

# Storykit: Back-to-back Synopsis

---

Short Synopsis (in 3s!) for ease of memorisation:

## The Wooden Horse

1. The Greeks go to war with the Trojans.
2. Odysseus comes up with the Wooden Horse ploy.
3. The Greeks win the war.

## The Ciconians

1. They are brought to the Ciconian shores by a freak wind.
2. The Greeks attack them because they were allies of Troy.
3. The Ciconians attack them back and the Greeks are forced to retreat.

## The Lotus Eaters

1. Arrive on a wooded isle and lose a searching-garrison.
2. Go in search and find them drinking the juice of happiness and forgetting.
3. Just get away before they are all stuck on the island under the influence of the juice.

## The Cyclops

1. Arrive on a barren island and search it.
2. Find the home of the Cyclops and are trapped in it.
3. Odysseus ('Nobody') tricks his way out, blinding the Cyclops, and they just escape.

## Aeolus

1. Arrive on a fortified island and are finally welcomed as guests.
2. Odysseus is given a bag as a gift by Aeolus.
3. Crew mutiny just as they reach home and release the winds from inside the bag, blowing them back out to sea.

## The Laestrygonians

1. Arrive on another island with an encircled harbour.
2. Find out the hard way that this is an island of giant cannibals.
3. They only just escaped with their lives.

## Circe

1. Arrive on yet another island only for some of the men to be turned into pigs by the goddess Circe.
2. Eurylochus sees this and implores Odysseus to leave.
3. Odysseus refuses to leave his men, and, with the help of the god Hermes defeats Circe, resulting in her offering the men hospitality for a year.

## The Underworld

1. They leave and follow Circe's advice to visit Tiresias in the Underworld.
2. There they discover some clues as to their future encounters.
3. They travel back to Circe.

## The Sirens

1. Devise a plan to pass the Sirens.
2. Set off from Circe's island once again.
3. They pass the Sirens.

## Scylla and Charybdis

1. Almost straight away they encounter the narrow pass between the sea monsters Scylla and Charybdis.
2. Some hard decisions have to be made.
3. They pass but at a cost – they lose some men to Scylla.

## The Cattle of Helios

1. They pass Thrinacia, the island of the cattle of Helios, and stay there because of the un-seaworthy weather.
2. They were told not to eat the cattle by Tiresias but they are so hungry that they do.
3. This brings on the wrath of the gods and results in the sinking of the ship and the death of the crew, except Odysseus, who narrowly misses being swallowed by Charybdis.

## Kalypso

1. He drifts for nine days and is washed up on Kalypso's shores.
2. She nurses him and falls in love with him and so doesn't let him leave.
3. He is trapped there for seven years until Athena helps him escape.

## The Phaeacians

1. Poseidon sinks the ship Kalypso made him and he is washed up on the shores of Phaeacia.
2. Nausicca, the king's daughter brings him to the king Alcinous who looks after him and listens to Odysseus' stories.
3. Odysseus is taken back to Ithaca by a Phaeacian ship with many gifts.

## The Return Home

1. Odysseus is disguised by Athena and then he meets up with Telemachus and Eumaeus.
2. They go to the palace together and are met by the unpleasant suitors.
3. During a competition for Penelope's hand the disguised Odysseus beats the other suitors and then kills them with his bow. Once Odysseus has convinced Penelope that he is Odysseus they are reunited.

**Longer synopses** (*from the book*)

## The War (The Wooden Horse)

The scene is set and the background told. A war breaks out between the Greeks and the Trojans over Helen's abduction from Menelaos, the king of Sparta. The war goes on for ten years before Odysseus devises a plan to

infiltrate the city of Troy. A wooden horse is left outside the city that hides Odysseus and some other Greek soldiers. After King Priam discusses what to do with his priests, the horse is taken into the city as it is thought to be a gift to the gods, and the Trojans believe that they would invite the wrath of the gods if they do not take it in. Once inside, Odysseus and his men let in the Greek army through the gates. The Trojans are defeated and the war ends.

## The Battle (The Ciconians)

A freak wind brings Odysseus and his men to the coast of Ismarus, the home of the Ciconians. The Ciconians were enemies of the Greeks and allies of the Trojans during the war. The Greeks attack them and take a Ciconian town by surprise. They kill many men and divide the spoils. Odysseus recommends that they leave Ismarus while they still have a chance, but the men don't listen and continue to carouse with wine, women and song. The Ciconians in nearby towns hear about the attack from some escaped survivors. They gather a fighting force and quickly attack the Greeks. It is the Greeks this time that are taken by surprise and overwhelmed. The two sides fight all night but the Greeks eventually have to retreat. Six men from each ship are lost.

## Happiness and Forgetting (The Lotus Eaters)

They eventually find their way to a densely forested island that is the home of a people who harvest a fruit that grows only on this island. The juice made from the fruit has the quality of making the recipients permanently happy (for as long as the juice is imbibed) and forgetful of their worries. Some of the men fall under the effects of the juice and Odysseus has to make a choice as to whether to drink the juice or not. They narrowly escape the island but lose one ship and one man in the process.

## Nobody's Home (The Cyclops)

They find another island and on it a cave that belongs to a Cyclops (Polyphemus) who traps them in the cave and begins to eat the crew. Eventually, Odysseus devises a plan to escape by getting the Cyclops drunk and telling the Cyclops that his (Odysseus') name is 'Nobody'. While asleep after getting him drunk,

the men blind the Cyclops with a giant stake. They are kept safe from the other Cyclopes who come to find out what all the shouting is about. Polyphemus blames 'Nobody' for the injury! Still trapped inside the cave, they escape by strapping themselves under the Cyclops' sheep. Polyphemus discovers that they have escaped before they get away from the island. Odysseus taunts the Cyclops from the safety of his ship but the Cyclops destroys another ship by throwing rocks in their general direction. This is where Odysseus makes an enemy of Poseidon, who turns out to be Polyphemus' father.

## Captain or Crew? (Aeolus)

This time they are taken in by Aeolus, the owner of the next island that they find. The men rest and Odysseus is given a gift by Aeolus: a tied, leather bag. A rumour circulates amongst the crew that it contains gold and silver when in fact it contains the imprisoned storm winds that might otherwise hamper their return home. As they return home, an argument breaks out among the crew while Odysseus is sleeping. Just as they reach Ithaca, the bag is opened by the mutinous crew and the winds are released, blowing the ships back out to sea to be lost again. During the storm all but one of the ships are lost.

## Dinner Guests (The Laestrygonians)

They venture forth onto another unknown island and find a race of giant cannibals called Laestrygonians. Odysseus narrowly escapes being eaten for dinner but during their escape they are trapped in a harbour and the ship is pummelled with rocks. Once again they narrowly escape becoming someone's dinner.

## Choices (Circe)

The ship lands on a forested island. Odysseus spots rising smoke and lifts the crew's spirits by providing them with a wild stag. The next day, lots are drawn to decide which of two groups will investigate the smoke. The half of the crew led by Eurylochus go to investigate. They find a house and the men are invited to eat by a mysterious but beautiful woman, the goddess Circe. She turns the men into pigs – all but Eurylochus, who hides, suspecting a trap. Eurylochus returns to Odysseus and tells the tale but also recommends that they leave the island before it's too late. Odysseus decides not to leave the island out of duty

to his men. He goes to Circe's house and, on his way, is met by the god Hermes who gives Odysseus a special flower that protects him from Circe's magic. He then goes to the house and eats but is not transformed. Circe surrenders to him and he makes her take a vow before accepting her help and hospitality. He insists that the men be returned to their original form. However, she is only able to partially grant this demand. The men have to make the choice – to turn from pig to man or not – for themselves. Most of the men choose to return to man-form, but some remain as pigs in order to remain happy. Odysseus and his men then accept her hospitality as atonement for her wickedness.

## Under The World (The Underworld)

After they have stayed with Circe for a year, Odysseus tells her that they must leave. She is sad but advises them to travel to the Underworld to retrieve information about their future from the blind prophet Tiresias, who lives there. They follow her directions and arrive in the far north at the meeting place of the five rivers of the Underworld where they perform the necessary rituals to open the gates of Hades. Odysseus sees the familiar face of his mother but must first of all speak to Tiresias. When the old man arrives he tells Odysseus a cryptic version of his future that he will need to make sense of as he travels on. Odysseus also sees the dead spirit of Achilles, hero of the *Iliad*. Armed with the new information, the men return to Circe to restock before they set off on the next leg of their journey.

## The Singing Women (The Sirens)

Having returned to Circe, she is able to give more meaning to some of Tiresias' words. She tells them more about 'the siren women' (The Sirens) and 'the horror of the rocks' (Scylla and Charybdis). She offers Odysseus some advice not revealed in this story: not to tell the men about Scylla so as not to frighten them into the whirlpool created by Charybdis. He plans to pass the Sirens by plugging the men's ears with wax to stop them hearing the Sirens' song. However, Odysseus himself has his men lash him to the mast so that he can hear the music and live. One of the men has his wax come loose and he swims off never to be seen again. Eventually they pass by unharmed but for the pain Odysseus receives for having heard the music whilst being unable to follow it.

## The Horror of The Rocks (Scylla and Charybdis)

Soon after having escaped the Sirens they arrive at the narrow pass that houses two monsters, one on either side. On the left hides Scylla, the six-headed monster that feeds on the unsuspecting crew members of passing ships. On the right is a whirlpool created by the monster Charybdis that sucks the water into it. If they steer to the left, six men will be lost, but if they steer to the right, the entire ship will be lost. This presents a dilemma: the ship or just six men? However, there is a more difficult dilemma for Odysseus: should he follow Circe's advice not to tell the men of Scylla, therefore reducing the risk of losing the entire ship to Charybdis through the men's fear? They pass through but at some considerable cost; but what the cost is depends on the decision made.

## Clouded (The Cattle of Helios)

They arrive at the island of Thrinacia through the fog, and Eurylochus persuades Odysseus to allow them to stay there for a time. Odysseus is not happy but relents. He makes them promise to only eat what Circe gave them because he recognises this as the island of Helios from which he was warned by Tiresias not to feed on the cattle there. They do as he bids. But the weather remains bad and they are trapped on the island. They run out of food and become hungry. Odysseus goes inland to pray to the gods for help. He falls asleep and Eurylochus takes the opportunity to speak to the men once more. He delivers a powerful speech that persuades the men to eat the cattle on the island but to promise to Helios to expiate for their transgression when they get home. Unfortunately, Helios doesn't see it like that and, when they eat the cows, the Sun god makes Zeus agree to punish them. The weather gets better and they leave the island but a cloud gathers over them and they are sunk by one of Zeus' lightning bolts. Odysseus is able to survive using his resourcefulness but he is drawn back to Charybdis by her current. He just manages to save himself by hanging on to the fig tree that grows over the whirlpool. She spews the water back up and he escapes. He is cast adrift once more.

## The Concealer (Kalypso)

After nine days of drifting at sea, Odysseus eventually arrives at the island of Ogygia, the home of Kalypso. Unconscious, he is brought to her and she

nurses him back to health and promptly falls in love with him. When he awakes she explains that he is her 'guest' but it quickly becomes apparent that he is really her prisoner. She demands that he love her and become her husband. He refuses and longs to return home. Kalypso tries to tempt him by providing him with his every want and need and even offering him immortality, but Odysseus still refuses. He is 'a guest' of hers for a total of seven years. His escape, however, is secured by Athena, while Poseidon is away. Hermes is sent to inform Kalypso that she must release Odysseus. She builds him a boat and he eventually leaves. Poseidon returns and is furious to find Odysseus free, so he releases a storm that sinks his boat and nearly drowns him. He is saved by some sea-nymphs sent by Athena and brought safely to the shores of the Phaeacians.

## The Storyteller (The Phaeacians)

Odysseus wakes to find himself on the beach of the Phaeacians but he doesn't know where he is, and, what's more, he has lost his memory. He is found by Nausicaa, the daughter of King Alcinous. As he can't remember his name, she gives him one – Leetho – and takes him to her father insisting that Alcinous take care of him. Odysseus – known to everyone there as Leetho – is taken in and looked after. He is invited to the Phaeacian Games that are put on in his honour, where he surprises everyone, including himself, when he takes the prize for the discus.

Later, a banquet is thrown with Odysseus (Leetho) as the guest of honour. They are entertained by Demodocus, the bard, who goes on to regale them with many tales, one of which is a story unknown to the listeners, about how Odysseus tries to evade being sent to fight in the war. Leetho is incensed at Odysseus' behaviour, not knowing that it is his own. Demodocus finishes his tale with the story of the Wooden Horse of Troy (which happened nearly 20 years earlier, now!) When Odysseus hears this story being told to him, his memory suddenly returns and he weeps. When Alcinous sees him weeping he stops Demodocus and Odysseus explains who he is and continues the story to prove it. The authenticity of his account persuades them that he is telling the truth and Alcinous vows to do all he can to return Odysseus to his homeland. The following day Odysseus is escorted to Ithaca and this time he arrives there, only to be met by a mysterious woman (actually Athena, who is there to disguise him for the trials ahead).



# The Stranger (The Return Home)

Odysseus makes his way, disguised by Athena as a stranger from Crete, to the hut of Eumaeus, his old, faithful servant. After sailing the seas in search of his father, Telemachus is also sent by Athena to the hut of Eumaeus. Penelope has finally come to the end of weaving a tapestry that she has been secretly unpicking in order to delay marriage to one of the suitors, so she can stall no more. The three men all meet at the hut but Odysseus remains disguised until Eumaeus is sent on to the city to tell Penelope of her son's return, at which point Odysseus reveals his true identity to Telemachus. The two of them hatch a plan, and then Telemachus, Eumaeus and Odysseus head to the palace. When they arrive, Odysseus is recognised by his old hunting dog, Argus – presumably by his scent – but the excitement kills the dog.

Penelope announces that there will be a competition to fire an arrow from Odysseus' special hunting bow through an alignment of axes: the winner will become her next husband. The stranger (Odysseus) meets Penelope and tells her that he has news of Odysseus and that he is alive. The stranger is washed by Eurycleia and she recognises a wound Odysseus received as a boy, but she remains silent. Nobody has the strength to string the bow until the 'stranger from Crete' is allowed to try. Odysseus strings it and then turns it against the suitors. Telemachus, Eumaeus and Odysseus kill all the suitors and traitors. Penelope refuses to believe that the stranger is Odysseus until he proves his identity to her by his knowledge of a hidden olive tree built into the frame of their wedding bed. All are finally – and joyfully – reunited.