

# **The Medusa**

**by Walter Lazo,**

**Published: 2012**



„Hey, that’s not in the map,“ said Cynthia, pointing at an enormous rock mountain.

„What’s not on the map?“ asked Francine, coming up behind her.

Cynthia, a petite blonde wearing khaki shorts and shirt, pointed again at the mountain.

„Oh,“ said Francine, „that’s not supposed to be there.“

„I know. That’s what I just said. We should totally go and investigate.“

Francine, tall and dark haired, wearing a similar hiking outfit as Cynthia’s, looked at the strange mountain that was where the map clearly stated flat prairie land and noticed a door, slightly ajar. „There’s a door in the mountain,“ she said.

„Come on, let’s go take a peek.“

„We should really wait for the others to catch up.“

„Yippers, they’re sure taking their sweet time,“ said Cynthia, wiping sweat from her brow.

There were five of them in the group, all from the States—Cynthia Snow, Francine Douglas, Cori Austin, Shane Pillman, and Rick Bagwell. They were all friends and had been so for a long time. This was their Greek vacation. They were exploring Greece's ancient ruins, but, loving adventure and somewhat disdaining structure, they had opted to forgo hiring a tour guide, relying instead on maps alone.

Cori, Shane and Rick, all out of breath, finally caught up with Cynthia and Francine.

„Hey,“ said Cori, gasping a bit, „is that mountain supposed to be there?“ Cori was wearing blue jeans and a red sport top and a baseball cap. She was cute in a subtle fashion, with bright brown eyes, short dark hair, a small nose, and a slightly crooked smile.

„It's not in the map,“ said Francine.

„So what,“ asked Shane, a pale young man wearing khaki shorts and a white tee shirt, „the maps we got are fake?“

„They're probably just old,“ said Rick thoughtlessly. He was a thin, lanky, red headed youth who for reasons only he could fathom decided to wear red shorts and a yellow shirt, giving him a rather goofy look.

„Yeah, genius,“ said Shane, dripping with sarcasm, „the mountain just grew there in the last couple of years, I'm sure.“

„Stop being such an ass,“ admonished Cynthia. She liked Shane but really had a difficult time tolerating his almost pathological habit of pouncing on anyone who said something without thinking. She could well imagine how impossible it could be to live with someone like that. As if people always thought about everything they said before saying it.

„Well, he should stop saying stupid things,“ mumbled Shane. He liked Cynthia, a lot, but wondered why she was so willing to tolerate people saying stupid things. That's what's wrong with the world, he thought, too much tolerance of things that should really not be tolerated.

„What's wrong with the maps?“ asked Cori. „Where we get 'em, anyway?“

„I bought this one in Virginia,“ said Cynthia, handing Cori a folded tourist map with historical places clearly marked in bold. „It's a standard tourist map, published last year. It should be fairly accurate. This other one—she handed another one to Cori—I got off of Google.“

„I've got this old map of ancient Greece,“ said Rick, trying to redeem his intelligence and erase the mark of his earlier comment.

„Let me see that, Rick,“ said Francine, taking the map from Rick. She inspected it for a few seconds. „It's official, that mountain should not be there,“ she said.

„The door is really weird,“ said Shane. „Maybe it's some sort of tourist surprise. I mean, how many mountains have you seen with a door built into it?“

„I don't think you could keep something this size a surprise,“ said Cynthia. „Let's explore.“

„Shouldn't we, like, call someone?“ asked Cori.

„Yeah,“ said Rick, „it's probably not a good idea to touch anything. We can get into trouble.“

„Shit on that,“ said Shane, moving next to Cynthia, trying to impress her with his bravado. „If it's not in any of our maps, then it's not a ruin, and we can go in.“

„What makes you think the door will even open?“ asked Francine. „For all we know it's just a painting.“

„Only one way to find out,“ said Cynthia, and then she bolted towards the door.

„Cynthia!“ yelled Francine, slightly startled but not really surprised. Cynthia was easily the most impulsive person she knew.

Francine was feeling nervous. She felt that something wasn't quite right here, that mountains that are not in maps, especially old maps, do not just appear out of thin air. She wanted to say something but noticed that the others were already following Cynthia. Because she did not wish to be left behind, and definitely did not want to be considered a spoil sport, Francine ran after the group.

The door was an enormous bronze behemoth, stretching upwards of twelve feet. It was built into the mountain, and it was partially open. Cynthia grabbed a thick ring handle and opened the door some more. She thought that the door was going to feel very heavy, but it moved easily.

„Hey, stop that!“ Francine said as she caught up with them and saw what Cynthia was doing.

„Why?“ asked Cynthia.

„You see, that's why everyone thinks that Americans are all obnoxious assholes,“ said Francine. „We never respect anything.“

„Oh, come off it,“ said Shane. „Look, it's not on any of the maps and there aren't any signs saying *do not enter*. For all we know, the Greek Government doesn't even know this is here.“

„Yeah, right, the Government totally misplaced an entire mountain, Einstein,“ said Rick Bagwell with way too much relish.

Shane turned on him instantly, pointing a threatening finger at Rick. „Shut up, if you don't want to get your ass kicked,“ he said.

„Nice,“ said Cori. „When he says something dumb, you jump all over him, but when you say something equally dumb, he is not allowed to say anything. Real nice.“

„That's just nature, babe,“ said Shane with a little smile, „survival of the fittest.“

„Survival of the fittest is the biggest bullshit,“ said Cynthia. „You're just looking for an excuse to be an ass.“

Shane lowered his head, muttered, „Whatever,“ and walked off a bit. He didn't like it when Cynthia got upset with him.

Cynthia, for her part, was too interested in exploring this strange and magnificent find—something she lived for—to be overly concerned with Shane's feelings. Besides, if Shane wasn't such an ass sometimes, he wouldn't get so much flak.

„Okay, guys,“ she said, „you can wait for me if you want, but I have to, at least, step inside and take a look.“ With that, Cynthia went through the door.

„Hey, wait up,“ said Francine, following. The others followed, as well.

They were inside a mountain. The wildness of this struck them all. Few people in the world could claim to have been in a mountain, and they were. They were in a long corridor, a completely artificial construct with two rows of hanging vines above it. The vines had glowing grapes that gave off a very bright purple light. They could see clearly and noticed that the corridor led to a room about forty yards away.

„What the hell is this?“ asked Shane, walking up behind Cynthia.

„It looks like a path towards that room,“ answered Cynthia.

„So what are we supposed to do, just follow the path or something?“ asked Rick.

„Doesn't anybody find it odd how this place is being lit?“ asked Francine.

Cori tried to reach one of the vines and pluck a grape, but it was out of her reach.

„Everything about this place is odd,“ said Rick. It was an odd place—the grapes did not look like bulbs but like real grapes that were just glowing and there was a nice flowery smell in the air that just made him feel at peace. That's what surprised Rick the most; Rick wasn't getting a sense of misgiving like he usually did when in questionable places. To his surprise, he felt good and curious.

„I want to see more of this place,“ said Shane. The others didn't notice, but his voice sounded far away.

„Yeah, I kind of do, too,“ said Francine, feeling genuinely interested, though a voice in the back of her mind told her that she should not be; in fact, screamed at her to get out. She ignored that voice.

„If the corridor turns after that room, we should probably mark the walls with something so we won't get lost,“ said Shane.

„Are you crazy?“ said Cori, horrified by the suggestion that they should deface a holy place. Now why did she think this was a holy place? She shook her head. „We can't just go around disfiguring ancient ruins,“ she said, her mind still in some sort of haze.

„This doesn't look like a ruin,“ said Rick, marveling at the beauty of it all. The corridor walls were smooth obsidian with gold trim that seemed to be dancing in all sorts of fantastic shapes. The floor they were walking upon was made of individually cut tiles of marble, and the ceiling, where the vines with the glowing grapes hung, was made out of red stone. „It looks so new and beautiful.“

Francine saw, in the lower corner of the left wall as it reached the floor, a few drawings that were both glorious and disturbing. She saw a man sitting on a rock, feeding a giant bird his hand, with a smile on his face. The detail was breathtaking, and the colors were so well combined only an artist of supreme mastery could have created it. There was another drawing, also beautiful and disturbing, of people of all ages hurling themselves down into the open maw of a revolting form that seemed to be a giant toad with rows upon rows of teeth. The people looked horrified, yet the drawing gave the impression that they were willingly throwing themselves into the monster's mouth.

Something snapped back in place in Francine's brain. Immediately, she became aware of how wrong everything felt and appeared. „Those drawings weren't there just a few minutes ago,“ she said.

„Huh?“ Cynthia said, turning to face Francine.

„Weren't those walls just black with some gold patterns?“

„Where's the door?“ asked Shane as the mist began to clear from his mind.

Everyone turned immediately, looking for the door. It was about forty yards away.

„I don't remember walking,“ said a perplexed Rick.

„Me neither,“ said Cori. „I thought we were standing still, talking.“

Shane Pillman thought of himself as a tough, clearheaded, rational and adventurous man, but at this moment none of that mattered. He was as confused as everybody else. He wasn't exactly scared—or could not bring himself to acknowledge his own fear—but was feeling the greatest sense of unease that he had ever experienced. He knew now that the only smart thing to do would be to exit the mountain, to get out. He was about to suggest this when Cynthia spoke.

„Guys, quick, come over here!“ she shouted.

Cynthia led the group into a large octagonal room filled with the most exquisite stone statues that anyone had ever seen. The statues were all in different postures of fear and despair. Some of them were not of humans but of fantastic creatures of mythology: satyrs, a griffin, and an enormous Minotaur that seemed life-size—standing eight feet tall and as broad as a real bull. Some of the statues were clearly of ancient soldiers. What was real odd, thought Cynthia as she examined each and every statue, was the uncanny detail. Cynthia stood in front of the statue of an old soldier who was in a posture of extreme fright—back bent and slightly twisted, hands raised as if warding off an attack, mouth opened in an unfinished scream. She was astounded with the minute detail the sculptor had achieved—she could make out the wrinkles on the face, the dried cracked lips, a tear emerging out of the left eye, and even the cavities on some of the teeth.

„This is the work of a genius,“ she said, her voice hushed in awe.

„A genius who didn't know how to sculpt weapons,“ said Rick, picking up a spear off the floor.

„Oh, yeah, that's weird,“ said Shane. „All the weapons on the soldier statues are real. I wonder why?“

„Well,“ said Cynthia, „I think that most geniuses are great in just one thing and not in everything.“

„Whoever made these was a macabre genius,“ said Francine with a shiver.

„Ah, I think the walls are moving,“ said Rick.

The entire room started shifting and rising. Had the group not been stupefied and sluggish, they may have been able to make a dash out of the room and escape; instead, they stood there watching, letting it happen. And the room kept rising.

When the room finished its ascent, the group found itself in a forest unlike any they had ever known. An army of birch trees with leaves as white as snow, spaced about ten feet apart, greeted them. The trees formed a pattern that appeared a maze. About fifteen feet in front of them, in a small clearing, stood a woman with her back towards them.

The woman was unusually tall and wore a long white dress. Her hair was a strange shiny green, and even though there was no wind it moved in soft waves.

Shane walked towards the woman. His mind was filled both with wonder and apprehension. Above him was a completely yellow sky, and before him a tall woman whose face he had a strong impulse to see, almost a need.

Francine had tried to stop Shane. She had grabbed his arm, but he shrugged her off, roughly. She was about to tackle him low around the knees when she noticed all the others were following him. Not really knowing why, Francine stayed behind. Something was bothering her, something about the macabre nature of this place. She decided to hide. She hid behind the huge statue of the Minotaur.

„Lady, are you all right?“ asked Shane, approaching the woman. By now he was frightened, but his conscious mind would not allow him to accept it, so he did not listen to that little voice in the back of his mind that screamed at him to get away. He reached out and was about to touch the woman's shoulder when she spoke. What she said he could not understand—it was an ancient dialect that had long ago descended into the house of oblivion.

Though he could not understand a single word she said, the profound sadness with which she said it was evident. He touched her shoulder and turned her around.

What he saw turned him to stone. The first thing he noticed was her hair, which was moving and squirming. Snakes, he thought—her hair is made of snakes. The snakes were of many different species and of varying lengths—some so thin as to almost be worms. Then he noticed her skin. It was a faded and ghoulish green, except for two nasty red marks, like tiny cuts, on her cheeks. Her forehead was wrinkled, yet those wrinkles did not seem to belong to age but to an abundance of skin that had folded upon itself. Finally, he saw her eyes. These were eternal pits of despair and emptiness that dragged the very essence out of him. They were the last things he ever saw.

Shane was still alive when his eyes turned to stone, and his face began to freeze in an expression of dawning horror.

Cynthia reached Shane as he was turning to stone. She tried to turn him around, grabbing his shoulder and pulling, but by now he was far too heavy to move. Startled and in a state of shock and disbelief, she looked at the woman as if expecting some sort of explanation. Cynthia turned to stone with one word echoing in her mind: Medusa.

Rick knew that something was wrong, but he was not near enough to understand what was happening. He could tell that the woman was staring at Shane and Cynthia; he could also see that both of them were frozen in weird postures, completely unmoving. Rick was trembling.

„Oh, God, she's coming our way!“ Cori blurted out as the Medusa turned towards them.

„How come they're not moving?“ Rick asked, almost to himself.

„Run,“ hissed Cori as urgently as she could without raising her voice.

They both ran in opposite directions.

Francine saw her friends running. Cynthia and Shane didn't move. She wanted to call them over, but the strange woman moved too fast, going after Rick. Francine waited for a count of twenty and then crawled out of her hiding spot behind the Minotaur. She was as scared as she had ever been in her life, as scared as when she was ten and the neighbor's Rottweiler had broken free from its yard and chased her up a tree. She could still see the dog's long sharp teeth snapping, saliva spilling all over the place.

Francine carefully made her way to where Cynthia and Shane were, frantically whipping her head from side to side, scanning for any sign of the strange woman. When she got a good look at them, she let out an involuntary yelp. They were completely turned to stone. Several things began to click in her mind—the uncanny detail of the statues, the statue of the Minotaur, the woman whose gaze could turn people to stone. „Oh, God,“ she whispered, „the myths are real.“

Though she was immensely frightened, she forced herself to think clearly. If the platform of statues had risen, then there had to be a way to lower it. She probably had enough time to search the platform before that Medusa creature caught up with Rick and returned looking for more victims. She probably had enough time, but it was beyond her to just abandon her friends.

Francine heard a loud, desperate scream. Rick. It was too late for him. She dashed in the direction Cori had taken, hoping to find her before the Medusa found them both.

She ran, dashing through strange foliage that had she been in a different frame of mind would have surely called beautiful. She ran until she cleared the forest, arriving at a place of brown and purple camel hump like hills. Someone called her name. She turned and there was Cori, her head and shoulders protruding out of a giant and slimy mushroom. Cori waved Francine over. „Quick, get in,“ she said.

Francine ran towards her, and Cori helped her climb into the mushroom. The mushroom sagged with the weight of both women, but not by much. Inside the mushroom felt like being in a tub full of tofu. They had to keep their faces out so as to breathe. They stuck their faces out of the underbelly of the mushroom umbrella so as not to be seen by the Medusa.

„Where’s Rick?“ Cori asked.

„I think he’s dead,“ Francine answered.

„I saw Cynthia and Shane,“ said Cori in a hoarse and desperate whisper. „They were turned to stone. That’s Medusa, isn’t it?“

„I don’t know,“ said Francine. „In the myths Medusa was killed by Perseus, but I don’t know how much of that is real. There were three sisters, I think they were called Gorgons, and Medusa was one of them. This can be one of the other sisters... I just don’t know.“

They heard a hissing sound accompanied by flat, slapping footfalls. They went completely silent. They could see out of the mushroom but, due to the angle, not very much, barely enough to make out the Medusa’s shadow.

The creature hissed and looked all around, searching for them. Then she began chanting in a language they had no way of understanding. The melodic sound of her chanting made their bodies sway, however. Before she could even think about it, Cori popped out of the mushroom, seduced by the chanting. She walked over to the Medusa, who seized her from the shoulders and stared into her eyes. Cori turned to stone halfway through a scream.

Francine was exiting the mushroom, also, when Cori’s scream, like a slap to the face, woke her up. The Medusa turned to look her way. Francine tucked herself back in the mushroom, closed her eyes, and pressed her hands over her ears. The Medusa chanted for a few minutes and then left.

Francine would have remained there forever, too afraid to move, but then everything started to vibrate. Earthquake, she thought, but the vibration was subtle and steady. She did not know what it portended, but the little voice in her head told her that it meant the mountain was about to vanish; for she now believed that the mountain had come from some other place, another world—perhaps a place where the gods still played their cruel and horrible games. She listened to the voice in her head this time.

Francine slithered out of the mushroom, took a few steps, a couple of deep breaths, and opened her eyes. The Medusa was gone, as was Cori.

Night was approaching. The sky went from a bright yellow to a deep red. Abandoning caution for the sake of speed, Francine ran to the platform.

When she made it back to the platform, all her friends were there, in stone form. They had become a part of this obscene museum of statues. She cried then, letting all her sadness and anguish pour out.

She knew that there had to be a lever, and she searched for one. Behind the statue of a burly farmer she found what at first seemed to be a lever but turned out to be a somewhat long dagger with a forward curving blade. It was stuck to the ground. She grabbed it and pulled it out.

Behind her she heard a loud, angry hiss. She closed her eyes, gripping the dagger tightly; tears streamed down her cheeks. The apotheosis of hopelessness embraced her, and she became the very embodiment of despair. She stood there waiting, dagger in hand, resigned, but somehow no longer afraid.

The Medusa grabbed her from behind, said something in a strange tongue Francine could never hope to understand but that for reasons that would elude her always sounded to her like an apology. The Medusa then turned Francine around and tried to pry her eyes open. „I’m sorry, too,“ whispered Francine as she thrust the dagger forward and upward. It entered the Medusa through the solar plexus.

Hot fetid breath covered Francine’s face as the Medusa hissed and howled her agony. The Medusa released Francine and staggered backwards. A slushing, slurping sound accompanied the exiting blade, and warm blood spurted all over Francine’s hands.

Still clutching the dagger, and with her eyes still painfully shut, a nauseous Francine fell to her knees. There she remained while the vibration in the ground and all around her intensified. But she did not care about that at the moment. She was listening to the horrible gurgling, dying sounds of the Medusa. Misery and pity filled her, and she did want to offer some sort of comfort to the Medusa, but did not dare open her eyes.

When the Medusa finally stopped making sounds, and Francine could no longer hear her breathing, and the vibration was becoming too much to bear, she crawled her way to the Medusa’s corpse. Trembling with both fear and disgust, she felt the Medusa’s body. She placed her hand on the Medusa’s chest. Blood was still flowing freely from the wound, but there wasn’t any movement. The Medusa was dead.

Remembering the old myths of how even the severed head of a Gorgon can turn people to stone, Francine kept her eyes closed.

The vibration of the mountain had reached a high pitch, and Francine knew that while her eyes remained closed she would not be able to find the lever that must operate the platform. However, she did not want to risk opening her eyes. But she had to do something, or she would disappear along with the mountain.

Francine dropped the dagger, reached down and grabbed the Medusa and started to turn her over. She had grabbed the Medusa from the shoulders and was attempting to turn her on her face when the Medusa’s hair hissed weakly and tried to bite her. Francine was quick, and when she felt the snake hair touch her



she screamed and jumped away. She then seized the Medusa again, this time lower, by the hips, and twisted her face down. Finally, Francine opened her eyes. She resisted the urge to look down and get a look at the Medusa's body and hair; instead, she looked for the lever.

The statues were trembling so hard now that they seemed to be fading in and out of existence. Francine looked for a lever or a switch. She was getting frantic—the platform, the forest, the mountain, were beginning to disappear. Francine ran around, looking behind every statue, until she found what she was looking for. It was an old lever built into the floor. It was about three feet high and made of metal she did not recognize. She grabbed it and pulled it hard.

The room spun at a high speed, nearly knocking Francine off her feet. When it stopped, she was right back where they had started. She could see the open door ahead. The room, the corridor, and even her body were now blinking in and out of reality. She ran for the door. She felt her heart pounding, almost bursting, and her mind was filled with visions of a terrible world where awful things that could not be, were. Everything shone an eerie green. Francine saw the door, jumped through as hard as she could, and then the mountain vanished.

She landed hard on her belly, heard the mocking laughter of depraved gods behind her, and knew that she, as well as her friends, had been nothing more than the plaything of evil forces beyond comprehension. She also knew, deep in her heart, that the Medusa had tried to warn them, but they had not understood her ancient tongue, and the Medusa had been forced to fulfill the will of the evil things that created her.

Francine got up, turned around, and was not surprised to see flat prairie land. The mountain had vanished. Her friends had been turned to stone—whether that meant they were dead or alive she did not know—and she had killed someone. Her hands were covered in blood. Francine started walking, her heart consumed by two feelings: bitterness over the loss of her friends and a seething desire for vengeance against forces she did not as of yet understand.

