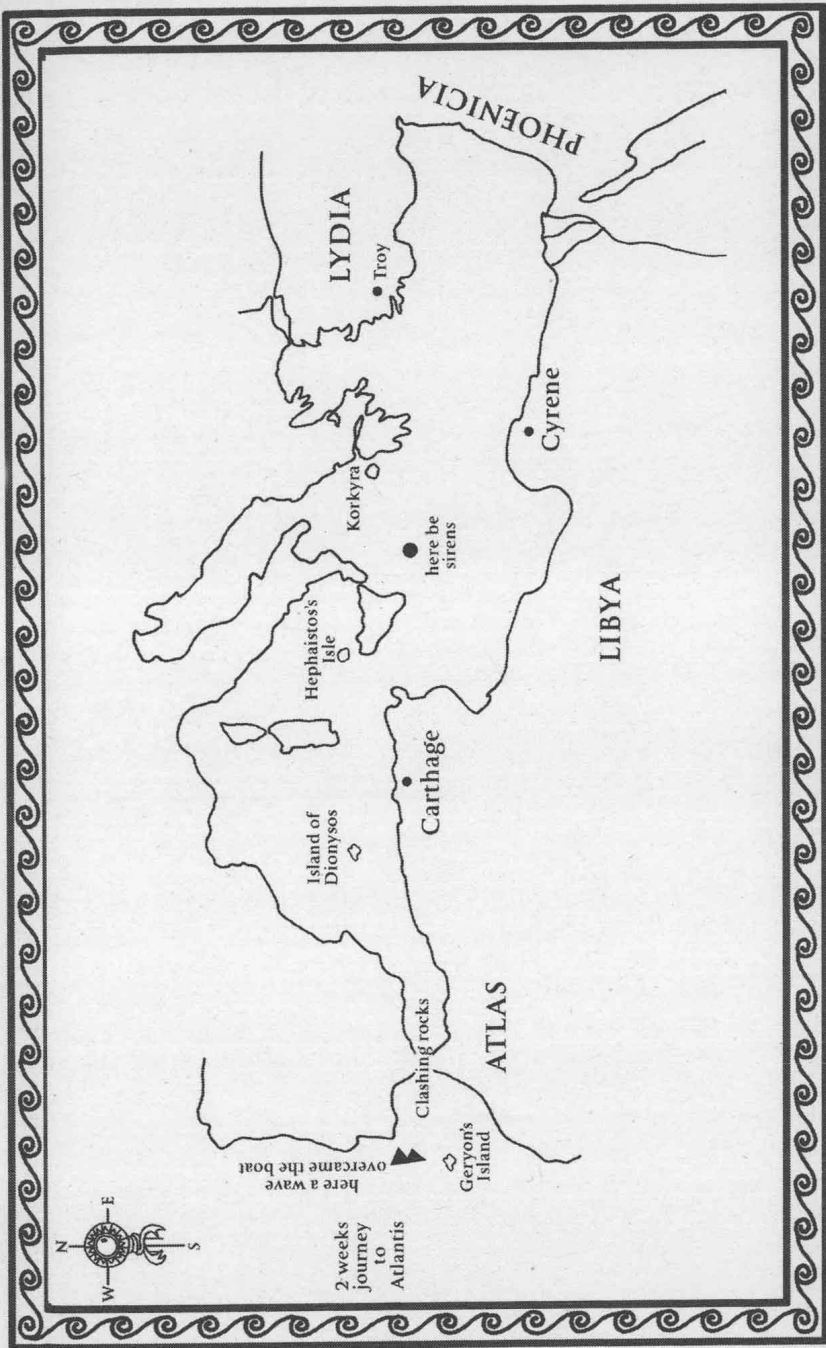
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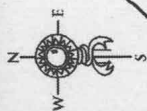
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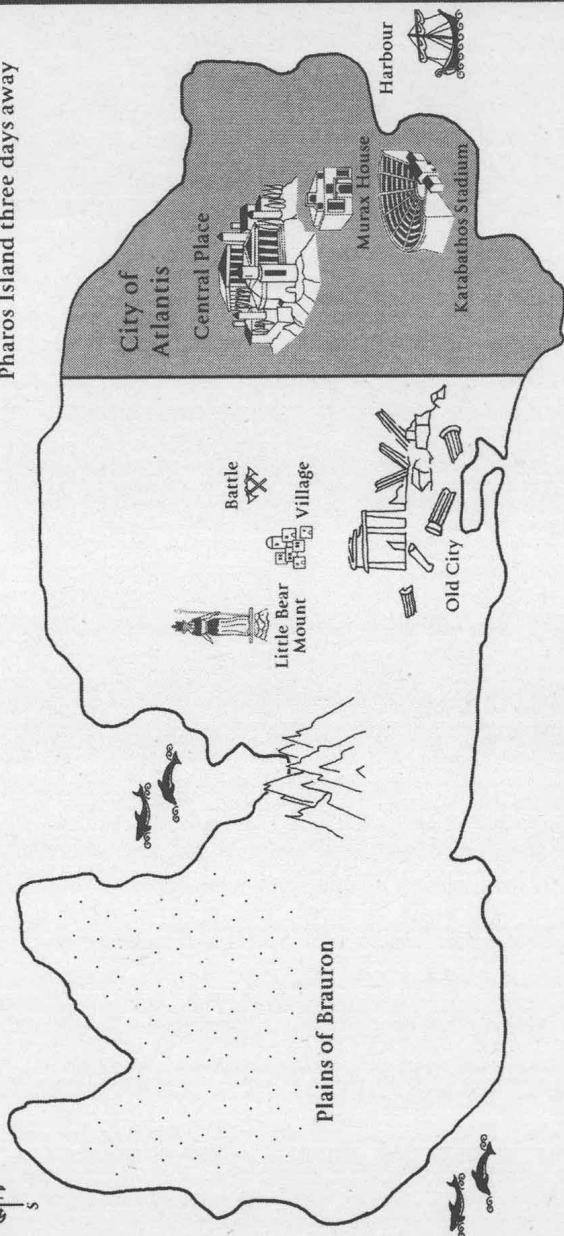
CORYDON
AND THE ISLAND OF
MONSTERS

*To the cities of New York and Venice
for all their inspiration*





Pharos Island three days away



ἄλφα

ONE

Corydon ran towards the cliff. He could hear the goat's plaintive bleating. As he ran, he called hastily, 'Gorgos! Gorgos, where are you? I need your help and I need it now!'

There was no answer. Corydon was not surprised, but he still felt a chill.

He had reached the edge of the cliff. He lay flat on his stomach and peered over the edge, the blue glitter of the sea below burning his eyes. There, halfway down the cliff, was a narrow ledge, and on it was a goat, lying on its side, bleating faintly. It did not have the energy to rise.

'Eripha,' Corydon crooned, hoping the beast could hear its own name, the tender name he had given it when it was a tiny dancing kid. But it made no response.

'Gorgos!' Corydon shouted once more. Again there was no reply from Medusa's half-divine son. Furious, Corydon began lowering himself over the edge of the cliff, his feet feeling for footholds. There were small crannies in the straight rock wall, and his eager toes and then fingers

grasped them, though as the cliff crumbled he had to hurry from one hold to another before they broke to powder in his urgent grasp. His sturdy goathoof helped him keep his footing.

He had no idea how he would get back up the cliff, but he couldn't leave Eripha on the ledge; the animal might take fright and slide over.

A handhold gave way and for one very long moment Corydon was dangling by one hand from a stiff thyme bush jutting from the cliff edge.

Then, with relief, his feet felt the dust of the ledge where Eripha waited, her yellow eyes glazed and dull.

He took off his short rope belt and, bending down, tied the animal's near foreleg to his wrist. She bleated.

Then he sat down, and gazed angrily at the sea.

Where *was* Gorgos? And where had he been when Eripha had stumbled over the edge in the first place. He was meant to be looking after the goats.

After a few more minutes of fury, Corydon's thoughts stopped whirling and began to slow.

He had been too angry to think before.

He was thinking now, and it was painful.

Why hadn't he asked the immortal gorgons Sthenno and Euryale to help him? They often did when sheep were trapped. Why hadn't he brought some rope? Why had he left his flock with Gorgos in the first place?

Corydon should have known what Gorgos was like. After all, they'd spent six months together. A winter of storytelling and songs by a warm hearth, listening to the riddles of the Sphinx, Euryale's hunting tales, Sthenno's

excitement over new prophecies. A winter of drying herbs and eating cheese. A winter in which he, Corydon, had turned their own adventure in fighting the seething army of heroes bent on destroying them into a memory, and then into an epic song.

Then, with the lengthening days came lambs, lambs, lambs born into the heavy snow of the mountains. Some of them born in terrible, bitter agony that reminded him of the birth of Gorgoliskos. He could hardly bear to think of that day.

And he had to care for the ewes and the lambs they bore. The weakly little lambs, especially. The mothers sometimes rejected them, and Corydon became their mother, feeding them and sleeping by them to keep their shivering little bodies warm.

Oddly, his favourite ewe had rejected her lamb this year.

It made Corydon wonder about his own mother. And about Gorgos.

Corydon had tried his utmost to teach Gorgos the art of shepherding. But Gorgos never seemed to understand.

When Corydon told him that it was important for pregnant ewes to get special grass, hand-pulled from the lush slopes lower down on the mountains, Gorgos laughed and said it was too much work. Corydon had found Gorgos keeping one great-bellied ewe on a snowy mountaintop with no green food for miles. She was gaunt and wild-eyed, and Corydon had nursed her by hand for two weeks to bring her back up to strength.

Gorgos couldn't sit and watch sheep or goats, and do a

little piping. He was only happy when running feverishly on the hillside, playing wild games that only he seemed to understand, acting out strange half-remembered hero tales of the deaths of kings and the burning of cities. The only animal Corydon had ever seen him care for, or even watch, was a wolf which had once ventured among the sheep in winter. Gorgos had stalked the wolf, imitating its movements, and then stared at it, like a wolf himself. To Corydon's surprise, the wolf had retreated before the snarling boy, bowing his head in submission. Gorgos had one deep scratch from this encounter, but had hardly noticed it. He never noticed bruises or wounds that would make other boys limp or cry.

The only other creature Gorgos found interesting was the nightingale that sang every night in the hazel tree. As she tuned up for spring, daily improving her song, Gorgos would stop running around the mountainside to listen, in a stillness so complete that it reminded Corydon of the way a wild animal sits looking at the moon. Corydon liked her song, too, but Gorgos seemed to hear in it something that no one else could detect.

As he sat on the ledge, thinking slowly of these things in the careful shepherd's way, Corydon couldn't help feeling angry all over again. Where *was* Gorgos?

His rage made him feel lonely. He had somehow hoped inside himself that Gorgos would be his friend, as Gorgos's mother Medusa had been. Coldly, hurtingly, he had begun to see that Gorgos was not the same as his mother, but entirely different.

It hurt because it meant he was alone.

Well, not really alone, he told himself quickly. There were all the other monsters, after all, and all of them were his friends. It was too long since he had seen Sthenno and Euryale or the Snake-girl, though. After the Battle of Smoke and Fire, after the heroes had departed, the monsters had gone their separate ways, each drifting back to his or her own solitary life. They had met only twice in the last long working year; once at grape-harvest time, and once in the first bright days of spring when the hills were mantled with flowers. Corydon loved those festival days. Even the villagers were less wary of him now, not eager to have him amongst them still, but willing to buy his cheeses.

So perhaps he didn't need Gorgos.

As he thought this, Corydon shifted his position a little on the hard stone of the ledge. Disturbed, the goat gave a faint bleat. Then, abruptly, there was a heavy rumbling noise, like a cart being driven along by swift horses. Yet no cart could be near a cliff . . . As his mind shaped this thought, the heavy stone of the ledge lurched under him, like the deck of a ship tossed by a wave. It almost threw him over the edge of the cliff. Desperately clutching Eripha, he tried to grip the edge of the shifting ledge in his hands as it swayed. Then he was hit by a flood of small stones from the cliff face, and the ledge jolted again, so that he almost plunged over the edge.

Looking out to sea, Corydon saw that whatever had disturbed the earth had affected the waves too. One huge wave raced towards the cliff, hitting it hard, like a mother's hand slapping a naughty child. The cliff shook

with the impact, but only the spray reached Corydon. Other waves followed, smaller but still ferocious in their energy.

What was happening to the world? At once Corydon began to guess that this was the anger of a god, for surely only a god could shake the earth and beat it like a housewife shaking dust from a rug. He knew at once which god it must be, but he did not speak the name. Not now. Instead his mind shaped the word 'earthquake', a word he had heard, but a reality he had never experienced before. As his mind cleared, there was a cry from above him. It was Gorgos at last.

'Corydon!'

He looked up and saw Gorgos's pointed, tanned face above him.

'Well, don't just stand there!' Corydon felt all the anger of the afternoon in a long heady rush. 'Get a rope or something.'

Gorgos nodded. Then without apology or explanation, he disappeared again. Corydon was left to listen to his growling stomach, and to wonder if the earth would shake again anytime soon, and to stroke Eripha. He did all these several times before he saw Gorgos peering over again. A rope slapped the cliff face above him. Gorgos was holding it.

'Tie it to a tree!' shouted Corydon.

'I've got it!' Gorgos shouted back. 'I won't let you fall! Anyway, there isn't a tree!'

Knowing Gorgos, Corydon decided to send the goat up first. He untied his belt from the creature. It bleated

miserably. He looped the rope around the goat's belly, trying to ensure that it was wound around the goat's legs so it couldn't slip and strangle the beast.

'Okay!' he yelled. Gorgos began hauling on the rope. Slowly, bleating frantically, the goat rose into the air. It kicked showers of small stones off the cliff face and onto Corydon. Watching its struggles, Corydon began to laugh, the long tension and rage somehow issuing in gales of insane mirth. The goat was curious; it stopped struggling and listened to the odd noises he was making. Corydon laughed so much he had to lie down on the narrow ledge.

The ledge, weakened by the earthquake, suddenly gave way and Corydon found himself clinging desperately to the cliff face, his feet braced on the few sharp shards of rock that were all that was left of the ledge. He hung between sky and sea.

Gorgos peered over; Corydon could see the strangely calm face. 'Help!' he cried.

'What are you doing, Corydon? Stop messing about. I don't know what to do with this goat.'

'I'm *not* messing about!' Corydon yelled. 'I'm about to plunge down this cliff face and into the sea! Now, would you mind very much helping me by letting down the rope?'

'Oh . . . the rope? Okay. Just wait . . . er . . . hang on . . . while I get it off the goat. Bother – these knots are tight. You wouldn't have a knife, would you?'

Corydon didn't kill Gorgos, but only because he couldn't think of a way to do it instantly from his present precarious position.

‘Gorgos,’ he said. ‘GET THE ROPE. Before I fall and drown. Okay?’

‘Bother! It’s all frayed now. Don’t worry, though. I have an idea . . .’

Corydon felt an immediate premonition of disaster. Rarely had he heard such ill-omened words.

His worst fears were realised almost at once.

Above him, there was a scrabbling sound. Gorgos had lowered himself over the edge. His bare feet hung about eighteen inches above Corydon’s head.

‘Grab my feet!’ Gorgos shouted. ‘Then I can climb back up with you hanging on!’

‘No, Gorgos!’ Corydon shouted hastily. ‘I’ll be too heavy for you to hold – it’ll pull us both off the cliff! Climb back up and go and fetch Sthenno or Euryale or anyone who can fly!’

‘Look, it’ll be fine! Just grab my feet!’

One of the pieces of rock on which Corydon was balancing suddenly gave way.

He had to try Gorgos’s stupid plan or fall.

He grabbed Gorgos’s feet and hung on firmly.

‘Ow, you’re so heavy,’ groaned Gorgos. ‘I’m not sure I can climb up . . . hang on . . .’

Corydon hung on. But his hands were already aching, and they were damp with sweat.

‘I can’t hang on for long—’ he said. He remembered that on that other cliff, the one in Hades’ realm, Pegasos had saved them. Was there anyone, anything to help them now?

He had to trust Gorgos’s strength.

And Gorgos gave a great heave almost at once. Corydon's torso was now at the top, so that he was half-lying on the cliff edge. Corydon scrabbled desperately with his feet, but he could get no purchase at all. Gorgos gave another great heave; even in his fear, Corydon was amazed at the boy's strength, the sheer might of his hands, his arms. Now he was suddenly up, safe, lying on his face in the grass, smelling the hot wool of the goat, breathing in dust. Alive. He felt like shouting for joy. But he had no breath. All the air had been forced from his burning lungs.

He sat up, winded. He drew in his breath.

Awkwardly, he said, 'Thanks, Gorgos.'

Gorgos was already on his feet. Another thing Corydon found hard about him was that he was never still.

Then he cocked his head to one side, as if he were listening to some sound only he could hear. His face closed up, became smooth and unreadable.

'It's fine!' he yelled, as he began to run off towards the hills again, long, easy, loping strides kicking up little puffs of dust around hard, bare feet.

'Where are you going?' Corydon bawled. 'We have to get the goat home! She's hurt!'

'You can do that,' came Gorgos's voice, faintly. It was as if he was listening to something else. As if Corydon's shouts and calls were only an annoying reminder of a reality that didn't matter to him.

Corydon sighed, and gave up. He still felt winded, and his fear had drained him. Gorgos, apparently, felt nothing of that kind. He was almost out of sight now, lost in the