

In the center of Colchis in an enchanted garden, the hide of a mystical flying ram hung from the tallest oak, guarded by a dragon who never slept. Jason would have to tread carefully to pry it from King Aeetes' clutches and win back his promised throne. But diplomacy was hardly one of the Argonauts' strengths. Jason would have to navigate this difficult task alone. Or so he thought.

Leaving most of his bedraggled crew to rest, Jason made for the palace with some of his more even-tempered men. His first instinct was to simply ask the king for his prized possession. But Aeetes was enraged at the hero's presumption. If this outsider wanted his treasure, he would have to prove his worth by facing three perilous tasks.

The trials would begin the following day, and Jason was dismissed to prepare. But another member of the royal family was also plotting something. Thanks to the encouragement of Jason's guardians on Mount Olympus, Medea, princess of Colchis and priestess of the witch goddess Hecate, had fallen in love with the challenger.

She intended to protect her beloved from her father's tricks — at any cost. After a sleepless night, Jason sombrely marched to the castle— but was intercepted. The princess armed him with strange vials and trinkets, in exchange for a promise of eternal devotion. As they whispered and planned their victory, both hero and princess fell deeply under each other's spell. Unaware of his daughter's scheming, the king confidently led Jason to face his first task.

The hero was brought to a huge field of oxen that lay between him and the fleece, and told that he had to plough the land around the crowds of oxen. A simple task— or so Jason thought. But Medea had concocted a fire-proof ointment, and so he plowed the flickering fields unscathed. For the second task, he was given a box of serpent's teeth to plant into the scorched earth.

As soon as Jason scattered them, each seed sprouted into a bloodthirsty warrior. They burst up around him, barricading his way forward, but Medea had prepared him for this task as well.

Hurling a heavy stone she had given him into their midst, the fighters turned on themselves as they scrabbled for it, letting him slip by the fray. For the third task, Jason was finally face to face with the guardian of the Fleece.

Dodging sharp claws and singeing breath, Jason scrambled up the tree and sprinkled a sweet-smelling concoction over the dragon. As the strains of Medea's incantations reached its ears and the potion settled in its eyes, the dragon sank into a deep sleep. Elated, Jason climbed to the top of the tallest oak, where he slipped the gleaming fleece off its branch. When the king saw the hero sprinting away— not only with the fleece, but his daughter in tow— he realized he had been betrayed.

Furious, he sent an army led by his son Absyrtus to bring the ill-gotten prize and his conniving daughter home. But all the players in this tale had underestimated the viciousness of these disgraced lovers. To the horror of the Gods, Jason ran his sword through Absyrtus in cold blood. Medea then helped him scatter pieces of the body along the shore, distracting her grieving father while the Argonauts escaped.

As Colchis and their pursuers grew smaller on the horizon, a solemn silence fell aboard the Argo. Jason could now return to Thessaly victorious— but his terrible act had tarnished his crew's honor, and turned the Gods against them. Buffeted by hostile winds, the wretched crew washed up on the island of Circe the sorceress. Medea begged her aunt to absolve them of wrongdoing— but bloody deeds are not so easily forgotten, and fallen heroes not so rapidly redeemed.