


Stephanie Draven Presents

LOVE, MONSTERS & MYTHOLOGY:

FOR ROMANCE WRITERS

Objective:

Identify the "monster" at the heart of your scene to create resonance



Think of a scene you're writing in your novel. What is your protagonist's fatal flaw and how does it prevent your character from getting what he or she wants?

EVERY SCENE, EVEN A LOVE SCENE, HAS CONFLICT

The reader has to know what's at stake. What does your hero or heroine stand to lose... or gain?

The Odyssey is the story of Odysseus, an ancient King of Ithaca who fought--and was instrumental in winning--the Trojan War only to find himself thwarted at every turn on his way home. Men like this epic story because it's filled with adventure, but I contend that the Odyssey is a romance.

Oh, you may doubt me because it's primarily about a hero who sleeps his way through the Aegean before returning to the wife and child he left at home. But it's ultimately a story about deep and abiding love. And though it isn't structured the same way a modern romance novel might be, it encapsulates lessons for modern writers. Odysseus has to conquer many monsters before he gets to have his happily ever after, and the hero and heroine in your novel will have to do the same.

When it comes to paranormal romances or even romantic suspense, it may seem easy to identify the monster in each scene. (ie. There's a vampire/demon/serial killer in the room! Eek!) But all monsters are representations of fears we have about ourselves or others. Monsters are incarnations of fatal flaws, of the enemy within, too.

Odysseus was very clever. It was his strength, but also a weakness. Because he thought he was so smart, he ended up offending Poseidon, the God of the Sea--not so clever when a boat is your only way home. Along with that cleverness came a near-fatal curiosity best exemplified by his encounter with the sirens whose beautiful voices he wanted to hear even though they were capable of luring him to his death.



The Other Woman

Today we don't think of nymphs as monstrous but to the ancient Greeks they were dangerous temptresses who could lead a hero astray.

A BESTIARY



The Sphinx



The Minotaur



Hercules & the Hydra



The Chimera

Sphinx

The Sphinx was a riddler, representing the inherent conflict between the sexes. Your hero may view your heroine as some foreign creature—a puzzle. The sphinx might also represent your character's inability to solve a mystery or unravel a problem or understand his or her own nature.

Kraken

This giant squid-like sea monster has numerous arms and tentacles, the better to capture and smother its prey. It could represent a possessive heroine, one who is too clingy. Or perhaps the "green-eyed" monster of jealousy—a hero who wants to keep his heroine all to himself, like Andromeda chained to a rock.

Harpies

The harpies harangued, tormented & kidnapped the weak. They can represent an outside force—an over controlling mother that our heroine listens to, or friends who think the hero is too blue-collar for her. Or perhaps harpies represent the nagging voices of self-doubt that our heroine needs to get rid of before she can find love.

Chimera

The Chimera is part goat, lion and dragon. It wasn't just two-faced, but three-faced! As such, it can represent dishonesty. Perhaps our hero has a changeable nature. Or perhaps our heroine struggles with identity issues.

Gorgons

Medusa was raped by Poseidon and transformed into an incarnation of rage, punishing all men after him by turning them to stone. Perhaps your heroine can't trust men anymore or makes our hero pay for what the men in her past have done. Perhaps our hero has a stone-cold heart and is used to keeping people away by showing his ugliest face to the world.

Furies

Furies were ancient avengers who tormented criminals until they atoned or went insane. Perhaps your hero's need for revenge stands in the way of finding love. Or maybe your heroine just can't let anything go.

Minotaur

The classic dark brooding hero has been hurt, badly. Betrayed. Like the *Minotaur*, he lurks in his dark gloom, lashing out at those who find him in his lair.

Hydra

This monster had deadly blood and if you cut off one of its many heads, two more would grow in its place. It might represent your hero's belief that he poisons everything he touches. Or perhaps it's his disapproving family, always spouting venom about the heroine. Or maybe it represents the frustration that every time the hero conquers one obstacle, another rises in its place.



Like the Furies, maybe your heroine needs to learn to let things go.

ROGUE'S GALLERY



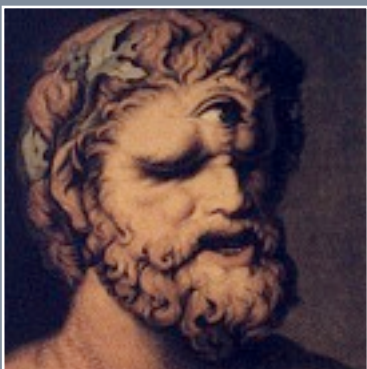
A Dryad



Cerberus



A Satyr & Nymph



Cyclops

Cerberus

The monstrous three-headed dog guarded Hades. Perhaps your hero is overly gruff in doing what needs to be done to enforce cosmic order. Maybe his bark is worse than his bite.

Cyclops

These one-eyed savage giants are the incarnation of myopia. Perhaps your hero is so focused on his goal, he's forgotten his humanity. Perhaps he can't see anyone else's point of view.

Dryads

Like all nymphs, Dryads were fiercely independent women, but also protectresses of their forests. They can represent your heroine's need to have her own domain or remain untethered.

Satyrs

The horny goats of ancient mythology were creatures of untamed lusts. Perhaps your hero is a playboy--and the heroine can't bring herself to trust him because of his past. Or perhaps the conflict in your scene is a heroine who can't resist a seductive hero when she really should.

Sparti

These warriors were sown from dragons teeth, springing fully grown from the earth, armed and ready to slaughter each other. Does your hero have a problem with violence? Does he become a mindless killing machine? Perhaps your heroine destroys everything she loves when she gets into a rage.

Witches

Circe, or witches in general, were enchantresses. They represent your character's fear that he will be transformed into an animal or that he will lose his freedom and independence, falling under the spell of lust, or addiction, or family obligations. On the other hand, witches like Medea--who murdered the princess her husband wanted to marry--represent a woman scorned. Perhaps the angry ex-wife who terrorizes your heroine.

Amazons

These female warriors shunned the company of men & were so dedicated to warcraft that they often removed a breast to make it easier to shoot arrows. They represent a heroine who goes it alone, or who is willing to deface or downplay her beauty or femininity to keep anyone from getting close.

The Golden Apple of Discord

Angry at having not been invited to a wedding, the goddess Eris rolled an apple before three goddesses that said 'To the Most

Beautiful.' The three goddesses were all jealous of one another, and their rivalry started the Trojan War, representing destructive sibling rivalry and a need for validation and approval.

Paris & Helen

She was Helen of Sparta before she became Helen of Troy--apt to fall for the man who had the stones to carry her off from her husband's house. She'd been promised to Paris as a reward for choosing Aphrodite as the most beautiful goddess of all, but their love affair resulted in the destruction of Troy. Their story represents a fear that love is selfish and must be denied if it hurts our friends, our family, or our countrymen. Perhaps your hero has torn loyalties. Perhaps your heroine has a bad relationship she can't ditch.

Midas

King Midas loved his wealth so much that he could turn anything he touched to gold. Unfortunately this meant he turned his beloved daughter into a golden statue. Like Midas, certain Harlequin Presents heroes have an obsession with money that prevents them from finding the love they want and need.

Narcissus

He was so handsome and vain that when he looked into a pond, he fell in love with his own reflection. May represent our hero's fear that the heroine is just too much like him.

Pandora

She opened a box and released all the evils of mankind, thus representing the flaw of too much curiosity. Perhaps your hero is afraid to find the answers to questions he'd rather not ask. Perhaps your heroine always gets into mischief, with disastrous results.

Psyche & Cupid

The god took mortal Psyche as his wife but remained invisible to her. Her jealous sisters convinced her that her husband was secretly a monster, so Psyche disobeyed him and looked upon his face. He then abandoned her (though they would later get back together). Their story represents the fear that if we really get to know someone, it can ruin a good thing. It also represents mistrust, a betrayal in a relationship, borne of doubts planted by others. Finally, it's the ultimate in social-class mismatches. Two people from different worlds.

Demeter & Persephone

When Persephone was captured by Hades and dragged into the underworld, her mother Demeter, the goddess of grain, was plunged into grief, turning the world into winter. The story represents a loss that your character can't get past--something that has turned them cold.

WRITING EXERCISES:

Use these techniques to strengthen your scenes and add resonance to your work

1. Explain why your hero is the worst man in the world for your heroine to end up with.
2. Explain why your heroine is also totally wrong for your hero.
3. Now explain why they're actually perfect for one another.
4. Identify a scene in your romance novel that you're working on now, or perhaps one that you'd like to be the emotional crux of the book, or maybe just one that captures your fancy. Briefly jot down a description of this scene.
5. Is this scene written from your the point of view of your hero or your heroine? For the rest of these exercises, this character will be your protagonist.
6. What has prevented your protagonist from finding true love before now? Delve deeply here. Every character has a fatal flaw or unfulfilled need.
7. Writing from your protagonist's point of view, tell us what your he or she wants to accomplish in this scene.
8. Is what you've written *really* what your protagonist wants? If not, tell us the truth

that your character doesn't know.

9. In this scene, what is preventing your protagonist from getting what he or she wants?
10. What is your protagonist afraid will happen if he or she doesn't get what he wants?
11. Identify the central conflict, internal or external, of this scene.
12. Now correlate this central conflict, fear, or fatal flaw with a monster or mythological figure from the list or from your own imagination. Which monster do you choose to represent your protagonist's problem in this scene?
13. Unless your protagonist is a classics major, he's not likely to say something like, 'I'm behaving like prideful Achilles, sulking in my tent.' The point of this exercise isn't to overtly work in mythological references, but to subtly use the themes of our oldest stories. So, consider everything you know about your chosen monster or mythology and write down at



Psyche let her jealous sisters convince her that Cupid was a hideous serpentine monster.

least twenty words you associate with it. (Use every sense here--sight, sounds, smells, touch, taste, emotions, moral judgments, etc.)

14. Now, from your protagonist's point of view, use some of these words from your chosen mythology to describe the setting. Is the blue carpet an ocean about to swallow our heroine and pull her down? Do the cubicles in the office building swim before our hero's eyes like some ancient labyrinth?
15. Now, from the point of view of your protagonist, write out his or her thoughts about the conflict he or she is facing in this scene using the words you used to describe your monster without ever mentioning that monster or mythology by name.