

Odyssey Speedrun: 24 Books in 60 Minutes

by Audrey Dubois



Odysseus Overcome by Demodocus' Song, by Francesco Hayez

Character List

Greek Chorus: Narrators of the show, as well as extras (Suitors, Sailors, Phaeacians, and Scholars).

Odysseus: Hero of the Trojan War, on his way home. Complicated.

Athena: Goddess of wisdom, who comes to Odysseus's aid. Often appears in disguise.

Poseidon: God of the sea, legendary for his temper and grudge against Odysseus.

Telemachus: Odysseus's son, a doormat until inspired by Athena.

Penelope: Odysseus's wife, a genius trapped by society.

Antinous: One of Penelope's simps, a frat boy.

Eurymachus: One of Penelope's simps, a frat boy. More #toxic than Antinous.

Nausicaa: Princess of Phaeacia. Doesn't like doing laundry.

Eumaeus: A swineherd in Ithaca; the first to see Odysseus return home.

Nestor: King of Pylos, a horse girl.

Menelaus: King of Sparta, a gossip.

Mentor: Olive oil salesman. Hero of another play.

Polyphemus: Giant cyclops, good with sheep.

Leukothea: Very minor sea goddess.

Demodocus: Poet-bard of Phaeacia. Only singing role in the show.

Aeolus: A kind helpful king.

Circe: A witch. See Madeline Miller for more nuance.

Tiresias: A prophet. Dead, but sometimes you can still hear his voice.

Calypso: A passive-aggressive immortal goddess.

Helios: Sun god.

Morpheus: Dream god.

Pronunciation Guide

Aeolus: ay-OH-luss
Antinous: ANN-tin-ohss
Athena: ah-THEE-nah
Calypso: cal-LIP-soh
Circe: SIR-see
Demodocus: deh-MAH-doh-kuss
Eumaeus: you-MAY-uss
Eurymachus: yer-RIM-ack-uss
Helios: HEEL-lee-ohss
Ithaca: ITH-ah-kah
Laertes: LAY-er-teez
Leukothia: lew-KOH-thee-ah
Menelaus: men-eh-LAY-uss
Mentor: MEN-tore
Morpheus: MORE-fee-uss
Nausicaa: NOW-zee-kah
Nestor: NEST-ore
Odysseus: oh-DISS-ee-uss
Penelope: pen-ELL-oh-pee
Phaeacia: FAY-AY-shah
Polyphemus: pol-lee-FEE-muss
Poseidon: poh-SAI-dun
Pylos: PIE-lowse
Telemachus: tel-LEM-ack-uss
Tiresias: tie-REE-zee-uss

Odyssey Speedrun: 24 Books in 60 Minutes

Scene 0: Prologue

GREEK CHORUS appear onstage.

GREEK CHORUS / NARRATORS

Welcome to Odyssey Speedrun:

24 Books in 60 Minutes.

The gods have bid us tell you these vital instructions:

Should a monster wreak havoc on our performance, you may flee to the exit closest to you.

Do not "smoke" or "vape" upon the premises, or Hephaestus will see fit to punish you.

A feast awaits in the main hall, as do commemorations of our fabled journey.

The words of the gods have been delivered.

And now:

We sing.

Muse, help us find the beginning of our story.

Tell us about Olympus, the home of the immortals,

Their goblets of ambrosia and golden hearth.

Show us grey-eyed Athena

And Poseidon, father of the sea.

Exit GREEK CHORUS.

Scene 1: The Telemachy

Curtain opens. Athena and Poseidon are watching The Mortal World on TV up on Mount Olympus.

ODYSSEUS (V/O)

Hello? Hello? Am I to have no friends left in this world?

ATHENA

Come on, Poseidon. How can you not love Odysseus?

POSEIDON

He deserves his fate, Athena.

ATHENA

But he's my favorite! You're so heartless!

POSEIDON

You're the goddess of wisdom but you're acting like a baby!

ATHENA

Joke's on you! I never WAS a baby!

POSEIDON

Look. Everyone blames the gods when something goes wrong. They never think about how we are OBLIGATED to punish them because they're making bad decisions. Such as, the decision to defy our will.

ATHENA

Obviously. Nobody could possibly disagree with that. But, look. You took away his boat and all his companions and left him on a tiny, deserted island. He's totally learned his lesson by now.

ODYSSEUS (V/O)

If only I could just see the smoke rising from my homeland, I would be happy!

ATHENA

Look at him! He's so pathetic! He's like a sad little kitten in a cardboard box! Plus, he gave you all those great sacrifices during the Trojan War. Remember that?

POSEIDON

Listen, I WANT to like Odysseus. But Odysseus stabbed my son in the eye.

ATHENA

You're still mad about that?

POSEIDON

Of course I'm still mad! He only had one! You should be glad Odysseus isn't dead. He's just eternally separated from his home and everyone he loves!

ODYSSEUS (V/O)

How lucky my kinsmen who died by the bronze-tipped spears of Troy. At least they were given the dignity of a funeral.

ATHENA

That's it. I'm stepping in.

Athena dons a coat and the mask of Experience, with the help of the GREEK CHORUS.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

I'm Pallas Athena now.

Scene 2: Casa Odysseus

GREEK CHORUS change the scene from Mount Olympus to Casa Odysseus. Exit POSEIDON and ATHENA. Enter ANTINOUS, EURYMACHUS, and PENELOPE. PENELOPE weaves at her loom.

GREEK CHORUS / NARRATORS

Odysseus, sacker of cities, hails from Ithaca.

He left to lead the charge in the Trojan War.

The war was won!

The Greeks were victorious!

Hurrah!

His kingdom waits for their victor's return...

But twenty years have passed,

And Odysseus shows no sign of coming home.

Left behind: his wife, Penelope,

And son, Telemachus.

After each delivers their last line, the GREEK CHORUS members switch from narrator mode to become background suitors.

ANTINOUS

Hey babe! Come watch me lift this ox.

EURYMACHUS

Look at me! I can crush this ouzo can against my skull!

They both fail at these pursuits, then flock around PENELOPE's loom.

ANTINOUS

So, Penelope, have you decided which of us you're going to marry?

PENELOPE

I still have a husband.

EURYMACHUS

Do you, though?

ANTINOUS

It's been twenty years.

EURYMACHUS

Time to move on.

PENELOPE

Sorry. I appreciate the offer, but I must finish weaving this burial shroud for Laertes first.

EURYMACHUS

Of course, babe. Respect.

ANTINOUS

Out of curiosity, when do you think it will be done?

PENELOPE

Oh, soon, probably.

ANTINOUS and EURYMACHUS turn away to have a private conversation. While their backs are turned, PENELOPE frantically unweaves the shroud she's working on.

ANTINOUS

She's been working on it for, like, twenty years. How long does it take to weave a shroud?

EURYMACHUS

I dunno.

ANTINOUS

And have you noticed that the shroud seems to be getting shorter when we're not looking? Is that how weaving works?

EURYMACHUS

How would I know? That's, like, chick stuff.

ANTINOUS

Yeah. I wouldn't know either, on account of all the testosterone.

Enter TELEMACHUS with an empty milk jug.

ANTINOUS, EURYMACHUS, and SUITORS are distracted by some kind of flip-cup game.

TELEMACHUS

Mother, these guys are the worst. They keep drinking all the milk, and then putting the empty jug BACK in the shady brook.

PENELOPE

I know, Telemachus sweetie. Hopefully your father will be back soon to slaughter them all.

ANTINOUS

Woo! Three points!

PENELOPE

At least they're dumb as a bag of rocks. I can't believe NONE of them have figured out I've just been weaving and unweaving the same section for years.

TELEMACHUS

But you can't just let them stay forever! They'll keep eating all your food and using your money to buy sandals!

EURYMACHUS

(to SUITORS)

You like these Nikes? I bought them from Nike herself.

PENELOPE

Oh, Telemachus... how do I put this delicately for a sensitive child's ears... if I refuse to remarry, they will dump us in the river and say there has been a terrible accident.

TELEMACHUS

Oh, I wish my dad would just walk through the door right now to chase them out!

A knock is heard.

TELEMACHUS

(running to the door)

Dad? Is that you?

PENELOPE

(running to the door)

Odysseus?

Enter ATHENA, still in her Experience persona.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

Why hello there, fellow mortals! Spare a meal for a stranger?

TELEMACHUS

You're not trying to marry my mom, are you?

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

Definitely not.

TELEMACHUS

Come in, then.

EURYMACHUS

And now it's time for the dance party!

Loud party music plays. Either through a speaker system or just a noisy bard.

TELEMACHUS

(shouting to be heard over the music)

I apologize, dear guest. These men are only interested in loud music, loaded nachos, and inheriting wealth they didn't have to work for.

ATHENA and TELEMACHUS move toward the courtyard. The music and noise fade to the background.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

Your voice! Your face! How it resembles Odysseus!

The name Odysseus is like a magic spell. The world becomes still and quiet for a moment.

TELEMACHUS

Wait, you know my dad?

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

Of course! He's my favorite character. I mean, he's my favorite... person. In the Trojan War. Sundays at 8.

TELEMACHUS

Oh my gods! No way! Do you know where he is?

ATHENA

Surely I, a mere human with no supernatural powers, could not know. But I received a prophecy from the gods...

(wink to the audience)

... that you should leave home to seek word from his comrade, Nestor of Pylos.

TELEMACHUS

Oh no. Is this prophecy going to have a lot of names that I can't spell?

ATHENA

Yes, my child. There are even more that I'm leaving out for the sake of time. Now go inform these bros of your plan. If they don't accept, they will incur the wrath of the gods.

TELEMACHUS turns off the music and clears his throat. Even with the word of the gods behind him, he lacks confidence.

TELEMACHUS

(to SUITORS)

Um, hey, guys? This dude I just met said my father's coming back.

EURYMACHUS
Who even is this guy?

TELEMACHUS turns toward ATHENA, like a kid looking to their parent to answer for them.

ATHENA
I'm... his mentor. My name is... uh... Mentor.

ANTINOUS
Oh! Mentor? From the olive oil stand?

ATHENA waves and hides her face, hoping ANTINOUS will not inquire further.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE
Yeah, yeah.

TELEMACHUS
Mentor says my dad can beat up your dad. I mean, my dad can beat up you. So you better knock it off.

EURYMACHUS
Oh yeah? What are you gonna do about it, punk?

TELEMACHUS
Something about incurring the wrath of the gods?

EURYMACHUS
Yeah, right.
(cracking his knuckles)
Boys, let's put him in his place.

ANTINOUS, EURYMACHUS, and SUITORS all simultaneously point their fingers at TELEMACHUS.

ANTINOUS, EURYMACHUS, and GREEK CHORUS / SUITORS
HA!

EURYMACHUS
There's no way the gods would ever side with a scrawny little nobody like you!

ATHENA calls down two hawks, who start slashing at the background SUITORS with their beaks and talons.

GREEK CHORUS / SUITORS

Ouch!

Ow!

My eyes!

How did these get inside?

TELEMACHUS

Oh man! He wasn't kidding!

EURYMACHUS

(sarcastic, with air quotes)

Yeah, yeah, "the wrath of the gods." You know, not every bird is a sign from the heavens. Some of them are just birds.

ANTINOUS

I dunno, man, this one seems pretty unambiguous to me.

TELEMACHUS

All right, here's what we'll do. We'll make a bet. You give me a ship and twenty men. If I find out he's alive, you can stick around until he comes home. If I find out he's dead, I'll let my mother marry one of you.

PENELOPE

Do I not get a say in this?

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

(to PENELOPE)

That's a question for scholars to debate three thousand years from now!

EURYMACHUS

Accepted.

(to ANTINOUS)

Give him your ship, Antinous.

ANTINOUS

My ship? What about your ship?

EURYMACHUS

Mine is too nice to send to certain doom. They don't need a ship with heated seats and tinted windows.

ANTINOUS

Fine. Here's the keys. Jingle jingle.

Exit ANTINOUS and EURYMACHUS.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE
(to TELEMACHUS)
 Great work! You really got them to respect you!

TELEMACHUS
 It didn't feel like I did anything. It was mostly those birds...

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE
 Nonsense! You did that all by yourself! I'll go on ahead. I need to calm the seas for your passage.
(beat, then correcting her slip of the tongue)
 Uh, by praying to the great and wonderful gods, of course!

Beat.

TELEMACHUS
 You're a god, aren't you?

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE
 Noooo. I am merely a mortal person like you.

They both know that TELEMACHUS knows.

Scene 3: Pylos & Sparta

The GREEK CHORUS remove their Suitor caps and take up Sailor oars.

GREEK CHORUS / NARRATORS
 Telemachus travels from Ithaca to Pylos,
 Where King Nestor, Lord of Horses, resides,
 To hear news of Odysseus,
 Sailing on the wine-dark sea.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS and TELEMACHUS
(chanting)
 Wine-dark sea! Wine-dark sea!

Enter NESTOR, wearing a horse girl T-shirt.

NESTOR
 Nice to horse your acquaintance!

TELEMACHUS

King Nestor, you fought alongside my father, Odysseus, during the sack of Troy.

NESTOR

Oh, Odysseus! No man could rival him in cleverness. He was strong as a horse, smart as a horse, and brave as a horse.

TELEMACHUS

You know where he is?

NESTOR

No. Odysseus is also as missing as a lost horse.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

You like horses WAY too much.

NESTOR

But you should ask Menelaus in Sparta. He survived the battle of Troy too.

TELEMACHUS

Great, another name I can't spell.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

(to TELEMACHUS)

I'll write them all down for you.

NESTOR

I will give you three of my best horses for the journey!

TELEMACHUS

No! No horses! Why would we need horses when we're traveling by sea? Keep your horses.

Exit NESTOR, waving goodbye. GREEK CHORUS begin rowing in the opposite direction.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

Telemachus and his sailors leave Nestor and his horses behind,
And instead head for Sparta,
Where Menelaus reigns.
Once again they sail the wine-dark sea.

ALL

(chanting)

Wine-dark sea! Wine-dark sea!

Enter MENELAUS.

MENELAUS

What do you want, peasants?

TELEMACHUS

My dad. Odysseus. Do you know where he is?

MENELAUS

(gossiping, à la "I heard this from my best friend's cousin's next door neighbor...")

Okay, don't tell anyone I said this, but... after the Trojan War, I summoned Eidothea, who told me how to capture Proteus, who told me that he saw Laertes' son on Calypso's island.

TELEMACHUS takes a moment to do the math in his head.

TELEMACHUS

So he's alive?

MENELAUS

I'm just telling you what I heard.

TELEMACHUS

That's great! Let's head back, gang!

MENELAUS

Don't you want to hear how I got from Egypt to Sparta?

TELEMACHUS

Not particularly!

Exit MENELAUS.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

We've received our answer!

Telemachus and Penelope, suffer no longer!

Odysseus is alive!

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

And it's all thanks to Athena's clever advice!

GREEK CHORUS / SAILOR

We could have saved, like, two weeks of sea travel if she had just told us about Odysseus in the first place.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

(to dissenting SAILOR)

Athena, the goddess of wisdom, trusts you to follow the trail of evidence to the proper conclusion. You should be honored.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILOR

Whatever you say, man.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

We should pour out libations to Athena, right? The coolest, smartest, prettiest of the gods, right?
We all love Athena.

TELEMACHUS

(indulging ATHENA's ego)

Sure. We'll pour out libations to Athena.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS, TELEMACHUS, and ATHENA

(chanting)

Wine-dark sea! Wine-dark sea!

Exit SAILORS, TELEMACHUS, ATHENA.

Scene 4: Casa Odysseus Again

Enter ANTINOUS and EURYMACHUS. PENELOPE weaves at her loom, eavesdropping.

ANTINOUS

So, do we know whether Telemachus is actually coming back or not?

EURYMACHUS

Who cares?

ANTINOUS

He left on MY ship. I need it to get back to my horses.

EURYMACHUS

Dude. If you marry Penelope, you won't NEED to get back to your horses! You'll have a whole kingdom's worth of horses!

ANTINOUS

Also, it's weird that Mentor left to advise him, but I just saw Mentor this morning at the agora.

Enter GREEK CHORUS member crossing the stage in a trenchcoat, hat, and mustache, looking similar to Pallas Athena's disguise.

GREEK CHORUS / MENTOR

Heck of a speech from Zeno this morning, am I right?

ANTINOUS

(to MENTOR)

Sure was!

EURYMACHUS

It's probably just a coincidence. Why are you thinking so hard about this? What are you, some kind of nerd?

ANTINOUS

What? No! I'm a jock like you!

EURYMACHUS

Besides, I already have an idea to deal with the kid. We'll just wait here, in front of the house, to ambush him with spears before he even gets to land.

ANTINOUS

Oh yeah! Great idea! Murder is ALWAYS the best solution!

ANTINOUS and EURYMACHUS high five and exit.

PENELOPE

Gods, what am I to do? They're going to kill my son and I have no way to tell him!

Enter ATHENA, still in Pallas garb.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

Weep not! The gods do not want you to waste your tears.

PENELOPE

Wait. Aren't you Mentor, the guy who left with my son?

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

(taking off the mask)

No... I am... it's...

ATHENA snaps toward someone offstage. A member of the GREEK CHORUS hands her the mask of Comfort.

ATHENA / COMFORT
It's me! Your sister, Iphthime!

PENELOPE
Oh. I'm sorry I didn't recognize you. You never come to visit.

ATHENA / COMFORT
As I was saying. Have courage! Your son is guided by Athena, the most powerful and benevolent of the pantheon. She sent me here to tell you this.

PENELOPE
If you actually were sent with the knowledge of the gods, then you must know about Odysseus, too!

ATHENA / COMFORT
Oh ho ho, you're a smart cookie, aren't you? I cannot tell you whether he lives or dies. It is not good to speak of things intangible as the wind.

PENELOPE
So... you won't tell me. But you DO know.

ATHENA
We get it! You're a genius! Smarter than the goddess of wisdom!
(turns to exit, ripping off the costume and mask, muttering)
Ungrateful mortals.

Exit ATHENA.
PENELOPE, ANTINOUS, EURYMACHUS, TELEMACHUS, NESTOR, MENELAUS, and GREEK CHORUS enter and step forward as they say their line.

PENELOPE
Odysseus, please come home.

ANTINOUS and EURYMACHUS
(raising their spears)
Odysseus, we dare you to cross us.

TELEMACHUS
Father, please take the crown of Ithaca once more.

NESTOR
Odysseus, the gentle scholar who calmed Achilles' rage...

EURYMACHUS

Odysseus, the arrogant man with a god complex...

MENELAUS

He cleverly outsmarts his enemies with wits!

ANTINOUS

You mean, he is a deceitful fraud!

GREEK CHORUS / NARRATORS

Odysseus, the fatherly king...

Odysseus, the mastermind of war...

Odysseus, the man of twists and turns...

PENELOPE

Husband...

TELEMACHUS...

Father...

ANTINOUS and EURYMACHUS

Liar...

NESTOR and MENELAUS

King...

GREEK CHORUS / NARRATORS

Are all these stories about the same man?

Let us meet the famous hero whose name is on everyone's lips.

Scene 5: Flashback

PENELOPE, EURYMACHUS, ANTINOUS, TELEMACHUS exit. GREEK CHORUS move aside and back, revealing the crumpled figure of ODYSSEUS, whose entrance was unseen. ODYSSEUS is sitting on the ground, hugging his knees and crying pathetically.

ODYSSEUS

No ship... no friends... no spoils of war... and not even the dignity of a burial!

He freezes as a record-scratch sound effect plays. Enter POSEIDON.

POSEIDON

Yup. That's him. Odysseus. You may be wondering how he ended up in this situation.

GREEK CHORUS / NARRATORS

Fates, grant us the power to turn back time.

Unspool the thread of destiny,

That we might see the beginning of this hero's journey,

Twenty years ago.

POSEIDON uses his godly power (or a remote control) to turn back time. Magical rewind effect with lighting and sound. ODYSSEUS becomes 20 years younger. The GREEK CHORUS become members of Odysseus' crew. ATHENA and POSEIDON look down from Mount Olympus, unseen by the others.

ODYSSEUS

Welp, that's that! The Trojan War is over! We won! Time to get back home in a reasonable amount of time.

POSEIDON

No problem.

ATHENA

Happy to help.

POSEIDON

Don't mention it.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

Shouldn't we stay another night and offer sacrifice to the gods?

That's what Agamemnon is doing.

ODYSSEUS

No. I want no delay in returning to my wonderful wife and son. Surely, the gods will forgive me if I depart immediately without giving adequate thanks.

POSEIDON

What the Hades? When I said "don't mention it," I meant, definitely mention it!

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

(sailing away, chanting)

Wine-dark sea! Wine-dark sea!

ATHENA

Poseidon, don't be angry with them. It's not a great look, but they've had a long ten years.

POSEIDON sweeps her aside with his trident.

POSEIDON

Now, you'll see what an angry god can do.

Thunder and lightning. The ship is cursed.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

We sail on the boundless sea,

Hoping to see our homeland rise over the horizon.

But the only island we find

Is the land of Polyphemus, the Cyclops,

and his herds of fantastic sheep.

Though we have plenty to eat, we're tempted by the promise of even more.

We decide to stop by; who would miss a few lambs?

Enter POLYPHEMUS.

POLYPHEMUS

All right, Cloudy, Fluffy, and Cottonball. Let's go out and get you some nice fresh grass to eat.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

Polyphemus leaves to graze his flock!

His door is open to us!

We dine on cheese and honey!

We surround ourselves with exquisite wool!

This is even better than home!

They do so.

POLYPHEMUS

Ahem. What do you think you're doing?

SAILORS freeze. ODYSSEUS puts on the mask of Woe.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

See how he invents a new persona,

A man who none of us know,

To bargain with this monster.

This is the way Odysseus fights.

ODYSSEUS / WOE

(liar mode activated)

We are Greeks, come here from Troy. After our brave battle, Poseidon cruelly dashed us on these rocks, leaving us stranded.

POSEIDON

What?? There was no "dashing." There was only cursing.

ODYSSEUS / WOE

We've had nothing to eat for days; nothing to offer you in return for your riches.

POSEIDON

You were just gorging yourself on baklava two minutes ago!!

ODYSSEUS / WOE

We beg you, on bended knee, to grant hospitality to a humble guest, as is the custom for all gods-fearing folk.

POSEIDON throws his hands in the air and exits. ATHENA follows.

POLYPHEMUS

Why should I fear the gods? I'm bigger than they are.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILOR

He has a point.

POLYPHEMUS

And I believe it is YOU who broke the law of hospitality when you entered my home, took my possessions, and stole my food.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILOR

He's got you there as well.

ODYSSEUS glares at his sailors.

POLYPHEMUS

But, I think we can strike a fair deal.

ODYSSEUS / WOE

We can?

POLYPHEMUS

Sure. For every bite of cheese and honey you've taken without permission, I take a bite from one of YOU.

The GREEK CHORUS bring on a large Violence Discretion Shield to cover POLYPHEMUS and two members of the GREEK CHORUS. Limbs fly everywhere. ODYSSEUS and other sailors look on, horrified. When the GREEK CHORUS remove the Shield, there are two plastic Halloween skeletons where the sailors had stood. POLYPHEMUS is holding a couple of femurs.

POLYPHEMUS

Mmm. I'm full. I haven't eaten that well since last Dionysia.

(pointing to Odysseus)

What is your name?

ODYSSEUS / WOE

Who? Me?

(thinking fast)

My name is Nobody.

POLYPHEMUS

Well, Nobody. I'm going to require a power nap, but you're next when I wake up for a midnight snack.

POLYPHEMUS falls asleep. ODYSSEUS removes the mask of Woe, distraught. He holds one of the skeletons.

ODYSSEUS

No! Two of my favorite men are dead!

GREEK CHORUS / SAILOR

You don't remember their names, do you?

ODYSSEUS

(does not remember their names)

I will choose not to say their names out of respect.

ODYSSEUS notices Polyphemus's shepherd's crook and brings it to his sailors.

ODYSSEUS

Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

GREEK CHORUS / SAILOR

Abandon all hopes of getting home and become sheep farmers?

ODYSSEUS

No! Let's just stab him. Help me sharpen this.

ODYSSEUS sets to work sharpening the crook. He cannot hear the following soliloquy.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

Odysseus, you are the wild card.

Just as likely to rely on complicated psychological gambits

As brute force and dumb luck.

If we could sum you up in one word, it would be...

It would be, well...

It would be something quite untranslatable.

ODYSSEUS

Give me a hand!

Some GREEK CHORUS assist with the crook. Others retrieve the Violence Discretion Shield.

ODYSSEUS

This is for Sailor 1 and Sailor 2!

ODYSSEUS aims the crook at sleeping POLYPHEMUS. The Shield raises. As ODYSSEUS stabs with a roar, viscera splatters out from behind the Shield.

POLYPHEMUS

Ow! My eye! Is that you, Nobody?

ODYSSEUS

Yes! Never forget the name Nobody!

POLYPHEMUS

Help! Help! Nobody is killing me! Nobody has plunged a stake into my eye!

GREEK CHORUS laughs. The Shield is removed. POLYPHEMUS is groping about on the ground, blind.

ODYSSEUS

Quick! Grab that wool and pretend to be a sheep!

ODYSSEUS and the GREEK CHORUS outfit themselves in cutesy lamb costumes. One by one they pass by POLYPHEMUS, presenting their fluffy heads to be petted and baaing adorably.

POLYPHEMUS

Where is Nobody? Where is he? The only ones here are my beloved flock.

ODYSSEUS

(quietly)

Okay, now run. Run run run.

ALL

(chanting, faster and quieter than usual)

Wine-dark sea wine-dark sea wine-dark sea

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

We run until we safely return to our boat.

Two men we left behind as nothing but bones,

But the rest remain whole for now.

And so we, the sackers of Troy, sail onward for home,

Never looking back—

ODYSSEUS

(calling back to POLYPHEMUS)

Hey idiot!

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

Never looking back!

ODYSSEUS

(calling back to POLYPHEMUS)

If you didn't want to get blinded, you shouldn't have eaten your own guests! It's called karma!

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

Stop!

We're already free.

Let's not make things worse.

ODYSSEUS

You thought I was a nobody! If anyone asks who took your eye, tell him it was—

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

Don't say it!

ODYSSEUS

It was Odysseus! The city-sacker! Son of Laertes, king of Ithaca!

POLYPHEMUS

If you don't turn around right now, I'm going to tell my dad.

ODYSSEUS

Oh really? And who is your dad?

POLYPHEMUS

Poseidon. God of the Sea.

POSEIDON rises up with a flair of blue lighting.

POSEIDON
How's my baby boy?

POLYPHEMUS
Not great. Hard day.

POSEIDON
Oh, poor kiddo. What can I do to make it better?

POLYPHEMUS
Make it so that Odysseus will never get back home. Or, if it is fated that he will see his family, then let him get there late, with no honor, with no ships, having caused the death of all his men, and let him find even more trouble in his own house.

POSEIDON
You got it, son.

POSEIDON snaps his fingers. It is done. ODYSSEUS faces away from the audience, his expression unreadable.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS
Who is Odysseus?
He has the wit and wiles that rival the great inventors,
But when it comes to low-hanging fruit,
He can't doesn't have the brains to resist taking a great big bite.
Odysseus, genius tactician, strategic mastermind,
Dooms us all with his needless boast.

Scene 6: Bad Things Keep Happening, For Some Reason

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS
Odysseus's pride marks the beginning of a terrible sequence.
First, he loses three men to the land of the Lotus Eaters...
Then three more to the cannibalistic Laestrygonians.
King Aeolus grants him a bag filled with North Wind.

AEOLUS
This will give you the speed to reach Ithaca in record time. Be careful not to unleash it in the wrong direction!

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

We unleash the wind in the wrong direction,
 And the boat is twice as far from home.
 We crash upon the island of Circe, the witch.
 We, once again, cannot keep our hands off food and treasure.

CIRCE

Everyone who takes from my island is punished for their greed. I turn them into pigs.

GREEK CHORUS / PIGS

Twenty more sailors lost.
 Twenty pigs gained!

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

Circe tells us to go to visit the prophet Tiresias...
 Only problem is, he's dead.
 We steer our ship toward the Underworld, Hades,
 And summon his ghost.
 Tell us the future, wise Tiresias!

TIRESIAS

Your memory of home is sweet as honey, but the journey to get there will be bitter.

ODYSSEUS

I already knew that.

TIRESIAS

You can get home, but not if you don't control the impulses of your men. Greed will be your destruction.

ODYSSEUS

I already knew that too. What kind of prophet are you?

TIRESIAS

When you meet the Golden Cattle belonging to Helios God of the Sun, do not harm them, or disaster will befall your entire crew.

ODYSSEUS

That one's new. Thank you for the simple instructions!

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

We sail directly into the seas of the Sirens,
 Whose voices hypnotize even the strongest wills,
 And lure them into the sea to drown.

Are their songs really so beautiful?
 We can't tell you.
 We don't know.
 We plug our ears with clay before reaching their waters.

GREEK CHORUS mimic plugging their ears.

ODYSSEUS
 Not me! I need to hear their song.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS
(can't hear)
 What?

ODYSSEUS
(raising his voice)
 I'm different! I'm special! I'm going to be the only one who has heard the Sirens and lived!

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS
 Why would you put yourself in unnecessary danger,
 When there's an easy way out?

ODYSSEUS
 And leave unknown information lying in the open like that? I don't take well to mystery. I want to learn their tricks.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS
(plugging their ears)
 We plug our ears with clay before reaching their waters,
 Except Odysseus,
 Who ties himself to the mast to be sure he doesn't leap into the waves.

ODYSSEUS
 I hear the song that no one else has ever heard, and never will.

ATHENA appears.

ATHENA
(to audience)
 Not even you. You think just because you're in the audience, watching from a distance, that you're immune to the rules of the gods?

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

(unplugging their ears again)

After we are safe from the Sirens, the strife doesn't end.

Our next battle is Scylla, a six-headed sea monster,

And Charybdis, an unstoppable typhoon.

The ship must navigate the narrow path between two equally unappealing options.

"Between a rock and a hard place."

Fall too far one way or the other,

and death is certain.

ODYSSEUS

What is this? Some kind of metaphor?

ATHENA

Yes.

ODYSSEUS

Is there no other way out? Can I kill the monster, or navigate around the two?

ATHENA

No, you fool! You're used to always wriggling your way out of things, finding a loophole, taking a third option. It's time for you to learn to surrender to the gods.

ODYSSEUS

I thought I was your favorite.

ATHENA

Favorites have to remember that they are mortal too.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

We try to aim our ship through that narrow gap of safety.

We really do.

But sometimes,

No matter how much you plan ahead,

Even when you do everything right,

You can't win.

Mind over matter doesn't apply

When the gods are in play.

ODYSSEUS

Another metaphor?

ATHENA

You got it.

Exit ATHENA.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

We lose six men, to the six heads of Scylla.
But on the other side of that terrible strait,
A sun-touched land that seems to glitter and glow!
It's beautiful!
It's magical!
It's covered with golden cows!

ODYSSEUS

Remember what Tiresias said—

TIRESIAS

When you meet the Golden Cattle belonging to Helios God of the Sun, do not harm them, or
disaster will befall your entire crew.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

We are too hungry to listen!
We slaughter the animals and gorge ourselves on sun-cow steak!

ODYSSEUS

Oh no.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

We've been living on soldier's rations for years!
This meal is worth any price we may have to pay.

ODYSSEUS

Here he comes.

HELIOS

For your crime of failing to follow simple instructions, I strike your boat with lightning and scatter
it in fragments across the wine-dark sea.

*The pieces of the boat fly apart. The remaining sailors and GREEK CHORUS sink to the bottom
of the sea, leaving ODYSSEUS the only one standing.*

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

(sadly chanting, as sink to the bottom of the sea)
Wine-dark sea... wine-dark sea...

GREEK CHORUS / NARRATORS

Odysseus manages to cling to the mast,
 Drifting by the whims of the current for nine days,
 Landing on the island of dreadful, divine Calypso,
 a charming nymph of the sea.
 Calypso falls in love at first sight.
 Does Odysseus fall back?
 Who's to say?
 He does kiss her.
 But that doesn't mean he loves her.
 The island offers everything he could ever need.
 Except a way out.
 One year passes.
 Then two.
 Then four.
 Then seven.

Exit GREEK CHORUS.

Scene 7: Calypso's Island

ODYSSEUS is sitting on the ground, hugging his knees and crying. This image should mirror the one where we first met ODYSSEUS. Enter CALYPSO and ATHENA.

CALYPSO

Hey, Odysseus, wanna play Mario Chariot with me?

ODYSSEUS

Noooooo! I miss my wife!

CALYPSO

How about some ambrosia and nectar? It's fresh!

ODYSSEUS

(throwing a sandal at CALYPSO)

Nooooooooo! Leave me alone!

ATHENA

(gesturing between CALYPSO and ODYSSEUS)

So... this isn't working.

CALYPSO

Yeah, genius, I figured that out.

ATHENA

Well, what do you expect? He fought in the Trojan War for ten years, and then spent seven years trying to get home. Anyone would probably be a little frustrated after that.

CALYPSO

I just don't get it. I save his life, I offer to make him my immortal husband, and he has the gall to get MAD at me.

ATHENA

Odysseus doesn't aspire to eternal life.

CALYPSO

My island has literally everything. What could he possibly want?

ATHENA

To leave.

CALYPSO

He owes me his life!

ATHENA

(gently, as though coaxing a friend through a breakup)

Girl, you need to let him go.

CALYPSO

Gods forbid a woman do anything.

ATHENA

Plus, this order comes directly from the gods, so...

CALYPSO

Yeah, okay, I know a threat when I hear one. You can leave now.

Exit ATHENA. CALYPSO sits next to ODYSSEUS.

CALYPSO

Hey.

ODYSSEUS

What do you want?

CALYPSO

Stop crying. I'm setting you free.

ODYSSEUS
Really?

CALYPSO
If you really want to go back to your "homeland" and "see your son again," then goodbye. Take this raft and these provisions from my island and leave already.

GREEK CHORUS enters, throws an inflatable pool raft and some "car snacks" (like a box of Welch's fruit snacks and Cheez-Its) at ODYSSEUS, and exits.

ODYSSEUS
This must be a joke. You might as well condemn me to death! You want me to float across the gulf alone on a rudderless raft? Even the most stable schooners sped on by Zeus could not succeed on such a journey!

CALYPSO
Oh my gods, relax! I'll speed you on with a gentle eastward wind, okay? I'm generous AND I'm prettier than your wife. Don't thank me or anything.

Exit CALYPSO, leaving ODYSSEUS alone with his raft.

Scene 8: #GamersRiseUp

GREEK CHORUS / NARRATORS
Would it be so easy to get home?
Not with Poseidon at the helm.
To the gods, the lives of mortals are like a game.
And in any game, there must be a winner.

Exit GREEK CHORUS. Enter ATHENA and POSEIDON, and a chess board.

ATHENA
Poseidon.

POSEIDON
Athena.

ATHENA
You still resent Odysseus?

POSEIDON
I do. And you still care for him?

ATHENA

I do.

POSEIDON

My, my, my. The will of two gods, pulling one man's fate in opposite directions. On which side of the line will the tug-of-war end?

ATHENA

(extending a chess piece)

Let's decide now.

POSEIDON

(taking the chess piece)

It must be exhausting always rooting for the antihero.

As they play, the GREEK CHORUS moves ODYSSEUS, the boat, and his environment. Be as abstract as you like with this sequence.

GREEK CHORUS / NARRATORS

When the gods play a game, they are not bound by mortal rules.

They use all their power to bend the outcome toward their victory.

ATHENA

(moving a chess piece forward)

I send a gentle eastward wind to speed Odysseus on his journey home.

POSEIDON

(moving a chess piece forward)

I smash the boat apart into tiny pieces with a massive wave. That was easy.

From this point on, POSEIDON and ATHENA add game pieces that are not chess pieces to the game board. They are making up their own rules.

ATHENA

(laying down a playing card)

I... I send a water nymph!

POSEIDON

What?

ATHENA

(adorning her card with a Monopoly hotel)

And she gives him a magic scarf!

Enter LEUKOTHEA.

LEUKOTHEA
(to ODYSSEUS)

Tie this around your waist and you shall not drown. Fate decrees you will survive.

ODYSSEUS
Can fate decree that I will stay dry?

LEUKOTHEA
No.

ODYSSEUS
(world-weary)
Okay.

LEUKOTHEA disappears.

POSEIDON
(grumbling)
Cheater.

ATHENA
There! After three days of floating, he will reach land. I win.

POSEIDON
(laying down Scrabble tiles)
Not so fast. Because my waves are guiding him right toward Phaeacia. It's all steep cliffs and jagged stones as far as the eye can see.

ODYSSEUS
Oh man. Those are some steep cliffs and jagged stones.

POSEIDON
No matter where he lands, his brain ends up dashed on the rocks.

ATHENA
Wait... wait... Ah ha! I got it! Phaeacia has a river, right?

POSEIDON
Right...

ATHENA
And every river has a mouth!

POSEIDON

Dang it!

ATHENA

(rolls a cup of dice)

I send a current that sweeps Odysseus toward the mouth of the river, where he can safely float inland!

ODYSSEUS crawls out of the water.

ATHENA

(places a game piece)

And now he can sleep beside the river.

POSEIDON

(counters with another game piece)

Nope. He'll freeze to death.

ODYSSEUS shivers.

ODYSSEUS

So cold.

ATHENA

(moves her piece back)

Fine. Then I send him into the woods.

Something— a glimmer of light, the tail of a squirrel— attracts ODYSSEUS toward the forest. He slowly starts to approach the source.

ODYSSEUS

Ooh, the woods.

POSEIDON

(preparing his move)

Yesss... great idea...

ATHENA

Wait. No. You're agreeing with me. This is a trap. If he goes into the forest, you're going to send the wolves after him!

A snarl from the forest scares ODYSSEUS back.

POSEIDON

Check. I'd love to see how you get out of this one.

ATHENA observes the seemingly impossible layout of the board and all its disparate playing pieces and tries to figure out a way to win.

ATHENA

I... shake a branch.

ATHENA places another random playing piece on the board. A branch above ODYSSEUS shakes. A few leaves fall down on top of him.

POSEIDON

That's it? That's your game-ending move?

ATHENA

Wait for it...

ODYSSEUS

Ah ha! I can make a blanket of leaves!

ATHENA

(fawning)

Isn't he the smartest? He picks up on all my signs.

POSEIDON

(throwing his pieces aside)

Last time I play against the goddess of strategy.

ATHENA

I've got to go down and meet him! Ooh, which disguise should I wear?

ODYSSEUS pulls a leaf blanket over himself and remains onstage. Exit POSEIDON, fuming, and ATHENA, gloating.

Scene 9: Princess Castle Time

As the GREEK CHORUS narrates, they litter fabric across the stage for NAUSICAA's room.

GREEK CHORUS / NARRATORS

Odysseus lands upon the isolated island Phaeacia,

Ruled by Princess Nausicaa,

Who receives a visitor before the sun rises.

Enter NAUSICAA, asleep. ATHENA now bears a mask of a young woman, picking up pieces of clothing in a basket.

ATHENA / BONHOMIE
Girl! Wake up! Your room is a mess!

NAUSICAA
(*sleepily*)
Whaaaaa? Who are you?

ATHENA / BONHOMIE
(*can't remember the name; it's not in the book either*)
It's me! Your best friend! Daughter of the famous sailor Demos! Bundle up your clothes! We're going to the river!

NAUSICAA
Can we at least have breakfast first?

ATHENA / BONHOMIE
No! What if your future husband finds out you have dirty chitons on every chair? We need to do laundry RIGHT! NOW!

NAUSICAA
Why are you willing to die on this hill all of a sudden? You're acting weird, Doris.

ATHENA / BONHOMIE
Yes! Doris! That was her name! Follow me!

ATHENA leads NAUSICAA over to where ODYSSEUS is sleeping.

ATHENA / BONHOMIE
Now go alllll the way over to the other side. That's where the best clothes-washing water is.

NAUSICAA
It's all the same water, Doris!!

NAUSICAA trips over ODYSSEUS, sleeping in his leaves.

ATHENA / BONHOMIE
Oh golly! What a surprise! A man! Who could have predicted this! I'm shocked!

NAUSICAA glares at ATHENA.

NAUSICAA
(to ATHENA)

You could have just told me there was a guy here and I would have come down.

ODYSSEUS
(tired to the point of loopy)

Wow. You're tall. When I was in the war, I saw a tree that looked like you once. Sorry I'm covered in leaves. It took me three days to swim here. I miss my wife. Oh, hi, Goddess Athena.

ATHENA / BONHOMIE
The poor man! He is delusional! We must get him to the palace right away!

NAUSICAA
I thought you wanted me to do laundry, "Doris."

ATHENA / BONHOMIE
This sad little guy clearly needs your help!

NAUSICAA
(pushing ODYSSEUS toward her palace)
Fine. I know better than to disobey the whims of a god.

ATHENA / BONHOMIE
Surely you do not mean me!

Enter GREEK CHORUS as Phaeacians.

GREEK CHORUS / PHAEACIANS
Odysseus arrives in Nausicaa's kingdom,
Who welcome any guests and fear the gods.
Athena pours unearthly charm upon his shoulders,
So he looks not like a man, but like a god.

ATHENA pours tinsel on ODYSSEUS and then exits.

GREEK CHORUS / PHAEACIANS
How he shimmers, like the sun!
How he shines, like a star!
Surely no one so glorious could be mortal.

NAUSICAA
You sit here. You're getting dinner and a show.

Enter DEMODOCUS with a lyre.

DEMODOCUS
Here's Wonderwall.

NAUSICAA
Skip.

DEMODOCUS
Drops of Jupiter.

NAUSICAA
Skip.

DEMODOCUS
She Will Be Loved.

NAUSICAA
Ugh, skip. Odysseus, why don't you pick what we listen to?

ODYSSEUS
Do you have anything about the Trojan War?

DEMODOCUS
Here's The Trojan Horse Anecdote.

DEMODOCUS
(sung; to the tune of How to Save a Life by The Fray)
Where did I go wrong? I lost a friend
'Cause I attack when I should defend
We couldn't capture Troy by force
So I learned how to build a horse
Where did I go wrong? We crept inside
And took our pony for a ride
Greatest of the Greeks, the death we bring
Then I learned, how to fool a king

As the song goes on, ODYSSEUS begins weeping, then sobbing loudly.

GREEK CHORUS
(to ODYSSEUS)
Why does the story make you weep, stranger?
Did you lose somebody at Troy?
Your father?
Your brother?
Or a dear friend?

NAUSICAA

You must try to be strong, just like Odysseus!

ODYSSEUS

But Princess, I am Odysseus.

GREEK CHORUS / PHAEACIANS

Gasp!

NAUSICAA

Oh! To think we have a legendary hero in these halls! You have been on quite an odyssey.

ODYSSEUS

You named the concept of a really long and annoying journey after me?

GREEK CHORUS / PHAEACIANS

We must pile him high with treasures!

We must speed him on our sturdiest ship!

Send our strongest soldiers to guard him!

NAUSICAA

(aiming her voice heavenward)

And if the gods happen to be watching this act of generosity to a hero of war, may they see fit to reward us. Let's bring him home! To the wine-dark sea!

GREEK CHORUS / PHAEACIANS and ODYSSEUS

(chanting)

Wine-dark sea! Wine-dark sea!

ODYSSEUS yawns and falls asleep in the boat.

GREEK CHORUS / PHAEACIANS

Now he sleeps like death, and does not stir.

He remembers nothing of his pain.

Let's not wake him.

He's had a hard twenty years.

GREEK CHORUS gently leave him on the beach of Ithaca, careful not to wake him. ALL exit save ODYSSEUS.

Scene 10: A Dream?!

MORPHEUS, the winged bringer of dreams, enters, and pours down a dream upon ODYSSEUS. Another set of GREEK CHORUS appear as modern scholars, as do PENELOPE and TELEMACHUS. A gavel cracks.

SCHOLAR 1

Now we will open the floor to debate. The question being: Who is Odysseus?

SCHOLAR 2

Despite being one of the prototypical heroes of modern culture, Odysseus shows no sign of the traditional hero's journey.

SCHOLAR 3

Indeed. Throughout his travels, he shows no sign of growth or change and learns nothing.

TELEMACHUS

You cannot judge a life by how well it suits the modern narrative arc. This ain't Percy Jackson's Lightning Thief.

SCHOLAR 2

Moreover, his actions are often contradictory.

TELEMACHUS

If Odysseus's characterization is inconsistent, it's only because PEOPLE are inconsistent!

PENELOPE

Indeed. You are like the gods; judging these people without ever having to interact with their world or live their lives.

SCHOLAR 3

What is a reader if not the god of the text?

SCHOLAR 1

Regardless of the intent, you must agree that Odysseus does not learn anything over the course of the book.

SCHOLAR 2

He never learns from his mistakes.

TELEMACHUS

Do you have insight into his mind? How can you say he learned nothing?

SCHOLAR 2

The only insight we get is through his dialogue— which he litters with lies!

SCHOLAR 3

What was it that Socrates said? "The unexamined life is not worth living"?

PENELOPE

(to *TELEMACHUS*)

Who's Socrates?

TELEMACHUS shrugs.

SCHOLAR 1

Even until the end, his pride remains intact.

SCHOLAR 1

Indeed, one could argue many of the actions taken by the protagonist could be viewed as morally bad.

SCHOLAR 2

Should we, as readers, be rooting for him? After all, he is arrogant, deceptive...

SCHOLAR 3

His defining character traits, if he can be said to have any, are all negative.

SCHOLAR 1

Are we sure he's a hero?

SCHOLAR 2

Is he good or is he evil?

PENELOPE

He's human!

This last outburst shatters the dream. SCHOLARS, PENELOPE and TELEMACHUS all suddenly vacate as ODYSSEUS wakes up.

Scene 11: Back 2 Ithaca

ODYSSEUS

Wha? Where am I? Where did all the Phaeacians go? They promised to bring me home to Ithaca, and stranded me on a strange island instead. Am I to be abandoned again? All this wealth is meaningless to a man alone.

ATHENA appears in a new mask, a young shepherd boy. When ODYSSEUS sees her, he puts on his own mask: an arrogant Cretan warrior, the mask of Pride.

ATHENA / INNOCENCE

Hello mister!

ODYSSEUS / PRIDE

You there, shepherd boy! What is this place?

ATHENA / INNOCENCE

(toying with him)

Stranger, you must be a foreigner or an idiot, if you don't know this famous country. Have you never listened to the songs or read the epic poems? Even as far away as Troy, people have heard of Ithaca.

ODYSSEUS / PRIDE

But... this cannot be Ithaca! Where is Blockbusterion? Radios Shackos? Where is Benys? This looks nothing like the kingdom I remember.

ATHENA / INNOCENCE

Can you honestly say that YOU have not changed in twenty years?

ODYSSEUS / PRIDE

Why do you speak as if you know me?

ATHENA / INNOCENCE

Who's to say I don't?

ODYSSEUS / PRIDE

(liar mode activated; this persona is defensive and wild)

I am a soldier from Crete. Shipwrecked by storm winds, with spoils I won from Troy. My commander's son tried to take my treasure from me, so I slaughtered him. Let that be a warning to anyone who thinks they can get the best of me!

ATHENA / INNOCENCE

(laughing)

You love fiction so much, you refuse to stop even in your own home.

ODYSSEUS / PRIDE

What?

ATHENA removes her shepherd boy mask.

ATHENA

You failed to recognize me. I am Athena, daughter of Zeus.

ODYSSEUS removes his own mask.

ODYSSEUS

Goddess, even the smartest man can't recognize you if you insist on wearing disguises.

ATHENA

You don't know it, but I have always protected you through all your hardships.

ODYSSEUS

Protected me? I've had nothing but bad luck since the day I left Troy! Everything I loved was taken from me twice over! I asked the gods to free me from my pain and heard no answer!

Goddess of deceit, goddess of trickery... how do I know you're not lying to me now?

ATHENA

You're alive. You're home.

ODYSSEUS

I thought I was your favorite.

ATHENA

You know why you're my favorite? When I lay out an elaborate scheme with a lot of moving parts, you always follow it. No hesitation.

ODYSSEUS

Have I been playing right into your hands this whole time, Goddess? Am I a toy to you?

ATHENA

No! You always rise to the challenge when everyone else will look right past it. You are the only one who understands the way my mind works. We're two of a kind.

ODYSSEUS

Two of a kind. You compare me to a god?

ATHENA

You twist my words like a champion.

ODYSSEUS

I learned by your example.

ATHENA

You know, your son is the same way.

ODYSSEUS
You know my son?

POSEIDON (O/S)
This is what you get for aiding my enemy!

A loud noise is heard— whatever a ship turning to stone sounds like. The GREEK CHORUS shout incoherently.

ODYSSEUS
What was that?

ATHENA
Nothing for you to worry about. Poseidon is angry at the Phaeacians who brought you here, so he turned their ship to stone.

ODYSSEUS
For helping me, they are punished?

ATHENA
Yes. To Poseidon, you are a criminal. They are guilty of aiding and abetting.

ODYSSEUS
Whole armies are like figurines of clay to you.

ATHENA
If you don't believe that I cared for you all your life, then let me prove it to you now by arming you with knowledge. Your son and wife are safe, and still have faith in your return. But if the men of the kingdom see Odysseus arrive, they will slaughter you on sight.

ODYSSEUS
So what do you propose?

ATHENA
(holding up an old man outfit)
What else? A disguise.

ODYSSEUS dons the mask of Wisdom. EUMAEUS enters with a pig.

EUMAEUS
All right, Peppa, let's go.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

Athena! That's the swineherd from the estate! I haven't seen him in twenty years!

ATHENA puts on her mask again.

ATHENA / INNOCENCE

Oi there, swineherd!

(to ODYSSEUS)

You stay here. I have one more thing to do.

Exit ATHENA.

EUMAEUS

Who was that?

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

(with irony)

Nobody.

Lights down on ODYSSEUS and EUMAEUS; the scene follows ATHENA instead.

Scene 12: Whatever Happened To Telemachus?

Enter GREEK CHORUS, dressed as sailors of TELEMACHUS.

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

Are you wondering what happened to Telemachus?

He is still on his way home from the house of Menelaus,

To tell his mother that his father is alive,

And the suitors still lie in wait to kill him as soon as his ship crosses the horizon.

ATHENA / INNOCENCE

Telemachus! Some advice for you.

TELEMACHUS

How did you get aboard my ship, strange shepherd boy?

She swaps out her shepherd mask for the Mentor mask.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

Forgive me. This successful journey has got me feeling young again!

TELEMACHUS

Oh, there you are, Mentor. I was wondering where you ran off to. Considering we're on a boat.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

Listen close, Telemachus. You're going to want to take the long way around and dock your ship on the other side of the island.

TELEMACHUS

That will take an extra three weeks! You must have a really good reason to avoid the coastline like that.

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

Prophecy. From Athena.

TELEMACHUS

Say no more! Set a course for the long way around!

ATHENA / EXPERIENCE

Oh— and another tip from Athena. Go visit the swineherd before you enter the palace, okay?

TELEMACHUS

Weirdly specific, but I won't question it!

TELEMACHUS and GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

(chanting)

Wine-dark sea! Wine-dark sea!

GREEK CHORUS / SAILORS

As Telemachus sails back to Ithaca,
The long way around,
Odysseus bonds with his old swineherd
And new friend, Eumaeus.

Exit TELEMACHUS and GREEK CHORUS.

EUMAEUS

So you actually MET Odysseus?

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

Yes. We fought together back in the Trojan War.

EUMAEUS

What was he like?

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

One time, we were on a stakeout below the walls of Troy. As the night turned cold, I realized I had forgotten my cloak. I told Odysseus that I would surely freeze to death.

EUMAEUS

Did he share his own, like a good leader?

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

No. He woke up the rest of the guys and said, "Listen! I was sent a dream by the gods! Someone needs to send a message back to base camp!" Our messenger took off his heavy purple cloak to sprint to the tents. Odysseus handed me the other guy's cloak and I fell asleep.

EUMAEUS

He... lied?

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

He crafted a story.

EUMAEUS

You make him sound deceptive.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

No, he was clever. The point is that he's the total package: brave, smart, and a heart of gold. Honestly, I'm kind of jealous of Odysseus.

EUMAEUS

Either way, it shows Odysseus was kind. He was always nice to me, even though I'm just the pig guy. Shame he's dead now.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

Wait. What?

EUMAEUS

Odysseus must be dead. Who ever heard of a journey from Troy to Ithaca that took twenty years?

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

I bet— no, I *guarantee* that Odysseus will arrive at his palace before the moon is full again.

EUMAEUS

I no longer trust strangers. So many have lied and pretended to bring news of Odysseus, but none have been truthful so far.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

I would NEVER lie! If Odysseus doesn't return before Apollo's feast day, then I'll exile myself from Ithaca!

EUMAEUS

It would be a miracle if he did, though. Things have been pretty bad here.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

What? Why, what's wrong at the palace?

Suddenly, loud music and bros shouting are heard from offstage.

EUMAEUS

Well, since Odysseus is probably dead, a bunch of suitors are hanging around the house.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

What!!!

EUMAEUS

Yeah, they're all hoping Penelope will marry him.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

If I were Odysseus, which I'm not, this wouldn't happen.

EUMAEUS

She's still working on the burial shroud, though.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

(standing up)

How dare they! I'm gonna go up to the palace right now and arm wrestle every one of them!

EUMAEUS

(holding ODYSSEUS back)

Nooo! You can't! You're too old!

Into this struggle walks TELEMACHUS.

TELEMACHUS

Eumaeus! Stop beating up that poor old man!

EUMAEUS

Telemachus! You're back!

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM
Telemachus? That was my son's name.

TELEMACHUS
Hello there, elderly beggar. Why don't you come up to the house with me? We've got plenty for you to eat and you can borrow some of my dad's clothes.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM
Really? You'd invite me as your guest?

TELEMACHUS
Hey, the gods love guests.

EUMAEUS
(whispering)
Watch out, Telemachus. This one's cuckoo like a coconut. He really believes Odysseus is on his way to Ithaca as we speak.

TELEMACHUS
Really? You believe he's on his way?

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM
I'd stake my life on it.

TELEMACHUS
You don't seem the type who would lie for a reward.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM
No, I suppose I don't.

TELEMACHUS
Join me. It's the feast of Apollo tonight. We'll have a huge banquet, and space at the table for you.

*ODYSSEUS and TELEMACHUS go toward the house. EUMAEUS remains at the barn.
Enter ATHENA and POSEIDON, watching unseen by the other characters.*

ATHENA
It's happening! I did it! Odysseus is reunited with his son! He's finally going home!

POSEIDON
Great.

ATHENA
Aren't you going to curse him?

POSEIDON
No.

ATHENA
That's not like you.

POSEIDON
He's going home with the deaths of his entire crew on his conscience. He missed his son's entire childhood. His regrets cannot be reversed. This man's heart is so heavy, I'm surprised he didn't sink. If I killed him now, his suffering would end, and all that work would be wasted. Let his victory be a hollow one.

ATHENA
A pyrrhic victory is still a victory. I need to see this through to the end.

POSEIDON exits. ATHENA remains. ANTINOUS and EURYMACHUS appear in the same positions we last saw them, crouching in wait for the arrival of TELEMACHUS. ANTINOUS starts nodding off.

EURYMACHUS
Wake up! We need to keep our eyes peeled! Telemachus could come at any minute.

ANTINOUS
Maybe he crashed my boat on an island or something and drowned.

An eagle with a wild dove in its talons flies by. An omen sent by ATHENA, of course.

ANTINOUS
Did you see that? The eagle, symbolizing victory, seizing the dove, the symbol of peace?

EURYMACHUS
Shut up about bird auguries! No one cares about bird auguries!

TELEMACHUS and ODYSSEUS come up behind them.

TELEMACHUS
What are you doing?

ANTINOUS and EURYMACHUS hastily hide their spears.

ANTINOUS
Spearing dolphins.

EURYMACHUS
Olympics training.

EURYMACHUS
Wait, did you just say spearing dolphins?

ANTINOUS
Who's this old guy?

TELEMACHUS
A guest.

ANTINOUS
He's sooo old, he looks like he could be Zeus's father.

EURYMACHUS
Haha yeah, he was probably going to high school during the Clash of the Titans.

ANTINOUS and EURYMACHUS high five. The GREEK CHORUS enter as suitors during this conversation.

TELEMACHUS
The gods love hospitality, so we should—

EURYMACHUS
As if the palace needs more beggars taking up all the resources for free!

ANTINOUS
Yeah, that's OUR job!

EURYMACHUS elbows ANTINOUS in the ribs. ODYSSEUS takes off his mask, but faces out to the audience, not to any of the other characters.

ODYSSEUS
(telling the truth for once)
You call me a beggar? I was a king, once. I had a beautiful palace, a wonderful wife, a beloved son, and enough wealth to feed a nation. But the gods took it all away from me. They sent me to war, they capsized my ship, they killed my men, they abandoned me to die... But I always knew I would see my home again. I can sense it; I'm almost there now.

ANTINOUS
Yeah right! You're just a liar and a thief!

ANTINOUS tries to hit ODYSSEUS. ODYSSEUS stands there like a rock. ANTINOUS hurts his hand.

ANTINOUS

Oh my gods! This old man's abs are SOLID!

ODYSSEUS replaces his mask.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

You should leave. Odysseus is on his way and he's even more ripped than me. The gods have decreed it.

GREEK CHORUS / SUITORS

Yeah, right!

The gods have decreed NOTHING!

Get out of here, stranger!

Go beg at someone else's door!

EURYMACHUS

(sarcastic)

No, wait, he's right! I have an intuition that this man has come to Odysseus's house through the god's will. See how a heavenly light shines from his head? Oh, wait, no, never mind, it's just because he's bald!

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM

If you're still here when he arrives, there WILL be blood. I would leave if I were you.

ANTINOUS attempts to sneak offstage. ATHENA lays a hand on his shoulder.

ATHENA

Nope. You are fated to die in this house by Odysseus's hand.

ANTINOUS

Spoilers!

ATHENA

Sorry for being omniscient.

Scene 13: Murder Murder Murder

Enter PENELOPE.

PENELOPE

Oh! I just had the weirdest dream. There were 20 domestic geese, peacefully grazing in the front lawn... and then a wild eagle swooped down and ripped out their throats, one by one.

ANTINOUS

Do you think... WE'RE the geese? And Odysseus is the eagle?

EURYMACHUS

For the last time! Not every bird-related scenario is an omen!

PENELOPE

Telemachus, why don't you go off to bed? It's getting late.

TELEMACHUS

Mom, it's 3 in the afternoon.

PENELOPE

You're a growing boy.

TELEMACHUS

I'm 32.

PENELOPE

And if you hear screaming, just ignore it.

TELEMACHUS

I— wait, what?

A door closes on TELEMACHUS. PENELOPE turns to address the crowd of suitors.

PENELOPE

You want to marry me. I am the prize. So let me set a contest.

ANTINOUS

What sort of contest?

PENELOPE

An archery contest.

PENELOPE retrieves a silver bow and arrow.

PENELOPE

I will not marry any man who is lesser than my husband. This bow belonged to Odysseus. Whoever can string the bow and knock down those targets will be my husband.

GREEK CHORUS all try in turn to hit the target... but none of them can even lift up the bow. ANTINOUS attempts as well, but his hand is injured from trying to punch ODYSSEUS.

EURYMACHUS
Let a real man try!

EURYMACHUS succeeds in lifting up the bow, but then cannot manage to nock the arrow.

EURYMACHUS
Ugh! This makes me so mad! I don't even care about Penelope at this point, I just can't believe this proves we are weaker than Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS / WISDOM
Perhaps I might have a turn? I have no need for a wife, I just want to see if I can still recapture my glory days.

ODYSSEUS strides up to the bow and lifts it effortlessly. Perhaps he shifts his mask onto his forehead to see better. His persona shifts dramatically from old beggar to buff warrior.

ODYSSEUS
Playtime is over.

ODYSSEUS easily strings the bow and aims it at the target. ALL onstage are shocked when it hits.

ODYSSEUS
And now, I will hit a target no man has ever hit.

ODYSSEUS slowly aims his arrow at ANTINOUS. ANTINOUS is drinking from a cup, his back to ODYSSEUS. ALL others freeze in terror.

ODYSSEUS
May Apollo guide my arrow.

The GREEK CHORUS moves the Violence Discretion Shield in front of the scene. After the Shield is in place, we hear the arrow fly, ANTINOUS shout, and SUITORS gasp. Violence Discretion Shield lowers. The tableau is the same, except the arrow has been loosed, and ANTINOUS is lying on the ground, his cup spilled. After a moment, EURYMACHUS steps toward ODYSSEUS.

EURYMACHUS
Hey! You just killed the most eligible bachelor in Ithaca! Do you have any idea how many sheep he owns? You're going to have to pay for that!

ODYSSEUS

No, I don't. I'm Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS rips off his mask and ragged cloak. ATHENA once again sprinkles tinsel on him to make him look more godlike. He coughs. ALL immediately go from scorning to supplicating. PENELOPE smiles.

PENELOPE

I knew it.

GREEK CHORUS / SUITORS

Odysseus!

You have returned!

Our noble king!

Hero of Troy!

We have missed you.

EURYMACHUS

Oh Odysseus! In that case, rejoice, for you have slain the one responsible for all this. Antinous planned to kill your son and become king of Ithaca. Now that he is dead, all your troubles are over! You have nothing to worry about!

The GREEK CHORUS starts bringing the Violence Discretion Shield onstage as Odysseus points his bow and arrow at Eurymachus.

EURYMACHUS

None of us would dare hurt you!

(notices the Violence Discretion Shield)

Hey, what is that? What do we need that for— OW OW OW

Once the Violence Discretion Shield is in place, unspeakable violence occurs. The Violence Discretion Shield lowers. EURYMACHUS is on the ground.

ODYSSEUS

I hate liars.

GREEK CHORUS / SUITOR

Get me my spear!

PENELOPE

Looking for this?

PENELOPE aims the spear and ODYSSEUS points his arrow at another suitor. The shield raises before their weapons fly. This time, the Shield stays up as ODYSSEUS kills all the suitors. Noises of cartoonish murder are heard. When the Shield reveals the scene again, ODYSSEUS is standing alone with PENELOPE. PENELOPE strides toward him, mindless of the bloodshed, and picks up his mask.

PENELOPE

It is you.

ODYSSEUS

It is me.

PENELOPE

I was in constant dread that some man would fool me with his lies. There are so many dishonest clever men.

ODYSSEUS

This is the dishonest clever man you married.

A few of the SUITORS, EURYMACHUS, and ANTINOUS start sitting up on their elbows to talk to ATHENA. They are unseen by ODYSSEUS and PENELOPE.

ANTINOUS

This is... a happy ending?

ATHENA

Of course!

GREEK CHORUS / SUITOR

But the tyrant is home free!

ATHENA

The lovers are reunited.

EURYMACHUS

He killed everyone, and you call him a hero!

ATHENA

(speaking to the audience as much as to the SUITORS)

I don't need to remind you. He's the protagonist. The main character. He's the one you root for, despite his flaws, because you see a part of yourself in him. You're stubborn. You're impatient.

You bite off more than you can chew. And you make choices based on what you think is important. Have you ever found yourself up against an obstacle, and on the other side is something you want so desperately it hurts? What do you do? Do what is right, or do what you need to do to win? We love Odysseus because we ARE Odysseus.

GREEK CHORUS, EURYMACHUS, and ANTINOUS

(murmuring, staring at their selves and each other)

We are Odysseus...

The SUITORS gather around ODYSSEUS, like a retinue of ghosts over his shoulder and around his ankles. Enter TELEMACHUS.

TELEMACHUS

Hey, did something fall? I thought I heard something—

(notices the carnage)

Oh my gods! Who are you?

Characters from ODYSSEUS's journey reappear.

EURYMACHUS

A liar?

NAUSICAA

A hero?

POLYPHEMUS

A thief?

EUMAEUS

A king?

DEMODOCUS

A warrior?

ANTINOUS

A coward?

ATHENA

A mastermind?

POSEIDON

A fool?

TELEMACHUS

Is that... the old guy from dinner? I'm seeing things!

Pause. All wait for ODYSSEUS to confirm who he is.

ODYSSEUS

Hi, Seeing Things. I'm Dad.

ALL laugh, including the SUITORS. ODYSSEUS, PENELOPE, and TELEMACHUS embrace as a family. ATHENA joins as a fourth member of the family. The other three are apprehensive.

The End