

Bellerophon

Bellerophon, a prince from Corinth, came to the palace of Iobates, king of Lycia, with a sealed letter. "It's a letter of introduction from King Proetus," Bellerophon told Iobates.

The king welcomed the handsome young man and entertained him for many days before remembering to open the letter. When at last he did read it, he was astonished. It said, "Bellerophon is a brave youth. But I ask you to kill him, for he has greatly offended my wife."

Iobates wondered what he should do. To harm a guest in his palace would anger the gods. Yet King Proetus was his son-in-law, and, because of this, he was obliged to honor his request. After much thought, Iobates came up with a solution. He would appeal to Bellerophon's courage and propose a mission that would surely lead to the prince's death.

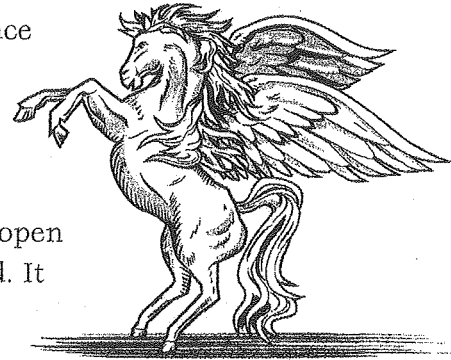
The next day Iobates summoned Bellerophon to his throne room. "I am very troubled," the king said. "My kingdom is being **devastated** by the Chimera, a fire-breathing monster with the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a serpent. If only I could find someone brave enough to rid Lycia of this creature!" Just as Iobates had expected, the young prince proudly offered to attempt this dangerous deed.

Before undertaking his mission, Bellerophon consulted Polyidus, a wise **soothsayer**. "You will succeed in slaying the Chimera by riding on the winged horse Pegasus," predicted the soothsayer. "Go now to the temple of the goddess Athena, for she will help you."

That night Bellerophon fell asleep in a corner of the temple. He dreamed that Athena brought him a golden bridle. "Slip it over Pegasus's head," she told him. "Only then will you be able to mount this wild, swift horse." When the prince awoke, he was amazed to find the bridle lying by his feet. He rushed out to the fields and found Pegasus drinking at a spring. Soon, Bellerophon was soaring through the sky on the back of the beautiful winged horse.

When he spotted the Chimera, Bellerophon directed Pegasus to swoop down and circle over her head. The beast roared, lashed her scaly serpent's tail, and spewed scorching flames into the air. But the horse and rider were just above her reach. Bellerophon shot arrow after arrow into the monster's body. With a final fiery roar, the Chimera fell over and died.

King Iobates was stunned when the young prince returned and announced that he had killed the Chimera. He sent Bellerophon off on other **perilous** missions. But, with the help of Pegasus, he always came back in triumph. At last, the king decided that this bold hero was surely favored by the gods and shouldn't be killed. Instead, he honored Bellerophon with a great feast and gave him his daughter in marriage.



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