

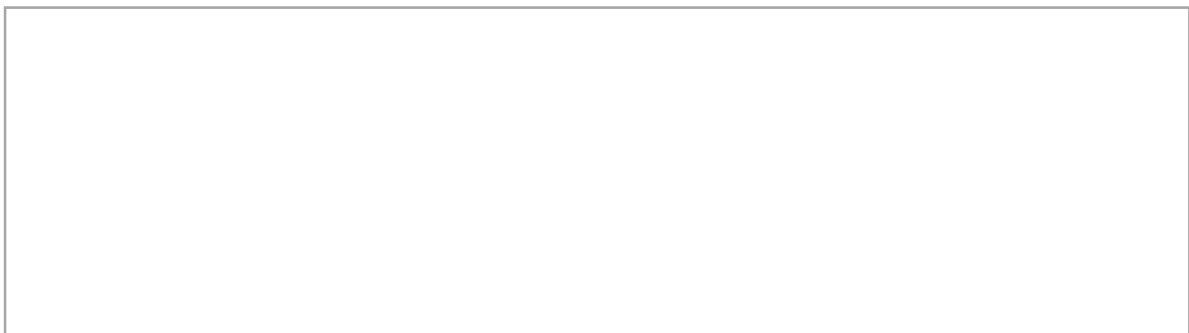
The Apossel Gate

Home, what a lost child cries for, pulls me south as I battle north. Just as a ship longs for port, there is nothing worse for mortal man than yearning for a place they are forbidden to go, a goal they can not possibly achieve. How many times would we come so close and fall short yet again?

I was taunted by memories conjured up by my desperate mind, the beautiful forests and valleys, spread out across the rolling downs of Ithaca, the warm sun-kissed smile of my loving wife and the tender lick of a happy dog. All this, a constant persistent reminder of the future I was fighting for.

Kindly, Circe prepared supplies for us to depart; provisions and blankets. Although she never intended for us to leave, she waved us off, cheerily putting on a smile.

The sea was calm, a light breeze caressed my heated brow as we worked, but the further we travelled the harsher the waves became. Then, (after a week at sea) we were enveloped by a fierce storm pulling us out to Poseidon's wrath, "Brace yourselves lads, prepare for the worst!" I cried over the whistling wind that whipped up brine into my eyes. Lightning struck the sky in half, like a scream of primal anger from the gods! As the boat creaked and swayed under the violent barrage it endured, salt-water sloshed onto the deck while gargantuan waves devoured entire portions of our floundering ship.

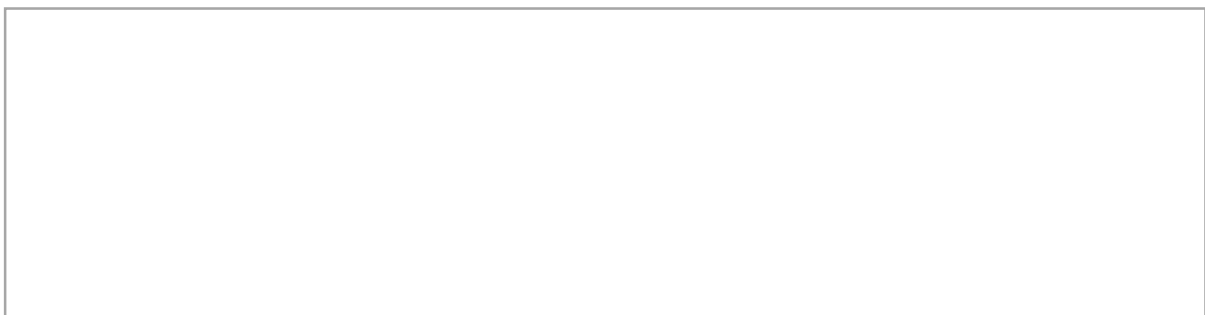


Rushing to and fro we fought to gain control of our spasming ship, pulling and tugging the sails which flapped and tore in the powerful wind, to correct our course. Our laboured breath appeared in white puffs filling the air, a stark contrast to the blackened clouds looming above.

"Agh!" someone screamed, while they tumbled into the unforgiving waves, a powerful rip-current clutching at his leg, drawing him under to their death. But after that there was only all-consuming darkness...

I wretched, the overwhelming stench of decay clung to my senses like a deathly leach, starving the life out of its victims to sate the ravenous hunger that tore apart its own insides. Swaying to my feet, I surveyed my grim situation. A vivid memory burned in my head, the dawning of a pounding throb in my mournful heart, many of my brave crew had died during our ghastly ordeal...

It was all I could do to brush away the tears that fell upon my dew dropped cheek, as I grieved their demise. But slowly a moaning creak emanated from my dilapidated boat as ten men fumbled towards my hunched back. Awestruck, I climbed to my feet; the grey sand crunching underneath. Overwhelmed by joy we smiled and laughed rejoicing at our survival. Little did we know, our joy was short lived; shrieking calls echoed through the ghostly land, permeating our gleeful souls, with the dread and bone chilling (all consuming) fear of the underworld! It was a harrowing knife in my heart, bleeding the positive emotions out of me, leaving a desolate plain where my strong-willed spirit used to be.



Through the wailing howls and balling of the departed, a gathering mist swirled and swayed; a wall of fog advancing towards us, fast. Tentatively I reached out to the spiralling smog but just as quickly I recoiled as my flesh began blistering and boiling. Dread hung in the air as if from a noose, our end was made clear, when the deathly fog encircled us we would die a lung-crushing demise another among the dead. Running through the maze of rocks, we clung to the desperate hope of sweet salvation, while the ever-nearing vapour slowly claimed us one after the other. Determination punctuated our every move, tripping over rocks, slipping over boulders that was all it took to make the prospect of death that filled my mind a very real future. Until..

Dark gates rose above me, emblazoned with skulls, the words "beware" etched in dark blood on its surface, but it might as well have been an invitation. As I tumbled before the giant pillars, that stretched like a coal black spring to the heavens, I clasped the entrance to its cobbled square path.

"Beware," a voice boomed, **" you have been warned of your cruel fate, worse than excruciating death."** The coal gates swung open as if automated. **" Now you must face the Cerberussss!"** It screamed terrifyingly brilliant in the cavernous passage, as it's haunting voice echoed off the walls.

