

The Eye of the Cyclops



This extract is from a Greek myth, retold by the author Anthony Horowitz in his book 'The Eye of the Cyclops'.



The Cyclops was certainly a terrifying creature. It was about the height of a two-storey house with thick, curly hair, a matted (and usually filthy) beard and only one eye set square in the middle of its forehead. It was grotesquely ugly, extremely bad-tempered, inordinately violent and generally worth going a long way to avoid. All this, any good book of Greek myths will tell you. But what is less often mentioned is the fact that the Cyclops was also incredibly stupid. It was probably one of the most stupid monsters that ever lived.



There were a great many Cyclopes. At one time they had been employed as blacksmiths for Zeus but after a while they had forgotten not only how to do the work but what the work was that they were supposed to do, and had become shepherds instead. They were shepherds for almost two hundred years before it occurred to them to go and buy some sheep. Then they took their sheep and settled on an island in the middle of the Aegean Sea where they lived in caves, seldom if ever talking to one another. There were two reasons for this. The first was that the Cyclopes were poor conversationalists, often forgetting the beginning of a sentence when they were only half-way through. But also, if there was one thing a Cyclops couldn't stand, it was another Cyclops.



The most famous Cyclops was called Polyphemus. He was the son of Poseidon, the god of the sea, but preferred to stay very much on land, looking after a flock of sheep. Polyphemus had no friends but was on intimate terms with most of the sheep. He knew them all by name, milked them as gently as his huge fingers could manage and shed real tears whenever he had to slaughter one in order to make his particularly delicious lamb stew.



One day returning to his cave after a hard day's work in the hills, he was astonished to find that he had had visitors. They were still there in fact, sitting in front of his fire and feasting on one of his sheep. There were about a dozen of them and looking more closely he was delighted to see that they were human beings.



Polyphemus loved human beings in his own way ...which was cooked or raw. What he particularly liked about them was the way their bones crunched between his teeth but never got caught in his throat.



The giant's face lit up in a great smile. It was also a horrible smile for, having just one eye in the middle of his forehead, everything he did with his face was rather horrible.

