Jason and the Argonauts
Summary

The Greek myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece is one of the oldest myths of a hero's quest. It is a classic story of betrayal and vengeance and like many Greek myths has a tragic ending. It begins when Jason's Uncle Pelias kills Jason's father, the Greek King of Iolkos, and takes his throne. Jason's mother brings him to Cheiron, a centaur (half man, half horse) who hides him away and raises him on the Mountain of Pelion.

When Jason turns 20, he journeys to see Pelias to
reclaim his throne. At a nearby river, Hera the Queen of the Gods approaches him disguised as an old woman. While carrying her across the river he loses a sandal and arrives at court wearing only one. Pelias is nervous when he sees Jason missing a sandal, for an oracle has prophesied that a man wearing only one sandal shall usurp his throne.

Jason demands the return of his rightful throne. Pelias replies that Jason should first accomplish a difficult task to prove his worth. The task is for
Jason to retrieve the Golden Fleece, kept beyond the edge of the known world in a land called Colchis (modern-day Georgia in Southwest Asia). The story of the fleece is an interesting tale in itself. Zeus, the King of the Gods, had given a golden ram to Jason's ancestor Phrixus. Phrixus later flew on the golden ram from Greece to Colchis, whose king was Aietes, the son of Helios the Sun God. Aietes sacrificed the ram and hung the fleece in a sacred grove guarded by a dragon, as an oracle had foretold that Aietes would lose
Determined to reclaim his throne, Jason agrees to retrieve the Golden Fleece. Jason assembles a team of great heroes for his crew and they sail aboard the Argo. The first stop of the Argonauts is the Greek Isle of Lemnos, populated only by women. Unknown to Jason and his crew, the women have murdered their husbands. The Argonauts fare much better though; in fact the women use the occasion as an opportunity to repopulate the island.
After many more adventures, the Argo passes Constantinople, heading for the Straits of Bosphorus. The Straits of Bosphorus are a narrow passageway of water between the Sea of Marmara, the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea. To the ancient Greeks, this was the edge of the known world. The Straits are extremely dangerous due to the currents created by the flow of water from the Black Sea. The ancient Greeks believed that clashing rocks guarded the straits and that the rocks would close together and smash any ship sailing through. Jason had
been told by a blind prophet he assisted how to fool the rocks. He was to send a bird ahead of him. The rocks would crash in on it and then reopen, at which point he could successfully sail through.

When Jason finally arrives in Colchis he asks King Aietes to return the golden fleece to him as it belonged to his ancestor. Reluctant, the king suggests yet another series of challenges to Jason. He must yoke fire-breathing bulls, plough and sow a field with dragons' teeth and then overcome the warriors who will rise from the furrows.
Aietes is confident the tasks are impossible but unbeknownst to the king, his daughter Medea has taken a liking to Jason. She offers to assist Jason if he will marry her. He agrees. Medea is a powerful sorceress and Jason is successful.

Jason and Medea return to Greece where Jason claims his father's throne, but their success is short-lived. Uncomfortable with Medea's magic, the locals drive Medea and Jason out of Iolkos. They go into exile in Corinth where the king offers Jason his daughter in marriage. He
agrees and so violates his vow to the gods to be true only to Medea. Furious, Medea kills the woman, kills Medea and Jason's children and then ascends to Mount Olympus where she eventually marries Achilles. Jason goes back to Iolkos where his boat the Argo is on display. One day, while he sits next to the boat weeping, the decaying beam of his ship the Argo falls off and hits him on the head, killing him outright.