

ACRISIUS

FULL LENGTH GREEK MYTHOLOGICAL PLAY

BY JETHRO DYKES

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Acrisius, a play by Jethro Dykes

Characters

Acrisius, King of Argos
Polydorus, his adviser
Danae, daughter of Acrisius
Perseus, grandson of Acrisius
Zeus
Athene

Zara, daughter of Ares

Simonides, politician
Inachus, politician
Nikos, politician
Ares, politician
Sames, politician

Jana, servant
Guards
Servants

Vurda, warrior
Garcha, warrior

Thanthusa, noble woman
Thana, noble woman

Attendants
Politicians

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Introduction

King Acrisius rules the Kingdom of Argos, with the help of Parliament. During his reign, Parliament grows strong and demands greater powers. Eventually, they vote on whether Acrisius should be allowed to rule: if Acrisius does not find a legitimate heir, they will impeach him.

The daughter of Acrisius is Danae. Because she is female, she is not regarded as worthy of ruling.

Acrisius desperately tries to marry, and then to produce a son. In the meantime, Danae is visited by Zeus, and the two of them enjoy conjugal relations. Their offspring is born. A boy, called Perseus.

Act One, Scene One

Acrisius sits at Court in Argos. He ponders silently until Polydorus enters.

POLYDORUS

A King must organise his Argonauts.

ACRISIUS

In Parliament, democracy is king.

POLYDORUS

Assemblies meet tomorrow; all your state
Awaits the judgement over Argos' law.

ACRISIUS

At times, I sit beside the sea; the waves
Are gentle, soothing words and melody.
The Government's decree will matter less.

POLYDORUS

I feel assured your Kingship takes the vote.

ACRISIUS

Democracy is young and full in strength.
We kings will faint against our constitution.
The vote will pass; I'll make contingencies.

POLYDORUS

We are prepared for such fateful outcomes.

ACRISIUS

Be guest of royal favour, by all means.
I care not for your vaunting, slothful ways.

POLYDORUS

A busy man keeps not the ways of sloth.

ACRISIUS

Then what!? You spend your time on clothes and food.

POLYDORUS

I advise the King! Twenty long years and service.

ACRISIUS

Democracy advances; so grateful.
What other tricks and things that do delight?

POLYDORUS

You must concede that democratic means
Are vital in the lifeblood of the kingdom.
Be sure to catch the progress of them all.

Simonides enters.

ACRISIUS

Ah, Simonides, what news do you bring?

SIMONIDES

The vote's tomorrow. I am instructing votes.

ACRISIUS

I think perhaps to leave them be; to swing
The vote might be construed unjust or biased.

SIMONIDES

And what of nobs opposing monarchy?

ACRISIUS

They have their rights as goodly Argonauts.

SIMONIDES

Your kingship under threat, a royal lessening.

ACCRISIUS

There may be ways to win the people.

SIMONIDES

My lord, it merely needs a little coaxing.

ACCRISIUS

They're Argonauts; some even noble blood.
What suggestion gives us rapid scope?

SIMONIDES

Incentivise, financialise.
Prepare to bribe.

ACRISIUS

A dangerous path; discovery no less.

SIMONIDES

I shall begin.

He exits.

POLYDORUS

He could induce destruction on the King.

ACRISIUS

He has not acted under my command.

Scene Two

POLYDORUS

Results are in. Unhappy news received.

ACRISIUS

Then speak. Enlightenment arrives at last.

POLYDORUS

He reads aloud.

‘The Argonaut Assembly has voted:
The law on Instant Primogeniture.
Unless Acrisius can produce a son;
Within two years, he shall forfeit his kingdom.
The Argonauts secure their rightful King.
Both strength and wisdom must and will prevail.’

ACRISIUS

So much for bribes from loyal Simonides.
I counted not, but wished for lenient votes.

POLYDORUS

We can rely on military might.
The army follows unsuggestibly.

ACRISIUS

To use the army? Fatal for all sides.
Produce an heir is all that’s now required.

POLYDORUS

My Lord, you are unmarried. There are few

Such likely candidates for your affections.

ACRISIUS

Then contact all the Greek and Turkish states!
There must be many royal queens on offer.

POLYDORUS

At once, my lord.

(pause)

I might suggest a local bride; a surer
Bet than Greek or Eastern gold Princesses.

ACRISIUS

And what about 'such likely candidates'?

POLYDORUS

Indeed, they're few. But Argonauts are here.
I will contact the local noble houses.
Fear not, the King Acrisius deems respect.

ACRISIUS

I care not for respect, but only love.

Scene Three

The next day, Acrisius sits down for supper. Jana brings him food.

ACRISIUS

A gentle thanks. A man is appetite.

JANA

Polydorus ordered healthy snacks.
Mere fruit and nuts without the tasty treats.

She exits. Acrisius is about to eat when Simonides enters.

SIMONIDES

Good news; they have accepted bribes. A vote
Now favours our direction; status quo.

ACRISIUS

Alas, too late. Bribery proves ineffectual.

SIMONIDES

Perhaps the vote's inaccurate or false:
Suggest recounting votes accumulated.

ACRISIUS

Even now, a bribe may slump on miracles.
Please join for food and drink, meantime.

Simonides sits down and eats. He quickly gags and collapses to the floor. Acrisius tends to him. Simonides is choking to death.

ACRISIUS

By Zeus! Forgive this man!

Attendants rush in but too late. Simonides is dead.

Poisoned! I should have eaten for my fate.

ATTENDANT

No doubt was meant for you, the King of Argos.

ACRISIUS

A servant of democracy? - They kill.
Bring Jana: the servant served the fruit and nuts.

Attendants push Jana into the chamber. She struggles.

So speak. Or similar fates await their turn.

JANA

They ordered me to poison all your snacks.

ACRISIUS

Ordered?

JANA

I know not names. They're renegades, outlaws.

ACRISIUS

Why would they kill the King of Argos?

JANA

I know much less than it appears.

ACRISIUS

And yet you know much more than we.

JANA

They trust not in the vote against the King.
Presuming less success, they rush for victory.

ACRISIUS

We will imprison you for now. Please go.

JANA

Perhaps I can repay your claim.

Scene Four

Danae sits alone in her bedroom. She is visited by Zeus.

DANAE

I always wished for rains of golden dust.
And yet this being is not unshapely.

ZEUS

Pray, little queen and sit yourself at calm.

DANAE

I care not for artful words or gestures.

ZEUS

I comfort you, as all the Argonauts
Surge and move around your tender body.

DANAE

Believe I am a Princess, nonetheless.
(*calling*) Polydorus!? Are you there at once!?

ZEUS

He cannot hear; such Gods' have ways to silence.
I comfort you again, to make you strong.

DANAE

And is it strength you give, or do you take?

ZEUS

I comfort. Whatever else I make believe.

They hold each other tightly.

DANAE

I am impressed by mighty deities.

ZEUS

I bring Olympus; acting with my heart.

DANAE

Please, Prince, I sense a power in you, loving.

ZEUS

Acrisius might not have his rightful heir.
His age precludes his generative heart.
And you are fecund, wanting, heating.
I grant you destiny and lasting fame.

The lights go down.

Act Two, Scene One

Two politicians talk in central Argos.

NIKOS

You ignorant fool! To kill Acrisius!

INACHUS

Survival is his grander skill, cunning.
For Simonides fell, somehow, instead.
The matter's less; the vote has passed, we're free.

NIKOS

Alert Acrisius? That path subtracts success.

INACHUS

He may produce a rightful heir. We must
Attend necessities outside control.

NIKOS

I'll not have moves.

INACHUS

Democracy may wither ere it grows.

NIKOS

You are a politician. Where's your strength
To argue, coax, cajole, manipulate?

INACHUS

The time suggests much stronger measures, or
A way to permanent our rightful gains.

NIKOS

Acrisius reigns outside of Parliament.

They exit.

Scene Two

It is around nine months later and Danae has given birth to Perseus at the Palace. Acrisius is alone until Polydorus enters.

ACRISIUS

You trouble me with your entrance.

POLYDORUS

I bring the gladest tidings: you are the
Grandfather of Argos; all its greatest King.

ACRISIUS

My mood deceives my gradual senses. What
Is it that you say? Speak 'fore my ears.

POLYDORUS

Your daughter is a Queen of Zeus. Her son
Is born to Argos; one day, he'll be King.

ACRISIUS

And me, a Grandfather, when I wanted none.
I wish to be father; much a simpler wish.

POLYDORUS

I still rejoice. It is a happy day.

ACRISIUS

And what's his name? I must - I should be pleased.

POLYDORUS

His name is Perseus. A goodly boy.

ACRISIUS

Yes, an aptly name.
Bring Danae and her shining Perseus.

Danae enters with Perseus in her arms.

POLYDORUS

Behold! Acrisius line is good and true.

ACRISIUS

Be quiet! Such sycophantic terms are vile.

(pause)

Now let me look upon this sweetest Perseus.

Danae hands Perseus to Acrisius.

DANAE

He's just like you, Papa, but very gentle.

ACRISIUS

How Zeus pursued your soul - I do not know.
He did not ask my hand or seek a father's
Blessing, or even think to 'quest a dowry.

DANAE

We are not married, father. Zeus will act
In any way that divination leads.

ACRISIUS

Mere Lord of Sky, Olympus, Fate and all
Else that lies between the ends of Earth.
He follows not the rules of matrimony.
(softly) Dear Zeus, what magic secret works for you?
So Danae, why would Zeus choose you, my daughter?

DANAE

I prayed for children and one entered life.

ACRISIUS

(softly) Perhaps I'll do the same.
Then we must celebrate. Polydorus –
Arrange a dance for guests and noblemen.
This Perseus must be given royal trimmings.

Scene Three

One month later, there is a grand ball at the Palace. Many grandees and high ranking Argonauts are in attendance.

POLYDORUS

How is Lord Perseus?

DANAE

He is well.

POLYDORUS

I am glad –

He is interrupted by Nikos, who is drunk.

NIKOS

You look so splendid robed, how much for that?

He tugs on Polydorus' costume.

POLYDORUS

This is inherited from ancestors.
And not for sale, nor apt for bribery.

NIKOS

One can be bought. No one's above the law.

POLYDORUS

I'm loyal. Service was my chancery.
My Lord Acrisius is my true vocation.

NIKOS

(sobering up)

He is an honest King and one admired.
Yet politics is now democracy.
All Kings are tyrants in their people's eyes.

POLYDORUS

I care not for the Argos citizens.

NIKOS

Times alter man's perceptions – status quo.
I caution your complacency; content.
The people lack such state of mind, stillness.

POLYDORUS

My life is following Acrisius' life.

Inachus approaches.

INACHUS

Forgive my learned colleague; he is drunk.

POLYDORUS

At once, my Lord, continue with the ball.

Inachus pulls Nikos away.

INACHUS

Arouse not their suspicions or their senses.

NIKOS

I do not understand. You are aggressive.

INACHUS

I am indeed but not to give alarm.

NIKOS

You wish to murder those who block your aims.
I simply wish for democratic causes.

Nikos pushes Inachus, accidentally spilling wine over Inachus.

INACHUS

You idiotic fool! Disgracing us!

POLYDORUS

My Lord. There's no necessity for rage.

INACHUS

Please fetch a servant or a cleaning slave.

NIKOS

You are what volatility may bring.

They part. Polydorus approaches Acrisius, followed by Vurda and Garcha.

POLYDORUS

My Lord, allow my introduction here.
The noble Vurda and her loyal Garcha.

VURDA

It is my final long-awaited pleasure.

GARCHA

I, likewise, to meet such grandiose King.

ACRISIUS

Please act not quite so formal with a King.

They all smile.

And let my royal hand touch both your hearts.

He kisses their hands.

POLYDORUS

Thus Vurda and her Garcha are both fighters.

ACRISIUS

What battle tales have you both? Recount.

VURDA

We fought the dreaded Hydra in the east.
And even helped to bring the Fleece once home.

GARCHA

Such trifle woes! We fought Medusa's head!
(pause)
I brag our female strength admittedly.
We triumphed not. The Gorgon's undefeated.

VURDA

Survival is our delicate adept.
We saw those men turn stone, then turn to dust.
Our instinct told us run and hide, befall.

ACRISIUS

And wisely have you acted, Vurda, Garcha.
My warrior days are distant memories;
Admitting fighting prowess, long ago.
I practise kingship although not cleverly.
My people wish to vote me out. They call
Democracy the newest, subtlest form.

VURDA

A soldier never speaks their mind: Listen:
Orders are followed: Never single thoughts.

Polydorus approaches with two noble women.

POLYDORUS

Allow my introduction once again.
I may present Argonaut Countesses.

Thanthusa and Thana step forward.

ACRISIUS

At last! A chance to meet the real talent!

VURDA

My Lord! Myself and Gurcha may suffice!

ACRISIUS

I know. I know. Yet you are noble fighters.
Not ladies of the lounge, or warming chamber.

POLYDORUS

(quietly) They say democracy is subtle!...
My Lord. Thanthusa's daughter of a Count.
And Thana is a wealthy noble woman.

ACRISIUS

I'm glad credentials will be credited.

Vurda and Garcha storm off.

THANTHUSA

I always wanted this to touch a King.

She holds out her hand.

THANA

Likewise myself, a gentle, gracious subject.

She holds out her hand and Acrisius takes both.

ACRISIUS

A real pleasure in meeting you at last.
Which noble families produced yourselves?

THANTHUSA

My Lord. My father's famous Kanthenes.
He owns much property in central Argos.

THANA

My Lord. My father too is really rich.
He is the famous thinker, Moxenes.

ACRISIUS

A thinker? How does he earn his finances?

THANA

He wrote so many tomes; a selling poet.

ACRISIUS

My kingdom has become extraordinary.
I always thought that poets were mere paupers.

THANA

They often are. Yet when they make their monies...

ACRISIUS

And Kanthenes? Is he a selling point?

THANTHUSA

Perhaps. A prudent one for princely deals.
He primes his market and his poignant price.

ACRISIUS

Then democracy's in able hands.
Perhaps I'll abdicate and save us pennies.
Meantime, you'll both dine with me soon enough.

THANA

A pleasure. Eating with a King is fine.

ACRISIUS

The pleasure's mine.

Scene Four

Acrisius has been summoned to the Argonaut Parliament. Acrisius stands in the centre, surrounded by politicians.

ARES

The law of instant primogeniture
Has set a claim on time; you are threatened.
Please state your progress with a rightful heir.

ACRISIUS

It shall not be long 'fore an heir arises.
We make a marriage with all royal trimmings.

ARES

And have you found prospective righteous bride?

ACRISIUS

Patience is my strongest vital asset.

ARES

The Argonauts are not quite so permitting.

ACRISIUS

I am a righteous ruler; heir or not.

ARES

Not in the eyes of Argos' multitudes.

ACRISIUS

And the army; reluctantly, I admit.

ARES

Advise a civil war? Unnecessary.

ACRISIUS

Then give me time. The law can be delayed.

ARES

No time for kings who shirk their sovereign duties.

ACRISIUS

Easier said than done. Princesses ne'er plenty.

ARES

Then find someone who will.

Acrisius exits the Parliament, followed by his advisers. There is a melee and crowds swarm around Acrisius. There is a shout. Acrisius has been stabbed. He crawls out from under the mass. Sames rushes to help him.

SAMES

Dear Lord, take hands and follow me.

Sames pulls Acrisius and hauls him off stage. They exit. The crowd disperses.

Scene Five

Acrisius lies resting in his hospital bed.

ACRISIUS

I feel the stretch of seeping onerous blood.

SAMES

The Furies judge as they see fit.
Your body surges forward, lest you doubt it.

ACRISIUS

Your optimism matches only mine.

SAMES

A little rest, and onwards on your feet.

ACRISIUS

What now?

SAMES

The killer has been found. A trial awaits.

ACRISIUS

His name?

SAMES

Unknown. Remembering nought. Hypnotized.

ACRISIUS

And why?

SAMES

Despite the passage of such laws that will
Allow renewal of your royal dynasty -
Provided thus the Son and Child be born –
There are such killers that may flinch at nothing.

ACRISIUS

Why do you care? You are a politician.

SAMES

Not all ourselves denote democracy.

ACRISIUS

I have a grandchild; Perseus, all the same.
Will that not do? He is a stronger son.

SAMES

They have discussed in Parliamentary sessions.
He's not your son; he's divine progeny.

ACRISIUS

And still my blood. What a combination!

SAMES

Suggest you find solace; sojourn, recoup.

ACRISIUS

Some time away? I would not eat, forlorn.

SAMES

You need to gather, harness what you will.
There may be trials still to grace your palate.

Sames exits.

Act Three, Scene One

Nikos, Inachus and Ares meet in Central Argos.

INACHUS

The King resists attempts to bring him peace.

ARES

You show such arrogance when all is won.
We have the vote for primogeniture.

INACHUS

We have indeed. What of Acrisius' son?
If he's born, then revolution turns to dust.

ARES

He's not born yet, nor shows no signs of being.
If born, a chance for democratic process.
Democracy, less a revolution.

INACHUS

Indeed, you are such political animals.

NIKOS

You have bestrode yourself for killing.
Acrisius has taken leave of absence.
Perhaps a wise move for yourself. And rest.

INACHUS

Of course! Of course!

NIKOS

He's headed south-

As far away from opportunities.
I warn you not to meddle further.

INACHUS

This is what we truly want.

NIKOS

Your words...

Scene Two

Acrisius is on a rest cure, staying in a wealthy district of Athens. He dines with Polydorus.

POLYDORUS

My Lord, the planetary system's fine.
Almighty Zeus will tender royal wounds.

ACRISIUS

There is a void inside my body-soul.
Zeus takes Danae then returns no compliments.
I am the father of his wife! Please help!

POLYDORUS

Zeus may change his shape at seconds' notice.
One minute, son, one minute, father; Lord.
His works outwit our reason, and our sense.
Assure yourself that Zeus stands by your side.

ACRISIUS

A timely signal; is all I request.

POLYDORUS

You often prided by your inner patience.
Where is it now; that clever, royal nerve?

ACRISIUS

Such patience must be ever truly patient.
A longest sentence but time is passing.

POLYDORUS

Assuredly my trial draws to close.

ACRISIUS

What do you mean?

A servant enters.

SERVANT

My Lord! A richly merchant wishes audience.

ACRISIUS

And what's his name?

SERVANT

He sounds as though a God – his name is Ares.

ACRISIUS

He also sounds a politician! Enter!

Ares enters, disguised as a merchant.

ARES

Acrisius! You are an Argonaut!

ACRISIUS

And you? Are you Athenian, or else?

ARES

I am a wealthy man and born of Athens.

ACRISIUS

What is your vocation or your trade?

ARES

I manufacture chemicals and potions.

ACRISIUS

And is their money in this worthy trade?

ARES

I am a working man, despite return.

ACRISIUS

This is an interesting concoction.

ARES

Does Argos not suffice? Why sojourn here?

ACRISIUS

My wounds are gathering what strengths possess.

ARES

Then let them gather to your mind. Unwind.
You seem an outward, boldly, daring King.

ACRISIUS

Why would you visit with this tiring King?

ARES

I am a wealthy, working, family man.
Two years ago, my daughter left her studies.
She lingers in the world and craves position.
Perhaps, yourself can meet and mentor her.

ACRISIUS

This seems a little too convenient.
I ask for aid from Zeus, then bang! Appearing
On my own doorstep comes a gathering trade.

ARES

I am a merchant, I admit. But pray,
This is no trade, I seek for my own daughter.
There's news abroad that you, yourself, seek solace.

ACRISIUS

And is she trained in airs and royal graces?

ARES

You are a liberal man, less protocol.
You may allow; the rest she'll gather fast.

ACRISIUS

And what must I be clearly signed to do?

ARES

I laboured under thoughts of happy marriage.

ACRISIUS

And what's her name?

ARES

Her mother called her brightly, shining Zara.

ACRISIUS

Then show her in.

Zara enters.

ARES

Please greet the King and earn his subtle kindness.

ZARA

My father states you have been gravely wounded.

ACRISIUS

Indeed but not a serious, mortal hurt.

ZARA

Then rest will cure your mentioned ills.

ACRISIUS

Indeed. And what about yourself, dear Zara?

ARES

Zara, speak of your creations in the mind.

ZARA

I would not wish to bore this sage-like King.

ACRISIUS

Indeed, I yearn to hear of your wisdom.

ZARA

Amazed by countless repetitive 'indeeds'.

ACRISIUS

So, pray, is ok? What else is going on?

ZARA

I wish to study politics, not trade.

ACRISIUS

Then I'm not the King for you at all!

ZARA

A constitutional monarchy we seek.
A combination: King in Parliament.

ARES

My Lord. I know not where she reads and learns!

ACRISIUS

We have a King and Parliament already.
What is it that your studying suggests?

ZARA

Our Parliament is weak, the King is mighty.
Democracy demands a vice versa.

ACRISIUS

You would divest me of my real powers.

ZARA

You are a learned, aged man. And now
Is time to rest upon your laurels; leave
The reigns of government to righteous others.

ACRISIUS

Such plans do co-exist with melancholy.

ZARA

Or just a way for love to triumph power.

ACRISIUS

There must be vaster oceans between us.

ARES

And yet a chord that sails through seas.

Ares exits leaving Acrisius and Zara to supper. Polydorus exits.

ACRISIUS

Time leads my tender thoughts in far directions.

ZARA

When I was young, ambition made me dream.
And now in Athens, my heart's already warm.

ACRISIUS

Do you belong beside me?

ZARA

I wish to learn.

ACRISIUS

What would you wish to know?

ZARA

What is a King?

ACRISIUS

A man.

ZARA

What else?

ACRISIUS

A gentle man.

ZARA

A gentleman?

ACRISIUS

That too. And you?

ZARA

A lady.

ACRISIUS

Gentle?

ZARA

Savage.

ACRISIUS

Learned?

ZARA

Acutely.

ACRISIUS

A cutie?

ZARA

That too.

ACRISIUS

You are indeed a sweet lady.

ZARA

Again 'indeed'. You are a kind.

ACRISIUS

Two of a kind?

ZARA

Too kind.

The moment is interrupted as a warrior enters through the window.

ACRISIUS

My Gods! Have I incurred their wrath already?

The warrior draws a knife and approaches.

Zara, stand away, I will protect you!

ZARA

My Lord, you are too weak to dream. Stand back.

Zara stands in front of Acrisius, as the warrior draws closer. The warrior lunges and Zara parries.

ACRISIUS

I think I see a lady of the sword!

The warrior lunges at Acrisius again. Acrisius defends himself. Zara steps back.

ACRISIUS

Who sent this spirit of Hades' willing?

The two men fight and Acrisius struggles madly. Meanwhile Zara has picked up a statue from beside the fireplace. She smashes it into the warrior. He collapses.

ZARA

He shall lose the nerve for trouble.

ACRISIUS

Assassination is inveterate now.

ZARA

No doubt a veteran of the assassins.

ACRISIUS

No trade. Yet something of malignancy.
Our foes in Argos act at such a cost.

ZARA

Assuredly, we paid them well.

