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ARGONUTS:
JASON & THE QUEST
FOR THE GOLDEN FLEECE

A COMEDY OF
TRAGIC PROPORTIONS

SCOTT LYNCH-GIDDINGS

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



SAMUEL
FRENCH

FOUNDED 1830

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

- THE POET.** The narrator of the story (male or female)
- JASON.** A young man in his teens; not the heroic type in appearance
- MEDEA.** The beautiful young granddaughter of Queen Æetes
- PELIAS.** The king of Iolcus; Jason's uncle
- HERA.** The queen of the gods
- CHIRON.** A centaur (half-man/half-horse); Jason's foster father and teacher
- PHINEAS.** A paunchy old man; speaks with a New York Jewish dialect
- ALCESTIS.** The elder daughter of King Pelias
- ASTEROPIA.** The younger daughter of King Pelias
- ORPHEUS.** An Argonaut; a singer and rock star of the ancient world
- HERCULES.** An Argonaut; the world's strongest man
- CASTOR.** An Argonaut; brother of Pollux
- POLLUX.** An Argonaut; brother of Castor
- MOPSUS.** A male Argonaut
- LAERTES.** A male Argonaut
- HIPPOLYTA.** A female Argonaut; queen of the Amazons
- ATALANTA.** A female Argonaut
- ANTIOPE.** A female Argonaut
- NEPHELE.** A female Argonaut
- HYLA.** A female Argonaut; Hercules' agent and personal trainer; short, bookish & non-athletic type
- FLEETFOOT.** A winged harpy (female)
- SWIFTWING.** A winged harpy (female)
- ÆETES.** The elderly queen of Colchis; grandmother of Medea and Apsyrtas
- APSYRTA.** Medea's younger sister
- TALOS.** A bronze giant (male)
- 1ST CITIZEN.** A Greek citizen (male or female)
- 2ND CITIZEN.** A Greek citizen (male or female)
- 1ST GUARD.** A Greek soldier; captain of the guards (male or female)
- 2ND GUARD.** A fierce Greek soldier (male or female)
- 3RD GUARD.** A rather accommodating Greek soldier (male or female)
- HOSTESS.** A gorgeous and glitzy TV emcee (female)
- 1ST JUDGE.** A snooty contest judge (male or female)
- 2ND JUDGE.** An attractive blonde judge with a German accent (female)
- 3RD JUDGE.** A funkier, more laid-back judge (male or female)
- CUPID.** A god of love; boyish (non-speaking)

CUPID'S GIRLFRIEND. Cupid's girlfriend (non-speaking)

POSEIDON. The god of the sea (non-speaking)

OLD RAM. Somebody in a ram costume (male or female)

SKELETON SOLDIERS. Characters dressed in skeleton masks and body-suits; minimum four (male or female)

KUROGOS. Graceful stagehands dressed in all-black masks and bodysuits; for moving props onstage in the Japanese theatrical style; minimum two (male or female).

CITIZENS. Greek citizens who interact ad lib.; minimum four, though preferably far more (the equivalent of the chorus in a musical)

SFX ORCHESTRA. "Sound effects" pit orchestra, consisting of keyboard, bass guitar, assorted percussion, et al.; referred to as SFX, MUSIC, or orchestra in the script

PRODUCTION NOTES

“Argonauts” was first performed on November 2, 2006 by students of Argo Community High School in Summit, Illinois.

The story is loosely based on the epic poem “Argonautika” composed by Apollonius of Rhodes in the 3rd Century BCE. The staging described in this script – i.e., the extensive use of blackouts and spotlights, the “god” and “king” platforms, etc. – reflects that first production. Simpler or more elaborate stagings are certainly possible.

CASTING

The first cast had 29 players – 12 males and 17 females. A smaller cast can be created through the doubling and tripling of roles. In the original, the following were multiple roles: Chiron/Cupid, 2nd Citizen/Hyla/Cupid’s Girlfriend, Hercules/Talos, 1st Guard/3rd Judge, 1st Citizen/Kurogo, 2nd Guard/Poseidon, 3rd Guard/1st Judge, Antiope/Chiron’s rear end, 2nd Judge/Apsyrtas, and of course the Skeleton Soldiers (6) and Kurogos (2) had other roles. Pelias, Phineas, Æetes, and even Medea could also take on other roles, and Alcestis and Asteropia could double as Fleetfoot and Swiftwing. A larger cast is possible, too, of course, with no doubling, and with more Citizens, Skeleton Soldiers, and Kurogos.

FEMALE ROLES

Since casting directors often have more females than males to choose from, a number of roles from the traditional story have been feminized here. Half the crew of Argonauts, for example, are Amazons in this version. King Æetes is now a queen, Medea’s brother Apsyrtas is now a sister named Apsyrtas, and Hylas, Hercules’ armor-bearer, appears as the female Hyla. Citizens, Guards, Kurogos, and Skeleton Soldiers can be either male or female.

SET PIECES

The Clashing Rocks were two carved and painted styrofoam rock faces mounted on wheeled frames. Their movement as described in the script was effective, though the rocks as well as the pantomimed ship can be done differently. For the bulls in Act Two we used 5’ X 5’ Chicago Bulls logos mounted to foamboard. They got laughs because the production took place in the Chicago area. When produced elsewhere a different design might work better.

THE ARGONAUTS’ COMPETITION

The “So you think you can be an ARGONAUT!” bit parodies TV competition shows, specifically “So You Think You Can Dance,” and one of the judges is modeled after Heidi Klum, a host of “Project Runway.” This scene should parody whatever TV competition/game shows are popular at the time. Heidi Klum’s “auf wiedersehen” won’t always be part of the collective consciousness, but some other catch-phrase will. When that time comes, feel free to drop the German accent and use a more current catch-phrase instead.

COSTUMES/PROPS

The centaur can be created very effectively by simply renting a two-person horse costume and skipping the head part. Medea's costume must be sleeveless for the love potion injection bit. Talos should be as thoroughly bronzed and robot-like as possible. If he is masked, his voice can be provided from a mic offstage. The Skeleton Soldiers can wear skeleton bodysuits and masks, i.e., store-bought Halloween costumes. If the backs of their costumes are solid black, they can "disappear" by facing upstage and then serve as kurogos for the Poseidon Rising scene. The Old Ram can be either a person in a ram costume (easy to construct out of woolly material and a black hooded sweatsuit) or a ram puppet operated by a kurogo (tricky). The Argonauts' oars can be constructed with narrow, pointed paddles so they can also serve as spears.

THE SNAKE

The snake puppet can be constructed in various ways. In the premiere, its body was made from a series of 6" x 8' and 8" x 8' flexible aluminum ducts, painted green and bent into shapes that fit neatly around the DS sides of the god platform. The pieces came apart easily so stagehands could strike them quickly during a blackout. The snake's neck was an 8" x 8' duct with a PVC pipe running through it that had a lightbulb attached at the top. Its head was crafted from chicken wire and its eyes were red gels. By connecting the light to a dimmer, the snake's eyes glowed, then dimmed and went dark as it fell asleep during the lullaby. A puppeteer hidden behind the god platform held the protruding end of the PVC pipe to raise, move, and lower the head/neck unit.

ACT I

*(SETTING: A bare stage except for two platforms on opposite sides (one – the “king” platform – for **KING PELIAS**, **QUEEN ÆETES**, and **HOSTESS**; the other – the “god” platform – for **HERA**, **TALOS**, and the tree/Golden Fleece/snake in Act II).*

*(AT RISE: A throne sits upon the king platform. The **POET** enters at a dignified pace, steps into a spotlight, opens a large storybook and addresses the audience.)*

POET. Pray ye, all here, the Muses may consent
To grant this mortal tongue felicity,
And weave in words a tale to represent
The godlike heroes of antiquity.
Before Odysseus traversed the seas
On journey home to his Penelope;
Before his Wooden Horse passed through the gates
Of Troy to put King Priam's realm to flame;
Before brave Achilles was brought to heel,
Or Hercules his labors long endured,
There came the greatest adventure of them all:
It is the story of the Argo's quest,
The baleful challenge of King Pelias,
And how a lowly shepherd earned a crown;
How, on his quest, this shepherd was compelled
To journey far to find, in a place where
Dominion of the earth and ocean cease,
Under the sleepless guard of dragon's glare,
Upon a lonesome tree: the Golden Fleece.
With your imagination, cast a spell
And grant me time this deathless tale to tell:
Of seas traversed, and monstrous creatures fought
By Jason, the courageous Argonaut.

(MUSIC provides a grand flourish to the end of the prologue. As the POET speaks his next lines, KING PELIAS enters followed by ALCESTIS and ASTEROPIA. They ascend the king platform, where PELIAS sits upon the throne, with ALCESTIS and ASTEROPIA taking their places at his side. As soon as PELIAS sits, he begins to squirm uncomfortably.)

POET. *(cont.)* It all began in Thessaly, in ancient times, when the kingdom of Iolcus was ruled by King Pelias, with his daughters Alcestis and Asteropia at his side. Pelias was a proud but vengeful and suspicious man, and one who sat uneasily upon his throne.

(Vocalizing his discomfort, PELIAS finally leans forward, reaches around and removes the crown which he apparently had been sitting on. He smiles – much more comfortable now – puts on the crown and settles into his seat. This routine irks the POET, who had hoped to conduct this tale with more dignity.)

He sat uneasily upon his throne because he had come to it by foul means. And further, he was haunted by two vexsome prophecies: that his kingdom would fall to a man wearing only one sandal...

PELIAS. Which is why I've decreed that all shoes must always be sold in pairs!

ALCESTIS. Good one, dad.

POET. And that he would die at the hands of one who shared his blood.

PELIAS. Which is why I've had all my relatives killed!

BOTH DAUGHTERS. *(in unison, coyly)* Except for us.

PELIAS. Why, of course. I'm not going to be murdered by my own daughters!

(PELIAS, ALCESTIS, and ASTEROPIA all laugh good-naturedly, while MUSIC provides an ominous chord progression.)

ASTEROPIA. *(to orchestra)* Knock it off!

(MUSIC peters out disjointedly. As the POET speaks, lights fade on PELIAS and his DAUGHTERS. They exit.)

POET. Yet Pelias had ruled Iolcus for many years, and neither prophecy had come true, so he gave little thought to such things. But the time was coming when the Fates would rise from their slumber. For, unbeknownst to this evil king, there was a boy of his family's blood – a long forgotten boy – who had spent his childhood years on the far away slopes of Mount Pelion, and who soon would hear the call of manhood...and his destiny.

(POET exits.)

CHIRON. *(offstage)* Jason!...Jason!

(JASON enters, reading a book. CHIRON enters a moment later from the same direction.)

There you are, my lad. Did not you hear me call?

(JASON remains rapt.)

Lost in your studies, eh? That's a fine place to be.

JASON. Chiron?

CHIRON. Yes, my boy?

JASON. You're the smartest horse I know. Perhaps you can explain something to me.

CHIRON. I'm not a horse, Jason. We've been over this. I am a centaur, one of an ancient race of mystical beings who –

JASON. *(interrupting)* I've been reading this book, "The History of Thessaly."

CHIRON. Ah. I knew someday you would find that book.

JASON. And it says here that Cretheus was once the king of Iolcus. And when he grew very old, he named his son Aeson as his successor to the throne.

CHIRON. That is true.

JASON. But when Cretheus died, Aeson did not become king. His younger brother Pelias did.

CHIRON. That also is true.

JASON. Pelias killed his brother Aeson so he could wear the crown, and he tried to kill the son of Aeson, too, who was just a baby.

CHIRON. Yes, it was a terrible thing.

JASON. But the baby was saved by Hera, queen of the gods...

(**CHIRON** *nods.*)

...who spirited the child away to Mount Pelion.

(*looking up at CHIRON*)

Here.

(**CHIRON** *nods again.*)

It goes on to say that the child's name was...

BOTH. (*in unison*) Jason.

JASON. And, look, the rest of the book is blank. Just empty pages, as if...

CHIRON. As if it were waiting to be written.

(**JASON** *shuts the book.*)

JASON. Chiron, am I the Jason of the story?

CHIRON. You are.

JASON. Then King Pelias of Iolcus –

CHIRON. Is your uncle.

JASON. And Aeson, the brother he murdered...

CHIRON. ...was your father.

JASON. Wow. Then I should be a king.

(**CHIRON** *nods.*)

And instead I'm a poor shepherd being raised by a talking horse.

CHIRON. I am not a horse, Jason. I'm a centaur. I keep trying to tell –

JASON. (*interrupting*) It's my destiny to be king, Chiron! It's my duty to avenge my murdered father! But...I don't know how to begin.

CHIRON. Nearly twenty years ago, when Hera herself appeared before me in all her glory and mystery, and gave you to me for safekeeping, she said that she would come back again when you were a man. And she would show you the way. The time has come, Jason. You must ask the goddess for guidance.

JASON. But how do I speak to the queen of the gods? How do I make her appear?

CHIRON. *(with a smile)* You've always had the power to do so.

JASON. Even now?

CHIRON. Whenever you wish. Just close your eyes, and tap your heels together three times, and think to yourself, "There's no place like –" Wait, that's not right. How did it go?

JASON. Oh c'mon, Chiron, you have to remember! Horses are supposed to have great memories.

CHIRON. That's elephants, not horses. Just let me think.

(ponders for a moment)

And I'm not a horse! Now you've got me all confused.

JASON. C'mon, Chiron, think!

CHIRON. Ah! Got it! Of course. You have to climb Mount Pelion to the Temple of Hera, where you must sacrifice an animal upon the altar.

JASON. Great, great!

(pacing excitedly)

Okay, there's no time to waste. You say I need...an animal?

(JASON eyes CHIRON's hindquarters. CHIRON quickly shifts around to face him.)

CHIRON. *(sharply)* Like a goat, Jason!

JASON. Right, a goat. Of course.

(JASON starts to exit but is stopped by CHIRON's words of warning.)

CHIRON. *(ominously)* But prepare yourself, young man! Mortal eyes are not meant to gaze upon the gods. Their mystical manifestations may be maddeningly mysterious. At the altar of Hera you will see and hear much that is beyond human comprehension. Listen to her words with care, young one. And do not wonder at the strange ways of the gods.

JASON. Right. Their mysterious manifests are...what you said. Thanks, Chiron!

(JASON dashes off as CHIRON waves goodbye.)

CHIRON. Good luck, Jason!

(after a pause)

And don't forget the goat!

(CHIRON exits. The POET enters in a spotlight.)

POET. So Jason climbed the sacred mount where he made his sacrifice to the goddess. And then, before him, upon the holy altar, he witnessed a sight of surpassing strangeness – inexplicable and unreal, unlike anything he had ever seen before.

(SFX: cymbal crescendo. Lights up on HERA standing on the god platform. She is dressed like a stylish, 21st century businesswoman and is talking on a cell phone.

JASON kneels on the platform steps.)

HERA. *(speaking into a cell phone)* Well, you just tell her to *do* it, girl – no ifs, ands, or buts. She has to learn. It's a dog-eat-god world out there – god-eat-dog, god-eat... god-eat-god? How does that saying go?

JASON. O most holy one!

HERA. Hang on, sweetie, I got another call.

(She presses a button.)

This is Hera. Hello? Hello?

JASON. Hello?

HERA. *(still on the phone)* Hello? Who is this?

JASON. *(doubtfully)* This is...I am Jason...s-son of...

HERA. Who?

(She finally looks down and is startled by the sight of him.)

Oh! My goodness! You nearly scared the immortal life outa me.

(eyeing him closely)

No, it can't be! Hang on a sec.

(She presses a button and speaks again into her phone.)

Athena? Well, you'll *never* believe it...No, it was an altar summons...Yeah, a real mortal. And get this, he says he's Jason, can you believe it?...I *know*...I *know*!...Well, I'll find out. Hang on.

(to JASON, who looks very confused)

So, you say you're Jason, huh?

JASON. O most sacred one, you speak so strangely...I know not how to –

HERA. C'mon c'mon, cut to the chase. Are you really Jason?
My Jason?

(leadingly)

Son of...?

JASON. Son of Aeson. My father was slain by my uncle Pelias, who usurped the throne that should now be mine. I...I come to thee, holy one, seeking thy counsel.

HERA. So it's really you!

(into the phone)

It's him. I'll call you back. *Ciao.*

(She disconnects the call.)

JASON. When shall you "call me back," most holy one?

HERA. I wasn't talking to you.

(JASON looks behind him to see who she was talking to.)

HERA *snaps her fingers.*)

Hey, hey, over here. Don't go crazy on me, Jason. Now, you want revenge on Pelias, right?

JASON. I...I guess so.

HERA. Sure you do! Your uncle's a creep! He stole your kingdom! He murdered your parents – and he did it in *my* temple. Your mother claimed sanctuary, but he came right in, bold as brass, and put her to the sword. That's why I took you. I had to intervene. I saved you so you could go kick your uncle's sorry keister outa that throne. Got it?

JASON. But, holy one, could not you, with one thunderbolt, strike him down yourself?

HERA. Thunderbolt? You mortals – always with the thunderbolts. Well, forget it. That stuff's dangerous and expensive. We gods try not to get too mixed up in human affairs, y' know. It's just not worth the aggravation. But this is different. Now are you gonna take care of that rotten Pelias or not?

JASON. If it is thy will, holy one.

HERA. (*impatiently*) It is!

JASON. Then I shall do it.

HERA. Good! Jeez, it's like pulling teeth.

JASON. But how?

HERA. How? I don't know how. Go to Iolcus. Go up to your uncle. Demand what's rightfully yours.

JASON. Will he just give it to me?

HERA. Sure! Maybe. Okay, probably not.

(*Her cell phone rings. SFX: piano plays a standard ring-tone.*)

He'll probably challenge you to a duel or something.

(*She looks at the display.*)

Oh, it's Zeus, what does *he* want.

(*to JASON*)

Look, I gotta take this. Go to Pelias. Accept his challenge. You're young and strong – I'm sure you can handle anything he throws at you. Call me when you get there. I have confidence in you, Jason. Don't let me down.

(*She presses a button and speaks into the phone with false cheeriness as she exits.*)

Zeus, darling! I'm so glad you called!...What? Really? Oh, how exciting!

(*Lights dim on JASON as he descends the front steps of the platform. Spotlight comes up on the POET.*)

POET. Armed with the counsel of the goddess Hera, Jason returned down the mountain – his eyes filled with wonder, his heart filled with doubts, his brain filled with questions, his lungs filled with air. You name it, Jason was full of it.

(Lights up on JASON and CHIRON as the POET exits.)

JASON. So, basically, I'm supposed to go to King Pelias and demand that he give up his kingdom.

CHIRON. Really? That's all she said?

JASON. Well, she said I'll probably have to go through some kind of challenge. A duel maybe, but I'm hoping it's more like a written test or something. And she said some other stuff, too, but a lot of it was pretty weird and didn't make sense.

CHIRON. As I said, the ways of the gods are unknowable.

JASON. So, I guess that's all there is to it. I might as well give it a shot. There's nothing for me here but shepherding. And, you know: been there, done that. I figure, what've I got to lose?

CHIRON. Nothing but your life.

JASON. Right.

(thinking for a moment)

'Course, being a shepherd's not that bad.

CHIRON. But it is your destiny to be king, and a shepherd of your people.

JASON. Destiny. Right.

(more thinking)

If I go to Iolcus, how will the people know me?

CHIRON. I will come with you and swear on my old bones that you are the son of Aeson. There are those who will remember me, the trusty advisor to old King Cretheus.

JASON. *(unconvinced)* Okay. But look at us, Chiron. No matter who I really am, I *look* like a humble shepherd. And you're a talking hor –

CHIRON. *(interrupting)* Centaur. I'm a centaur.

JASON. I mean, they won't even let us in the gate!

CHIRON. You may be right. But "clothes make the man," they say. Let us sell our flock and buy you some rich attire – a gorgeous cape, and sandals made of solid gold – that you may look a king from head to toe.

JASON. *(with a groan)* I hate shopping.

CHIRON. Now Jason –

JASON *(glumly)* Okay, okay, I know you're right. I'll do as you say.

(with distaste)

Shopping.

(CHIRON chuckles good-naturedly and pats JASON on the back as they begin their exit.)

CHIRON. The goddess said you would face challenges, my boy.

JASON. At least I know they won't get any worse than this.

(JASON and CHIRON exit. POET. enters in a spotlight. MUSIC underscore as he speaks, indicating the hustle and bustle of the city a la "An American in Paris." PELIAS, ALCESTIS, ASTEROPIA, GUARDS, and CITIZENS enter and take their places in a freeze.)

POET. Thus did Jason courageously face the first of many challenges: shopping with Chiron. They journeyed to the big outlet agora in Athens, where Jason found a great deal on a fine new cape for himself, and solid gold sandals, too, while Chiron was off getting reshoed and having his tail trimmed. Then at last, dressed in his new finery, Jason and his old companion made their way to the grand city of Iolcus, where Jason's destiny – and his doom – awaited his long foretold arrival.

(On the king platform, PELIAS sits on his throne with his DAUGHTERS on either side. CITIZENS are frozen in poses of conversation. A 3RD GUARD stands at attention, facing front, as if guarding the door to the royal court. This area is dimly lit at this point. Lights are up

on stage area where 1ST & 2ND GUARDS are about to meet.)

(After fanfare, MUSIC underscores with a martial tune. 1ST & 2ND GUARDS enter from opposite sides of the stage bearing long spears and march toward one another. When they nearly meet, leaving a few feet between them, they stop, stamp their spears on the floor, and speak in unison. MUSIC concludes when they stamp their spears.)

GUARDS. *(in unison)* The Gates of the Palace of His Royal Majesty King Peleas of Iolchus!

(Still facing each other, they slowly lower the points of their spears forward to 45 degrees, creating an archway between them: the entry gate. [SFX: sound of chains when “gates” are lowered or raised.] 1ST & 2ND CITIZENS enter and approach the gate. 2ND CITIZEN pantomimes timidly knocking three times on the door [SFX: wood block]. The GUARDS do not react.)

1ST CITIZEN. *(to 2ND CITIZEN)* No, no, these gates are really thick. You have to knock real loud.

(1ST CITIZEN removes a sandal and appears to rap soundly three times on the imaginary gate [SFX: wood block, louder]. The GUARDS slowly raise their spears [SFX: chains rattling] till they’re pointing straight up at their sides to represent the opening of the gate. The CITIZENS take a step forward to speak to the guards. 1ST CITIZEN puts his sandal on.)

1ST CITIZEN. *(to 2ND CITIZEN as the gate opens)* I’ll do the talking.

1ST GUARD. Ye who dare to knock upon the gates of Iolcus: state your purpose!

1ST CITIZEN. We seek an audience with King Pelias!

1ST GUARD. *(fiercely)* No one sees the king! Ever!

2ND GUARD. *(even more fiercely)* It is forbidden!

(1ST CITIZEN casually holds out a golden amulet on a chain.)

1ST CITIZEN. Can you, uh, make an exception in this case?

(1ST GUARD takes the amulet and examines it.)

1ST GUARD. *(casually)* Okay. King's down the hall, second door on the right.

1ST CITIZEN. Thank you, Captain.

(1ST GUARD pockets the amulet.)

2ND GUARD. *(fiercely, with a stamp of his spear)* On your way!

(As they speak the following lines, the CITIZENS take a few steps DS then turn to walk "down the hall" to the king's court while the gates (the GUARDS' spears) close behind them [SFX]. The CITIZENS pantomime speaking to 3RD GUARD, who lets them into the court where they melt into the dimly-lit tableau. During these same lines, JASON and CHIRON approach the gates from US. JASON wears a new tunic and shiny golden sandals.)

2ND CITIZEN. Why'd you give him your gold chain?

1ST CITIZEN. Gold for the Captain of the Guard is the only way to see the king.

2ND CITIZEN. Ah. "When in Greece, the palm must be greased"?

1ST CITIZEN. You got it.

(The CITIZENS pass by 3RD GUARD just as JASON and CHIRON reach the gates. JASON knocks [SFX: wood-block]. There is no response from the GUARDS.)

CHIRON. Those before us knocked upon the gate with a sandal. Perhaps it is their custom, a sign of deference.

(JASON shrugs and removes one of his sandals.)

JASON. A solid gold sandal oughta do the trick.

(He raps three times on the gate with his sandal [SFX]. As before, the gates slowly open [SFX]. JASON is still holding his sandal in his hand when the 1ST GUARD speaks.)

1ST GUARD. Ye who dare to knock upon the gates of Iolcus: state your purpose!

JASON. I demand to see the king.

1ST GUARD. No one sees the king! Ever!

2ND GUARD. It is forbidden!

JASON. (*gesturing idly with the golden sandal*) Look, pal, we came a long way to see the king, and –

(*1ST GUARD gazes at the solid-gold sandal and snatches it.*)

1ST GUARD. Jumpin' Jupiter, will ya look at that!

(*to JASON, without looking*)

King's down the hall, second door on your right.

(*still admiring the sandal*)

Wow.

JASON. Um...thanks. Say, can I have my sandal –

2ND GUARD. (*fiercely, with a stamp of his spear*) On your way!

(*Anxious to get past the GUARDS, CHIRON urges JASON to move along. As they speak, they follow the same path as the CITIZENS, ending up by the 3RD GUARD. Meanwhile, 1ST & 2ND GUARDS exit military-style as lighting shifts to 3RD GUARD stage area.*)

CHIRON. Come along, my son.

JASON. Wait a minute, what about my sandal? It cost a fortune!

CHIRON. It must be their custom.

JASON. But I can't go limping up to the king like this, with only one shoe. I'll look like an idiot.

CHIRON. Perhaps Pelias wants to keep his visitors off balance. That would be like him, seeking advantage. It's a power play.

JASON. It's whack is what it is.

CHIRON. Just be sure of yourself. Even with one shoe, you are more sure-footed here than he. Remember, this is your kingdom.

(*JASON and CHIRON step up before the 3RD GUARD.*)

3RD GUARD. Halt! Have you an audience with the king?

JASON. We do.

3RD GUARD. Then you may enter.

(JASON passes the GUARD, who then abruptly drops his spear in front of CHIRON.)

Hold it. You can't take your horse in there.

CHIRON. I am not a horse. I am a centaur, one of –

3RD GUARD. You can tie him up over there.

CHIRON. I shall not be tied up like –

JASON. *(to GUARD)* Look, could you take care of it for me? I really need to see the king.

CHIRON. I'm not a –

3RD GUARD. Well, I shouldn't really leave my post...

JASON. C'mon, just this once. The king's expecting me.

CHIRON. *(fed up with being ignored by them both)* Hey!

3RD GUARD. *(to CHIRON)* I'll get you some hay in a minute, just hold your horses.

CHIRON *(offended)* I'm neither a horse nor have I horses –

JASON. *(to GUARD)* It'll just take you a minute to tie him up.

3RD GUARD. Oh, very well. But don't tell anybody I did this for you.

CHIRON. Look, I'm not gonna –

JASON. Thanks. I appreciate it.

3RD GUARD. Sure thing. He'll be tied up over yonder.

CHIRON. Jason –!

JASON. *(to CHIRON)* I'll be right back.

(JASON moves past the 3RD GUARD into the court area, which is still dimly-lit. CHIRON, at a loss for words, watches him go.)

3RD GUARD. *(to CHIRON)* So, fresh hay? Oats?

CHIRON. *(resignedly)* Sure.

(As CHIRON and 3RD GUARD exit, lights come up on the court of KING PELIAS, which suddenly comes to life with CITIZENS talking quietly among themselves ad lib. JASON looks around the court, then up at the king platform where he sees PELIAS chatting casually with his DAUGHTERS.)

JASON. *(clears his throat)* I have come to see the king!

(Nothing changes. No one notices him. Looking around uncomfortably, he musters his courage and tries again, louder.)

I demand to see the king!

(This silences the court. Everyone stares at him. PELIAS rises angrily from his throne.)

PELIAS. I am the king, young rascal! And who are you to demand –

(He stops short, stricken by what he sees: a man with only one sandal.)

Why...why are you wearing only one shoe?!

JASON. *(confidently)* Oh, I think you know.

(PELIAS gasps and stumbles back to his throne. While JASON continues with his lines, PELIAS confers in urgent whispers with his daughters, who share his alarm. JASON. looks around at the other CITIZENS in the court.)

I mean, everybody else has only one...

(to the CITIZENS)

Hey, how come you all have both your shoes?

(A few CITIZENS respond ad lib., e.g., "What're you talking about?" "Of course we're wearing shoes," "Are you nuts?" etc. All are silenced by PELIAS' next outburst.)

PELIAS. *(to JASON)* Very well!

(aside, to his DAUGHTERS)

It's only one of the prophecies, and not the worst one.

(to JASON)

Tell us your name, young stranger.

JASON. I am no stranger, uncle, or should be none. I am Jason, son of Aeson your brother.

(PELIAS gasps again, stricken as before. He turns back to his DAUGHTERS again.)

PELIAS. Man! What was my horoscope today?

(His DAUGHTERS have no idea. PELIAS struggles to regain his composure.)

So. Jason, son of Aeson, here at last. I suppose you want my kingdom.

JASON. Thanks, uncle! Gee, that was easy –

PELIAS. Not so fast, not so fast! Are you even suited to rule a kingdom, callow youth? Let me test you. If it were prophesied that a man with only one sandal would someday come and demand your kingdom, what would you do when such a fellow showed up at last?

JASON. Hmmm. I guess...I would try to get rid of him. Maybe discredit him?

PELIAS. *(impatiently)* Yes, yes, but how?

JASON. Um...in exchange for the kingdom, I'd, uh...

(suddenly inspired)

I would dare him to do something that I secretly knew could not be done. Out of pride he would have to accept the challenge, not realizing that it could only lead to his failure – or even his death.

(PELIAS mulls this over a moment, as do the CITIZENS, mumbling quietly among themselves.)

PELIAS. That's not bad. All right. Jason, I will hand over my kingdom to you if you will but restore to the people of Iolcus our greatest treasure: the Golden Fleece.

(The CITIZENS gasp, thrilled by the mere mention of that legendary, long-lost prize. They chatter ad lib., e.g., "The Golden Fleece!" "Is such a thing even possible?" "That would be fantastic," "He should be King if he could do that," etc. JASON thinks about it for a moment as he takes in the obvious enthusiasm and interest exhibited by the crowd.)

JASON. *(earnestly)* And so I shall!

(CITIZENS burst into wild cheers and applause. As the lights fade, they quickly exit as if going off to celebrate. KING PELIAS, confident in his manner once again, exits with his DAUGHTERS arm-in-arm.)

POET. And thus was born the greatest quest from such a sordid thing: the ill-willed challenge of a desperate king. At once, Jason made sacrifice upon the altar of Hera and called the goddess to appear.

(Lights up on the god platform where HERA, in workout clothes, jogs in place. She has an iPod, is wearing earbuds, and holds a bottle of water. JASON kneels on the platform steps and calls to her.)

JASON. Queen of the gods! It is I, Jason!

(HERA continues to jog in place, breathing heavily.)

Hera, most holy! I have made sacrifice to thee! I seek thy counsel!

(HERA stops jogging and bends over, puffing, resting her hands on her knees. At last she sees him.)

HERA. Jason!

JASON. Yes, my sacred queen! I call upon you as you bid –

HERA. What? Oh, sorry.

(She removes her earbuds, still breathless from her workout.)

Whew! That's better. So what's up?

JASON. It was all as you said it would be, O wise one. King Pelias challenged me with a quest.

HERA. Figures. A duel, a quest – I knew it'd be something like that. So what do you have to do?

(She takes a drink from her water bottle.)

JASON. I merely have to retrieve something called the Golden Fleece.

HERA. *(She does a spit take.)* The Golden Fleece?! Oh, jeez! That Pelias is more clever than I thought.

JASON. *(proudly)* Actually, it was *my* idea.

HERA. What?! You –!

(struggling to control her temper)

Do you see, Jason? Do you see why we don't like to get involved with you mortals? Do you see how aggravating it is?

JASON. What is this Golden Fleece, holy one?

HERA. Oh, it's a long story. It's a whole 'nother myth. See, there was this golden ram that flew away one day –

JASON. A ram that could fly?

HERA. Yeah, y'know, you'd think *that* was as interesting as its fleece being pure gold. But, no, people only cared about the money angle. It tells you something about mortals. Anyway, the ram ended up getting sacrificed on an altar, and now its golden fleece is hanging on the branch of a tree...

JASON. That seems simple.

HERA. ...at the end of the world...

JASON. That sounds far.

HERA. ...in a land of magic and monsters...

JASON. That's not good.

HERA. ...where it's guarded by a giant man-eating serpent.

JASON. So you're saying that this quest idea isn't so hot.

HERA. It's a disaster! You're in a real jam, Jason. You're gonna need a lotta help – and more than I can give.

JASON. What should I do?

HERA. (*after a moment's thought*) Okay. I suggest you hold a contest of strength and skill that will attract all the greatest champions of Greece. The winners will be your crew. Meanwhile, look up a guy named Argus and get him to build you a ship. He's expensive, I know, but you get what you pay for, and you'll need something really top-notch. Next...are you writing all this down?

JASON. Should I be?

HERA. Didn't that talking horse teach you how to take notes?

(*sighs in exasperation*)

I knew home-schooling was a bad idea. Anyway, once you get your ship and your crew, you must find a small uncharted island off the Bebrycian coast where you'll meet old King Phineas. He knows where the Fleece is and he knows how to get there. He practically knows

everything – for all the good it’s done him. Look, I gotta get going or I’ll be late for the nectar-tasting at Delphi.

(to **JASON**)

Get a move on. You’ve got lots to do.

(She starts to go, then stops and turns back.)

Oh, and by the way, I can only help you one more time, so be careful about calling on me again.

JASON. But why, goddess?

HERA. Pantheon policy. I don’t make the rules. Three times max, that’s it. So think good and hard before you call on me again.

(She puts her earbuds back in.)

Good luck, Jason. You’ll need it.

(She exits, jogging. JASON exits opposite, bewildered. Spotlight on the POET.)

POET. Jason followed Hera’s advice and arranged for Olympic games to be held in Iolcus. As the goddess foresaw, the greatest champions of Greece vied for the honor of a place aboard the Argo and a chance to take part in the most daring quest ever conceived. As befits such a noble endeavor, the games were conducted with the utmost decorum and solemnity.

(Lights up on the ARGONAUTS and many adoring CITIZENS who suddenly begin screaming, jumping up and down, and waving hand-painted signs naming their favorites, e.g., “I ♥ Hercules!” and “Orpheus 4-Ever!” etc. They are gathered beneath a sparkling banner that reads, “So you think you can be an ARGONAUT!”)

(The HOSTESS stands center stage with three JUDGES off to the side behind her. The male JUDGE wears a fancy tunic and the female JUDGES wear flashy gowns. The HOSTESS in particular is dressed to the nines. The 2ND JUDGE speaks with a soft German accent a la Heidi Klum of the TV show “Project Runway.”)

(HERCULES steps forward, having just completed his part in a competition. HYLÄ follows him in the manner of a personal trainer – handing him a towel, speaking words of encouragement ad lib., giving his shoulders a rubdown, etc. The JUDGES are busy conferring with each other. The CITIZENS' cheers die down in time to hear the HOSTESS speak.)

HOSTESS. Wow! Another terrific performance by the one and only Hercules! But what about Hyla? No judge likes to get smacked by a discus like that. Will she make the cut? Let's listen in to hear what our panel of judges have to say.

(The JUDGES wrap up their conference and step towards HERCULES and HYLÄ. The HOSTESS exits. The JUDGES' praise for HERCULES is effusive, of course, but he just seems bored by it, having heard it all before.)

1ST JUDGE. *(to HERCULES)* What can I say? You are fabulous. I'll admit I had high expectations of you, but you've only managed to blow 'em away. You make it work, baby.

(CITIZENS cheer at the JUDGE's remarks.)

2ND JUDGE. *(with a German accent)* Zis is true, Hercules. "You da man," as zey say. You are ze top dog in zis competition, no question.

(to the crowd)

Isn't zat right?

(They cheer again.)

3RD JUDGE. Yeah, Herk my man, I got only one thing to say about your performance...

(hamming it up to the crowd)

WOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

(They eat it up, cheering wildly.)

2ND JUDGE. Ja, but Hyla...explain to me vat you vere sinking in ze discus competition. Zat vas lame.

3RD JUDGE. Yeah, like, nobody does that funky wind-up move anymore.

1ST JUDGE. To me – I have to say – it was just so “L-Y.”

(dismissively)

L-Y, L-Y, L-Y.

HERCULES. *(looking to HYL A for an explanation)* “L-Y”?

HYLA. “Last year.”

HERCULES. *(to 1ST JUDGE, frowning)* I don’t care. I want Hyla to come along on the voyage.

1ST JUDGE. I’m sorry but –

HERCULES. She’s my armor-bearer...

1ST JUDGE. Well, no one else gets an armor-bearer –

HERCULES. ...my personal trainer...

1ST JUDGE. I see, but –

HERCULES. ...my agent...

1ST JUDGE. Fine, but –

HERCULES. ...and masseuse.

1ST JUDGE. Masseuse? Okay, but –

2ND JUDGE. *(to HERCULES)* Look, *mein freund*, I haff to tell you: in zis contest, you’re either in or you’re out.

(to HYL A)

And you, Hyla, are ze veakest competitor, zo...*auf wiedersehen*.

3RD JUDGE. Yeah, sorry, but that’s the way the pita crumbles.

HERCULES. Tell you what, how ’bout we perform one more contest. Then decide.

1ST JUDGE. *(surprised)* Very well, but we’ve pretty much done it all: discus-hurling, javelin-throwing, pole-vaulting, weightlifting –

3RD JUDGE. Yeah, like, what’s left?

HERCULES. Judge-tossing.

1ST JUDGE. *(getting the message)* Oh.

(The JUDGES look at each other apprehensively.)

Maybe we don’t need to see anymore after all.

2ND JUDGE. *Ja, maybe zo.*

3RD JUDGE. *(making thumbs-up gesture)* Hyla gets a big thumbs up from me, man.

2ND JUDGE. *(same gesture)* Zis from me too.

1ST JUDGE. *(hurriedly)* So, we're all agreed? Terrific!

(The JUDGES frantically congratulate HERCULES and HYL A ad lib., e.g., "Good job, Hyla," "Congratulations," "Keep up the good work," etc., while shaking their hands and patting them on the back – all very hurriedly, so they can get away from HERCULES before he does something they'll regret. As they scurry away, HERCULES gives HYL A a knowing smile as they turn and stroll toward the crowd.)

POET. And so the crew of the Argo was chosen – the greatest champions of all Greece.

HERCULES. *(over his shoulder, to the POET)* And Hyla!

POET. *(resignedly)* And Hyla.

(A spotlight hits the HOSTESS as she steps out on a platform. [MUSIC: Alan Parsons' "Sirius" (Chicago Bulls theme music) or similar; disco ball lighting, etc.] As the HOSTESS calls out each name, an ARGONAUT trots up, enthusiastically accepting the accolades of the cheering CITIZENS, and joins the line-up with his/her comrades, in the manner that athletes are introduced before a game. The JUDGES return carrying the ARGONAUTS' oars and take positions at the start of the line-up. The 1ST JUDGE hands an oar to each ARGONAUT as he/she runs up to join the line. JASON re-enters at this time to watch the festivities from the sidelines.)

HOSTESS. And now, it is my great pleasure to introduce to you the winners of our contest. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you...the Argonauts!

(The CITIZENS erupt in cheers.)

First, from Arcadia...the daughter of Iasus...our very own Mistress of the Hunt...Atalanta!

(CITIZENS cheer. ATALANTA runs up to start the line-up.)

The youngest son of Ampyx...slayer of the Caledonian boar – though there's nothing boring about him! – everybody's favorite soothsayer: Mopsus!

(CITIZENS cheer. MOPSUS runs up, slaps hands with ATALANTA and takes his place beside her.)

All the way from Corinth...a young Amazon with a whole lotta heart...one of our most popular competitors...Nephele!

(CITIZENS cheer. NEPHELE runs up, slaps hands with her teammates and gets in line.)

The sons of Leda and Zeus himself...those wild and crazy brothers...you know who I'm talkin' about... Castor and Pollux!

(CITIZENS cheer. CASTOR and POLLUX run up, slap hands with teammates, then do a chest-bounce off each other before joining the line.)

HOSTESS. *(cont.)* Born of the river god Asopus...now the Royal Princess of Thebes...give it up for Antiope!

(CITIZENS cheer. ANTIOPE runs up, slaps hands, etc.)

You may know him as the son of Calliope and Apollo... You may know him for his hits like "Athens On My Mind" and "Oedipus Rocks"...But, however you know him, you know he'll keep the beat on board the Argo... the master musician of the classical world...Orpheus!

(CITIZENS cheer. ORPHEUS runs up, slaps hands, etc.)

When he's not at home horsing around with his young son Odysseus, he's out breaking records as one of Thes-saly's top athletes...Let's hear it for the fastest Greek on two feet: Laertes!

(CITIZENS cheer. LAERTES runs up, slaps hands, etc.)

Descended from Ares, the god of war...the one and only Queen of the Amazons...they don't come much tougher than this, folks...Hippolyta!

(CITIZENS cheer. HIPPOLYTA runs up, slaps hands, etc.)

HOSTESS. (*cont.*) Born on Mt. Olympus...

(Cheers erupt at those words and only build from there. This is like the introduction of Michael Jordan before a Bulls game back in the day.)

...favored by the gods...honored among mortals...and just an all-around great guy...ladies and gentleman, the world's strongest man...Hercules!

(Wild cheers from CITIZENS. HERCULES runs up, slaps hands, joins the line.)

And, last but not – well, lastly...HYLA!

(Spirited cheers from the ARGONAUTS, though the citizens applaud with less enthusiasm as HYLEA briskly walks up, slaps hands & joins the line.)

People of Greece, let's give a hand to the greatest crew of heroes ever assembled...

(cheers from all)

...to sail the greatest ship ever built...

(louder cheers)

...taking on the greatest challenge ever imagined...

(even wilder cheers)

...all under the command of...Jason!

(On the word "Jason" there is sudden silence and all lights go out but for a stark spotlight on our hero and a warmer one still on the POET. [Recorded SFX: chirping crickets, fading out during POET's lines.] JASON has a determined look on his face.)

POET. (*dramatically*) Jason. The orphan. Jason. The shepherd. Was he a champion like the others?

(JASON looks proud, pumping up his chest a bit.)

No.

(JASON deflates a bit.)

Was he a great warrior like the others?

(**JASON** begins to look a little unsure of himself.)

No. He was a young man, little more than a boy, facing an almost hopeless challenge. But did that stop him?

JASON. (*nervously*) Um...

(*The POET glances at JASON. He had not expected to hear responses from JASON during this speech and it's throwing him off a bit.*)

POET. What could he hope for but utter defeat, perhaps a gruesome death? Or worse –

JASON. Worse?

(*The POET glances at JASON again and subtly gestures for him to be quiet. The POET is trying to create a dramatic build with this speech and JASON is ruining the effect.*)

POET. ...eternal, agonizing torture at the hands of vengeful gods, who we all know despise the pride of mortal men. Yet did this shake his courage even for a moment?

JASON. Well, now that you mention it I, uh...

(*While JASON mumbles, the POET looks directly up at the light booth.*)

POET. (*in a business-like tone*) Harvey?¹

(*The POET gestures to the booth to lose the light on JASON, and JASON's spotlight immediately goes out. The POET signals his thanks to the booth and continues his speech in his previous, dramatic manner. JASON, in the dark, shuffles into position for the Argo rowing scene.*)

No! In the face of all this, Jason's heart remained strong and true. For he knew he was the only Argonaut – the one above all – whom Fate had chosen. There was no turning back now.

(*During POET's lines, the CITIZENS exit silently while the ARGONAUTS take their places to create the Argo. MUSIC sets the mood for the coming adventure. The*

¹ This should be the real name of whomever is operating the lightboard.

ARGONAUTS create the ship by sitting in two rows, facing the stern of the imaginary craft, and simultaneously going through a repetitive rowing motion with their oars while vocalizing a “hrush” sound of the water with each pull. **JASON** stands heroically at the bow. **ORPHEUS** stands at the stern.)

And so it began: the Quest for the Golden Fleece. Jason – now the uneasy captain of a crew of champions – led them aboard the Argo and set sail for danger, adventure, and eternal glory! But soon the wind proved fickle, and so did our heroes work the oars for many a long hour...under the blazing Aegean sun.

(*MUSIC: Under the **POET**’s final sentence, a quiet drum roll grows louder and slower until it becomes the steady beat of a bass drum or tympani by the time the **POET** says his last words. The drum sets the pace for the strokes of the **ARGONAUTS**’ oars.*)

(*Lights up on the Argo. **ORPHEUS** wears a small drum on a leather strap which he beats in time with the SFX drumbeat. The **ARGONAUTS** make their “hrush” sound with each pull of their oars. A little unsteady in his new role, **JASON** calls out to his crew, trying to sound forceful.*)

JASON. Keep at it, Argonauts! Put your butts into it!

NEPHELE. (to **JASON**, helpfully) Backs.

JASON. (quickly correcting himself) Backs into it!

(to **NEPHELE**)

That’s what I meant.

NEPHELE. I know, sir.

(***JASON** thinks for a moment, then takes another stab at issuing an order.*)

JASON. Orpheus, give the crew a song to lend heart to their labor!

(***ORPHEUS** hums a note to each downbeat for two measures as he makes up a song in his head. Then he begins to sing a steady, mournful rowing song.*)

ORPHEUS. (*sings*) Row...

Row...

Row, men

Row, men

Row –

CASTOR. Hey, Orpheus, we're Greeks –

POLLUX. – not Romans!

(**ORPHEUS** *pauses, a little irritated, and rethinks his lyrics while still keeping the beat on his drum. The only sound is that steady beat and the “hrush” of the oars.*)

ORPHEUS. (*sings*) Row, brothers

Row, brothers –

ATALANTA. What do you mean “brothers”?! Half of us are women!

(*The other female ARGONAUTS chime in ad lib., e.g., “Yeah!” “What about us?” “It’s so typical,” “Sexist pig!” etc. ORPHEUS pauses as before, keeping the beat, but showing even more irritation at these interruptions of his song. After a few moments’ thought he tries again, though he clearly doesn’t like his new compromise.*)

ORPHEUS. (*sings*) Row...people

Row, people,

Make the Argo go, people.

Jason on his quest must go –

So let his people row!

(*The song’s last line is sung to the tune of the “Let my people go” refrain in the old spiritual “Go Down, Moses.” The ARGONAUTS groan at this, ad lib., e.g., “Oh, come on!” “That’s terrible!” You’ve gotta be kidding,” “That song stinks!” etc. The drum beat stops. Near the end of the ad lib complaints, NEPHELE, who is seated in the bow near JASON, addresses him.*)

NEPHELE. (*to JASON*) Think it’ll be a long voyage, Cap’n?

ORPHEUS. (*snippily, to the crew*) Look y’all, this is my only rowing song so get used to it! Now just shut up and row, people...

(Shouting more than singing this time – and still with that snippy attitude – ORPHEUS and the drumbeat begin again.)

Row, people!

Row, people!

(He stops singing after two lines and stares angrily at his rowers while the drumbeat continues.)

JASON. *(to NEPHELE, with a certain dread)* Oh I think it's definitely gonna be a long voyage.

(Spotlight on the POET as JASON and the ARGONAUTS exit in a blackout. [MUSIC: Drumbeat fades out with drumroll, and the music carries on in a foreboding style.] A projection screen is put in place as ATALANTA and NEPHELE bring in an LCD projector on a cart.)

POET. And a long voyage it was. They rowed the Argo past Meliboea, crashing through its stormy surf, and skirted the Isle of Homole, mastering the rough outfall there from the river Amyrus. Then, sailed they all night by a blessed wind past the headland of Canastra, till by morning they beheld the distant heights of Ossa and Mount Olympus. But their fair wind deserted them by sundown, as the Thracian slopes of Athos rose before. And so they bent their backs again, and rowed the Argo ashore for an evening's rest – or what they *thought* would be an evening's rest – on the Sintian Isle...of Lemnos.²

(Lights up on ATALANTA and NEPHELE standing next to the LCD projector which faces the projection screen. [RECORDED MUSIC: upbeat bouzouki music like you'd hear in a Greek restaurant.] Atalanta holds a clicker for changing slide images. MUSIC fades out shortly after scene begins.)

ATALANTA. *(perkily)* Hi, everybody! Glad to see so many of you here. My name's Atalanta.

² This monologue covers the setting up of the projection screen for the following scene and can be easily shortened if less time is needed.

NEPHELE. *(sweetly)* And I'm Nephele.

ATALANTA. And we've been asked to give you the 411 on our little trip to Lemnos – which was totally cool.

NEPHELE. Oh I so loved it there.

(ATALANTA points her remote at the projector, clicks it, and a colorful photo appears on the screen showing the beachfront of a Greek island.)

ATALANTA. Now we're not saying it's easy to get to, but it's, like, totally worth checking out if you're in the 'hood. Very friendly, not too touristy.

(She glances at the slide.)

This is the beach front.

(She clicks a couple times during the next portion, showing other slides of the beach with people sitting in beach chairs, laying out on blankets, playing in the surf, etc.)

NEPHELE. Great beaches, by the way.

ATALANTA. Yeah, gorgeous white sand, gentle surf, and none of these vendors coming up all the time trying to sell you stuff, which I hate.

NEPHELE. F'real. You can just lay there chillaxin' and totally vegge out.

(ATLANTA continues to click through a few more images illustrating their travelogue, including a couple smiling photos of her with HIPPOLYTA, ANTIOPE, and NEPHELE, sometimes outdoors with sunglasses and shopping bags, or gathered at a table in a taverna.)

ATALANTA. And the shopping is, like, to die for.

NEPHELE. It's all that!

ATALANTA. Yeah, like, the cutest little boutiques – there was this one street with nothing but sandal shops! I was like in heaven.

(A photo appears showing ATALANTA and NEPHELE proudly holding some of their brand new sandals.)

And there were these weird, retro little coffeehouses with big patios overlooking the bay. Too gorgeous!

(She clicks to an image of ATALANTA and NEPHELE at a Greek cafe.)

Here's me and Nephele at Pindar's – great place, the best baklava.

NEPHELE. And there are really good deals on stuff, too. We all got our hair braided, and you could get your nails done for like five bucks. Hippolyta and Antiope got their tongues pierced – which, like, totally grosses me out, but whatever.

ATALANTA. Yeah, and Nephele here got this wicked tattoo, right on her –

NEPHELE. *(acting scandalized)* Shut up, girl!

(Both giggle. ATALANTA clicks through two more typical tourist images.)

ATALANTA. Don't I have a picture of that? I thought I did. Maybe they wouldn't print it. It was pretty racy. Anyway, us girls spent a lot of time together and really bonded, y'know? Except for Hyla.

NEPHELE. Nah, we didn't hang with her. She was always off with Hercules.

ATALANTA. Yeah, they're, like, joined at the hip.

NEPHELE. And we didn't see the other guys much either 'cause they all went off and got seduced by the freaky chicks on this island.

ATALANTA. Actually, the whole deal with that was really weird. Like, these women on Lemnos – it turned out that, before we got there, they had *murdered* all the men on the whole island.

NEPHELE. Yeah, like, *all* of 'em – even their own fathers and sons and stuff.

ATALANTA. I don't know what got 'em so bent. I mean, like, guys can be really gross, for sure. But kill 'em?

NEPHELE. Then, like, who pays for dinner?

ATALANTA. So anyway, afterwards these Lemnos babes are all like, "Oh, man, we're so sorry." And the young ones suddenly wanna have babies, and they're like, "Oops,

we killed all the guys. So, like, how are we gonna, you know, have babies?" Like, total airheads, right?

NEPHELE. I mean, c'mon ladies, you gotta think these things out a little bit.

ATALANTA. So, anyway, they put the moves on Jason and the guys, right? They go, "Quit this quest thing, man. Jason, you wanna be a king? You can be king right here. And all you guys? You can have as many wives as you want, I mean, like, take your pick."

NEPHELE. But finally, y' know, Hercules brought 'em around. He got all up in their grill, like, "Wassup with y'all? Are we goin' on this quest or not? Like, you know, the Golden Fleece?" And I think it kinda dawned on 'em that you really don't wanna hook up with some breezy who just capped her ol' man.

ATALANTA. Really. So, anyway, the guys finally came back –

(She clicks her remote and a picture appears of a dog wearing a party hat. ATALANTA and NEPHELE speak simultaneously.)

ATALANTA.

NEPHELE.

Wait a minute...

What's that, girl?

(ATALANTA clicks again to another picture from a dog's birthday party.)

ATALANTA. Oh. These are pictures from my Aunt Olympia's birthday party for her stupid dog. Can you believe it? They musta been on this roll.

NEPHELE. Some people really overdo it with their pets.

ATALANTA. *(to audience)* So I guess that's all I've got from Lemnos.

(RECORDED MUSIC: Bouzouki song begins again.)

Bottom line: Girls, if you go to Lemnos, be sure to check out Pindar's for the coffee and the great desserts, and don't miss that street with all the sandal shops!

NEPHELE. And guys? If *you* go to Lemnos, I'm sure you'll have a good time but...just watch your back, know what I'm sayin'?

*(They exit in a blackout as a spotlight comes up on the **POET**. Recorded **MUSIC** fades out. During the Poet's next lines, a park bench is placed on stage for the next scene.)*

POET. And so our heroes escaped the concubines of Lemnos and rededicated themselves to their quest. Jason was wary of the islands now, with their many dangerous enticements like affordable time-shares and duty-free shopping. But there was still one more they had to visit: a small, uncharted isle off the coast of Bebrycia, where Jason would find old King Phineas, he who held the key to finding the Golden Fleece.

*(**PHINEAS** enters with a bag lunch and sits on the bench.)*

Phineas was blessed with the gift of unerring prophecy, but his generous use of that gift brought the wrath of Zeus upon him. To torment the old prophet, Zeus plagued him with a pair of Harpies – winged vixens who stole most of the old man's food, and befouled the rest with their loathsome stench, keeping their victim ever on the edge of starvation.

*(When the **POET** mentions the harpies, **SWIFTWING** and **FLEETFOOT** enter from opposite sides of the stage and creep toward **PHINEAS**. They have big, bat-like wings, beehive hairdos, and are dressed in 1950's-style dresses and high heels. They are heavily made-up with red lipstick and very long polished nails, and both wear harlequin glasses attached to beaded chains around their necks. As they approach, **PHINEAS** looks in his bag lunch and pulls out a sandwich wrapped in wax paper, unaware of their approach.)*

PHINEAS. Let's see what we got here. Corned beef on rye? Mmm, that smells good. That's that spicy mustard I like so much. What else have we got here...

*(The **HARPIES** step around opposite sides of the bench and stand over **PHINEAS**. They speak with pinched, nasally voices and tend to parrot each other's phrases like Myna birds.)*

FLEETFOOT. Why, if it isn't Phineas.

SWIFTWING. Yes, if it isn't Phineas.

PHINEAS. Oy, not you two again!

FLEETFOOT. Is it lunch time already? What've we got today?

(FLEETFOOT grabs the lunch bag out of PHINEAS' hand and starts to look inside.)

PHINEAS. That's mine! Leave that alone!

(PHINEAS grabs the bag back while, on his other side, SWIFTWING picks at the sandwich in his hand. FLEETFOOT continues to try to slip her fingers into the lunch bag.)

SWIFTWING. I'm so hungry. Aren't you, Fleetfoot?

FLEETFOOT. I'm so hungry, Swiftwing, I could eat a centaur.

(PHINEAS realizes SWIFTWING is fingering his sandwich, so he pulls it away to his other side – putting it within FLEETFOOT's reach.)

SWIFTWING. She could eat a centaur! Isn't she funny?

(SWIFTWING grabs the lunch sack this time.)

PHINEAS. No, she's not funny. Give me that!

(As PHINEAS grabs the bag back, FLEETFOOT takes the sandwich out of his hand.)

FLEETFOOT. Mmm, I'll have some of this.

PHINEAS. Here, stop it! Don't touch that!

(FLEETFOOT turns her back to PHINEAS as she picks at the sandwich. While PHINEAS tries to stop her, SWIFTWING grabs the bag again and starts poking around inside it.)

SWIFTWING. Do you have any pickles today?

FLEETFOOT. Oo, ick! Nasty mustard! That's no good.

(FLEETFOOT throws the sandwich on the ground.)

PHINEAS. Now look what you've done! That was perfectly good corned beef!

SWIFTWING. (*looking in the lunch bag*) Oooo, lots of tasties!

(*to FLEETFOOT*)

And a pickle too!

FLEETFOOT. And a pickle too?

(**PHINEAS** *picks up the sandwich and sniffs it. It has been spoiled by the harpy's touch.*)

PHINEAS. Oy! Don't you ever wash your hands? That's disgusting!

SWIFTWING. Well, thanks for lunch, Phineas.

FLEETFOOT. Yes, thanks for lunch, Phineas.

BOTH HARPIES. (*in unison*) We'll be back for dinner!

(*They laugh wickedly and exit, chattering to each other. SWIFTWING still has the lunch bag. From the other side of the stage, JASON enters followed by CASTOR, POLLUX, ANTIOPE, and NEPHELE. As they approach the bench, they watch with curiosity as the harpies depart.*)

FLEETFOOT. Did you smell that mustard?

SWIFTWING. That was awful mustard.

FLEETFOOT. I wish he had better food.

SWIFTWING. Then *we'd* have better food!

(*They cackle at that as they exit into the wings.*)

PHINEAS. (*dejectedly*) Perfectly good corned beef.

(*He sighs heavily and wads up the sandwich in its wax paper. Then he looks up at JASON and the others, who are approaching slowly and respectfully.*)

Nu?³

JASON. (*with uncertainty*) What?

PHINEAS. What's on your mind, boytchik?⁴ You're staring.

JASON. Oh. Sorry. I am Jason, son of Aeson, captain of the Argo. My crew and I have sailed many leagues –

³ Well?

⁴ young man

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