

# GILGAMESH

## VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Below is a list of words that appear in the story. Read the list and get to know the words before you start the story.

**arrogant**—boastful; conceited  
**defy**—disobey; challenge  
**destined**—certain; decided ahead of time  
**downcast**—discouraged; sad  
**fickle**—changeable; uncertain  
**grappled**—wrestled; struggled  
**justly**—fairly; with respect  
**menace**—threat; danger  
**mock**—make fun of; insult  
**mortal**—human  
**nobles**—upper-class people  
**recounting**—retelling  
**sacred**—valuable; important  
**scurrying**—scrambling; moving quickly  
**spite**—hatred; ill will  
**summit**—top; peak  
**tyrant**—dictator; harsh or cruel ruler  
**unleashed**—released; set free  
**wan**—pale; sickly  
**warily**—with care

### Main Characters

**Anu**—sky god; king of the gods  
**Aruru**—goddess of creation; creator of earth and people  
**Enkidu**—Gilgamesh's best friend

**Gilgamesh**—King of Uruk; son of goddess Ninsun  
**Humbaba**—monster who guards the Cedar Mountain  
**Ishtar**—goddess of love  
**Ninsun**—minor goddess known for her wisdom; mother of Gilgamesh

# GILGAMESH

*A myth from Babylonia*

*Gilgamesh is not only a king—he is part god. But his people find it hard to put up with his cruelty. So the gods send an unusual being to teach Gilgamesh a few lessons.*

**G**ilgamesh<sup>1</sup> walked alone on the great wall of Uruk.<sup>2</sup> The wall's huge, rose-colored boulders reflected the bright afternoon sunlight. Within those walls stretched the city, with all its marketplaces, temples, palaces, and mud houses.

"A fine city," Gilgamesh said to himself. "The finest in all the world."

Gilgamesh was Uruk's king, and he was proud of the walls that he had built himself. Their tops were so wide and strong that warriors could drive great chariots on them. Uruk had withstood many attacks because of the strength of its walls and the fierceness of its king.

"My people should be grateful," Gilgamesh said to himself. "I keep them safe from our enemies."

However, his people were unhappy, and Gilgamesh knew it. The city leaders often brought complaints to the king's attention—complaints which made him angry.

"Why aren't my people happy?" he growled. "They have no right to tell me what to do. After all, I'm more than a king. I am a god!"

<sup>1</sup> (gil' ga mesh)

<sup>2</sup> (ur' uk) Uruk was an ancient city between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The site is now part of Iraq.



But Gilgamesh knew that he was only part god. True, his mother was the goddess Ninsun.<sup>3</sup> But his father, although a king, had been **mortal**.

Even being only part god made Gilgamesh the most powerful and bravest of all mortals. No wrestler could defeat him, and he was the cleverest hunter of all.

Even so, Gilgamesh was **downcast**. He hated his mortal side. He knew he had to die someday, as surely as the lions he hunted.

"It isn't fair that I must die!" cried Gilgamesh, gazing over his city. He suddenly wanted to strike out, to break down the mighty walls with his fist. But what good would that do? Death awaited him, and he was helpless to do anything about it.

The people of Uruk could not guess Gilgamesh's thoughts as they watched him pace the walls. He looked like a proud and brave man, not someone who was worried about dying.

His body was muscled and he held his head high. His black curly hair and beard shone in the sun. His fierce dark eyes were large and shining. From afar, it was easy to admire him.

But when Gilgamesh came back down into his city, the citizens didn't stop to pay their respects. Shopkeepers and nobles alike hurried to get out of his path.

As always, the king tore through the city. He challenged a young man to a wrestling match. But the youth ducked out of sight without a word.

Gilgamesh finally raided a house, leaving with a bunch of dates. The king never even bothered to thank the occupants. He felt it was his right to take what he pleased. He was strong and he was king. And he didn't want his people to forget it.

When Gilgamesh returned to his palace, his people huddled together and whispered to each other. "This is our king! He's supposed to be wise as well as mighty. He's supposed to help and protect us, not lay waste to our homes!"

<sup>3</sup> (nin' soon) Ninsun was a minor goddess whose temple was in Uruk.

"We must do something," one noble remarked.

"What can we do? Our king never listens to our pleas," answered another.

"Gilgamesh doesn't listen to us. But he might listen to someone of his own kind. We must ask the gods for help."

The nobles went to a temple to beg help from Aruru,<sup>4</sup> the goddess of creation.

"Please listen to our prayers, great Aruru," they called to her. "You created the earth and all its creatures. Only you can make a man who is Gilgamesh's equal. Create another mortal who can overcome our king's terrible pride, for we can stand no more of this **tyrant!**"

The goddess Aruru heard the nobles and left her place in the heavens. She soon appeared near the Euphrates—the great river which flowed by Uruk. The goddess wasn't sure at first how to answer the prayer. So she knelt down on the riverbank and thought long and hard. The wet, muddy clay seemed to give her an answer.

Aruru picked up a handful of clay and closed her eyes. Pictures filled her head—pictures of great heroes and gods. One in particular stood out from all the others—that of Anu,<sup>5</sup> father of all the gods.

"Yes," she whispered. "I will make a man who looks like Anu."

Aruru prayed to Anu as she pushed and pulled the clay, her eyes still closed tight. Before long she could feel the clay come to life in her hands. She lowered her creation to the ground and opened her eyes.

A living man lay sleeping on the ground in front of her. Aruru named him Enkidu.<sup>6</sup> Then she returned to her home among the gods.

This Enkidu was no ordinary creature. Although he was shaped like a god, he had a wild look about him. His body was covered with short, rough hair like a bull. His mind was untamed as well, filled with the memories and thoughts of

<sup>4</sup> (a roo' roo)

<sup>5</sup> (a' noo)

<sup>6</sup> (en ke' du)

beasts. He knew nothing about human beings.

For many days after his creation, Enkidu lived in the wild among the animals. He ran with the gazelles,<sup>7</sup> easily keeping up with them. He grazed in the fields and joined herds of wild beasts at the watering hole. He was wild and free and happy.

Enkidu was smart too. He filled up pits dug by hunters to catch animals. And he helped beasts escape when they got caught in traps.

One young hunter grew angry and confused when, day after day, he found all his traps ruined. "Who can be doing this?" he asked himself.

So the hunter set a trap and hid behind a nearby tree. Then he waited to see who or what would come along and undo his work.

At last Enkidu arrived and destroyed the trap. But Enkidu's animal sense told him that something was wrong. He peeked behind the tree and discovered the hunter. Enkidu silently stared at the man.

The hunter was so frightened that he couldn't move. The wild, hairy creature seemed neither beast nor human.

"You're a monster!" gasped the hunter.

But Enkidu could not understand what the hunter said. He knew no human words. So without a sound, Enkidu turned and walked away into the desert.

The hunter picked up the animals he had trapped and hurried away. He knew that the king must be informed of this strange **menace** that was running free.

So the young hunter journeyed to Uruk. When he came before Gilgamesh, he described the monster he had seen.

But Gilgamesh had heard many stories of monsters invading his territory. He hardly listened to them any more. Still, he thought he had better do something—just in case the story was true. So Gilgamesh called a priestess to come to his throne room.

"There are reports of a strange creature in the desert," the king said to the priestess. "Perhaps he is a man, perhaps he is

an animal. I want you to go and find out for yourself. If he is human, capture him and bring him here."

The priestess dressed in her finest silk robe and most glittering jewelry. And she put on her sweetest perfume.

The young hunter led the priestess to the watering hole and left her. As she waited, a gentle breeze carried her perfumed scent across the desert.

When evening fell, Enkidu and a herd of gazelles came to the watering hole. However, the gazelles smelled the woman and ran away. Enkidu smelled her, too, but did not run. He approached her **warily**. He had never come upon anything like this priestess.

"Come here, strange fellow!" said the priestess. Curiosity drew Enkidu closer.

"People told me you were a monster," she said, touching his hand. "But now I see they were wrong. You are a human being—a fine and godlike human being!"

Enkidu could not understand what the priestess said because he still knew no human words. But he was fascinated by the strange, sweet sounds the priestess made. He was struck, too, by her beauty—so unlike any animal he'd ever seen.

The priestess stayed with Enkidu for six days. During that time, he began to speak.

"What are these sounds I'm making?" he asked the priestess.

"Words," explained the priestess. "People use them to understand each other."

"These words make me sad," said Enkidu. "I didn't know what sadness was until I had a word for it."

Enkidu became sadder and sadder by the day. At last he reached a decision.

"It's time for me to rejoin my fellow beasts," he said to the priestess. "That's where I belong."

But when Enkidu approached a herd of gazelles, they ran away from him. And when he tried to chase after the animals, he discovered that he could no longer keep up with them.

In despair, Enkidu returned to the priestess. "What has

<sup>7</sup> Gazelles are small antelopes that live in desert regions.

happened to me?" he asked her. "Why have I become so weak and slow?"

"It's true that you've lost some of your strength and speed," the priestess explained. "But you've gained new skills and knowledge. You are becoming more human."

"You see, Enkidu, you were never an animal," she went on. "You belong with people. You're too intelligent to run wild for the rest of your life."

"But what shall I do?" wondered Enkidu.

"Come back to the city of Uruk with me," the priestess urged. "Our king, Gilgamesh, has heard of you. He wants to meet you."

The priestess told Enkidu about the beautiful city of Uruk. She spoke of its marketplaces, temples, palaces, and houses. She promised that Enkidu would enjoy the company of other people just as he had once enjoyed the company of animals.

Then she told Enkidu about Gilgamesh the king—how strong and swift he was and also how cruel and selfish.

Enkidu was disturbed by the description. "Surely this Gilgamesh knows he must treat his fellow creatures with respect," he said. "The animals I roamed with are wild and don't know the gentler ways of humans. But at least they don't fight each other for amusement."

"I think Gilgamesh could learn a thing or two from you," the priestess remarked with a smile.

"Take me to Uruk," Enkidu demanded. "I want to meet this king."

So the priestess led Enkidu to the city of the mighty Gilgamesh. As they approached the gates, the people gathered around and admired the priestess' companion.

"He's the equal of the king," one said.

Another objected, saying, "No, he's not as tall."

"But he's stronger," the first one answered. "Look at the size of his arms and legs."

While news of Enkidu spread among the people, Gilgamesh lay sleeping in the palace. The king's slumber was suddenly interrupted by a nightmare.

Gilgamesh dreamed he saw a falling star rush earthward

from the sky. In his dream he rushed out of his palace and ran to the place where the star had fallen. He found a huge stone there, bright and glittering like a beautiful jewel.

The king knew that the stone was of great value, and he wanted to take it home. But try as he might, he couldn't move it—the strange stone seemed to fight against him.

This immovable object disturbed Gilgamesh. He had never encountered a man, beast, or thing he couldn't control.

At the end of his dream, the people of Uruk came from the city to gaze at the stone and worship it.

Gilgamesh awoke with a start. Filled with fear, he told his dream to his mother, the goddess Ninsun.

"Your dream means good news," she told her son. "True, you will meet a creature as strong as you, and the two of you will struggle. But this creature will become your friend. Much good will come of your friendship."

By the next evening, Gilgamesh had nearly forgotten about his dream. Gilgamesh and a group of his friends set out in the streets of Uruk. They intended to tear through the town as usual, doing as they pleased with the townspeople and their belongings.

But just when Gilgamesh was about to fling open the door of a private home and go inside, his way was blocked. Enkidu stood in the doorway, preventing the king from entering.

Gilgamesh stared at Enkidu in surprise. "How dare anyone block my way!" growled Gilgamesh.

With a mighty yell, the king threw himself at Enkidu. Gone was his memory of his dream and his mother's words. His only thought was the match at hand.

For what seemed like hours the two men **grappled**. Enkidu grunted as Gilgamesh slammed him into a wall. But Enkidu quickly gained his balance again. He rushed at Gilgamesh and threw him to the ground.

That still wasn't the end. Gilgamesh was on his feet in a flash, ready to continue.

And so it went. First one, then the other seemed close to triumph. But neither could claim victory.

The townspeople heard the noise and soon gathered

around. They stared in amazement at the two men. Never before had their leader been so evenly matched.

At long last Gilgamesh released his grip. He stood back and let out a hearty laugh. "I've never known any man with strength to match my own!" he cried.

"Nor have I ever met any beast as strong as you," answered Enkidu. "You are, indeed, a great warrior. But are you a great king?"

"What do you mean?" Gilgamesh demanded.

"Can a king who hurts his people without a thought be called great?"

For once, Gilgamesh looked ashamed. "No," he answered quietly. Suddenly he remembered his dream and what his mother told him. He stared at Enkidu with growing awareness.

Without another word, Gilgamesh stepped up to Enkidu and embraced him. "I dreamed of you last night. We were **destined** to meet. You must come live in my palace," Gilgamesh insisted. "You will have the finest clothes, wine, food—everything you will ever need."

"I would be honored," Enkidu replied.

And that's how it began. Almost immediately the two became the best of friends. They were both delighted to have met their equals.

Enkidu also became a favorite of the people of Uruk, who knew he was the answer to their prayers.

"Enkidu is wise," the people said. "He will show Gilgamesh that it takes more than physical strength to be a good king."

Enkidu didn't disappoint them. Patiently and gently, he would say to Gilgamesh again and again, "The father of the gods has given you great power. But the gods intend for you to rule **justly**, not selfishly. Do good for your people. Do not misuse your power."

Gilgamesh learned Enkidu's lesson little by little. As time went by, he became a wise ruler. He was fair and kind to his people and no longer needed Enkidu's gentle reminders.

Finally the people of Uruk had no reason to fear their king. When Gilgamesh walked down the street, people didn't

hurry away. They stayed to admire and praise their mighty ruler. They also honored Enkidu, the friend who was always at the king's side.



One day Gilgamesh found his friend sitting alone in deep sadness. There were tears in Enkidu's eyes and a frown creased his brow.

"My friend, why do you sigh?" asked Gilgamesh. "Why do you look so bitter?"

"I've grown weary and can no longer run swiftly," Enkidu replied. "This easy life has made me forget who I really am."

"What do you mean?" Gilgamesh said with a laugh. "You're stronger and swifter than any man in the city—except perhaps for me."

"You don't know what it's like to be far from home," said Enkidu, raising his voice. "You've always lived in this fine palace. But part of me is still an animal, still untamed. That part of me belongs to the wilderness. Oh, how I long to be free and wild again!"

But they both knew that Enkidu could not go back. He could no longer run fast enough to keep up with the wild beasts. Even if he could, he would no longer be accepted among them. Enkidu would be alone if he returned to the wilderness. And so would Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh thought the matter over for a while. Then he said to Enkidu, "I suppose we'll both soon grow old and weak, living in all this luxury. Warriors like us need battles to fight, challenges to meet."

"Yes," groaned Enkidu, "but what challenges are left for us?"

"Well," began Gilgamesh, "there is something I've been wanting to do for quite a while. And this just might be the time to do it—with you at my side."

"And what might that be?" asked Enkidu with a spark of interest in his eye.

"I'm not just talking about an adventure. If we do this successfully, we would make life better for everyone in

Uruk.”

“What is it? Tell me!” exclaimed Enkidu. He was definitely interested now.

“Have you heard of the Cedar Forest?”

“Yes. I learned of that place when I lived with the animals.”

“Can you imagine being able to use wood from such a forest?”

Enkidu frowned. “Think what you’re saying,” he said. “Don’t you realize that the monster Humbaba<sup>8</sup> guards that forest? Enlil, the god of storms, put him in charge there ages ago.”

“So,” said Gilgamesh with a smile, “I think you see our challenge. If we kill Humbaba, we’ll be free to cut down the cedar trees. In the place of mud, our people will have fragrant wood to build their houses with.”

“A challenge is one thing,” replied Enkidu. “But to openly defy the gods is another.”

“And do you plan to spend your life quietly obeying the gods, Enkidu? What sort of punishment do you fear from them? Death? Wake up, my friend. We’ll all die sooner or later. The gods live forever. We cannot.”

“But Gilgamesh, Humbaba spits fire and roars like thunder. He can hear an enemy approaching from miles away. And his magic brings weakness upon anyone who tries to enter. This is no challenge. This is madness!”

Gilgamesh glared at his friend. Traces of his hot temper showed. “Well, then, I guess I’ll just have to fight the mighty Humbaba by myself.”

Enkidu studied his friend. Then he sighed. “You’ll do no such thing. If you’re determined to take up this quest, I’ll go with you. Friends don’t turn their backs on friends. But don’t get the idea that I approve of this craziness of yours.”

The people of Uruk didn’t approve either. They were angry, afraid, and certain they would lose both of their heroes. They begged Gilgamesh and Enkidu not to go. But the two

warriors would not listen to their pleas.

“We’re doing this for you,” Gilgamesh told the citizens. “Please don’t worry. We’ll soon be back safe and sound—and with plenty of wood!”

To comfort his people, Gilgamesh prayed to the gods. “Oh, mighty ones!” he shouted to the sky. “I know the Cedar Forest belongs to you. Yet Humbaba, the watchman of the forest, is evil. He prevents my people from having wood for their houses.

“I don’t wish to make you angry by killing something that belongs to you,” the king continued. “I am merely thinking of the good of my people. For this reason, I’m asking your help in ridding the earth of this evil named Humbaba.”

When their supplies were ready, Gilgamesh and Enkidu armed themselves and departed through the city gates.

“I will lead the way,” said Enkidu. “I know the wilderness with its hidden trails. My friends the animals also told me where Humbaba lives.”

So Enkidu led Gilgamesh across the plains, along the very paths he had roamed when he ran with the wild herds.

As Gilgamesh had hoped, Enkidu seemed more and more renewed by the coming adventure. As the men walked and hunted along the way, Enkidu’s strength returned. Although he could no longer run as fast as the gazelle, he regained much of his old swiftness.

The two companions walked for many days. They drank at water holes which were full of fresh water. Hawks and eagles circled in the sunlight.

At last they stopped and Enkidu pointed ahead. Before them stood a mountain covered with tall cedar trees.

“The Cedar Forest, **sacred** to the gods,” whispered Enkidu. “This is where the terrible Humbaba lives. We’ll have to be more careful now—and quiet, too. Humbaba may even be listening to us this minute.”

The two warriors crept silently up the mountain, hiding behind trees and bushes. About halfway up the mountain, they found themselves standing before a towering gate built of timber and stone.

<sup>8</sup> (hoom.ba’ba)

"At last!" exclaimed Gilgamesh. "The gate to Humbaba's home!"

But as Enkidu opened the gate, weakness overcame him and he fell to the ground. While Gilgamesh stopped to help his friend, the two could hear Humbaba **scurrying** away to the top of the mountain.

"We'll never defeat that monster now," Enkidu moaned. "His magic has weakened me. I can hardly move."

"And what would you have us do—turn back?" asked Gilgamesh. "I swear never to return to Uruk until this monster is dead—or I am. Come, Enkidu. We must stand by each other. Stay close to me. I'm sure your weakness will pass."

So Gilgamesh helped his friend continue up Cedar Mountain. They were amazed by the height and beauty of the trees rising above them. They enjoyed the shade and the cedar scent filling the air. But they knew the monster Humbaba waited for them at the **summit**.

When nightfall came, it was Gilgamesh who was overcome with weakness and fell into a deep sleep. A terrible dream came to him—a dream in which the earth crumbled and fire rained from the sky. Gilgamesh saw the mountain top burning. From out of the surrounding smoke, he heard a voice cry out.

"Gilgamesh! Gilgamesh!"

Gilgamesh opened his eyes. Enkidu was shaking him, saying his name over and over. "Gilgamesh! You're awake at last! Your sleep was so deep and long, I almost mistook it for death."

"I've had an awful dream," said Gilgamesh, rubbing his eyes. He described it to Enkidu.

"But this is good, Gilgamesh!" exclaimed Enkidu. "Your dream surely means victory for us—and death for Humbaba!"

The warriors made a sacrifice to the gods and continued up Cedar Mountain. At last, they came to Humbaba's magic grove<sup>9</sup> of seven cedar trees. The winds began to blow, and

<sup>9</sup> A grove is a cluster of trees. Many cultures and peoples believed that groves were magical.

thunder and lightning filled the sky.

"Are the gods against us, even after my prayers?" Gilgamesh wondered.

Suddenly Humbaba stepped out from among the magic cedars. He was truly a terrible sight, as tall as the cedars he guarded and as wild as the storm swirling around him.

"You are trespassing in the sacred forest of the gods!" Humbaba bellowed in a voice louder than the thunder. His great eyes glared down at them. "Leave at once—while you still can!"

Any mortal would have turned and fled at these words. But Gilgamesh was no mere mortal. Bravely, he took his sword and his ax and stepped forward to do battle.

"Humbaba, I have sworn not to leave until I have completed my mission," he said. "My people need wood. And if that means I have to kill you for it, then so be it."

"I'm afraid you're mistaken," said the monster with a wicked grin. "It is not I who will die. You are the one who should fear for your life!"

And with that, the mighty Humbaba rushed toward Gilgamesh. But Gilgamesh was ready for him. The king quickly sidestepped his opponent's rush and Humbaba stumbled into a tree.

Roaring with anger, the monster straightened and turned back toward Gilgamesh. Then with a huge sweep of his arm, Humbaba knocked the king off his feet. But Gilgamesh jumped up, ready to continue.

The storm raged while the two struggled. The trees bent under a mighty wind. Suddenly the wind and rain turned against the monster. Lightning blazed, setting the mountain top on fire.

"The gods have heard our prayers," thought Enkidu.

Finally Gilgamesh struck Humbaba a mighty blow with his ax. The monster fell senseless to the ground. The storm still swirled around them.

"Is he dead?" Enkidu asked.

Before Gilgamesh could answer, Humbaba moved his head and opened his eyes. He tried to rise, but his power was



gone.

"Gilgamesh," the monster begged, "let me live and I will serve you. I'll help you with my magic."

Gilgamesh felt pity for the fallen Humbaba. "Shall I let him go?" he asked Enkidu.

But Enkidu didn't trust the monster. "He's clever and dangerous, Gilgamesh. He'll turn on you. You must kill him."

"Silence, Enkidu!" snapped Humbaba. "Who are you, anyway? A palace servant, nothing more! How dare you tell your king what to do!"

"See how his evil magic works," Enkidu said. "He'd turn you against me."

The king knew Enkidu's words were true. So he drew his sword and struck the monster. Then Enkidu picked up his own sword and struck yet another blow. Gilgamesh let fall one final blow, and Humbaba was dead.

With the death of Humbaba, the storm calmed. Everything around them was burned and lifeless. Gilgamesh's dream had come true.

Enkidu looked around. Down the mountain slopes he could see huge trees moving gently in the breeze. Small green stems quickly popped out of the burned and blackened soil. All evil had vanished from the Cedar Mountain.

"We've won the giant's forest!" exclaimed Gilgamesh in delight. "All these fine trees are ours. Now our people can use wood instead of mud to build their houses."

The two companions rested a bit and then made their long journey back to Uruk.

At the city gates, a crowd of people joyfully rushed forward to greet Gilgamesh and Enkidu. How grateful everyone was to have their king and his mighty companion home again! And now the two were greater heroes than ever. Feasts and celebrations went on into the night.



But even as the people rejoiced, trouble was brewing. Ishtar,<sup>10</sup> the goddess of love, caught sight of the celebrations from afar.

<sup>10</sup> (ish' tar)

She was overwhelmed by Gilgamesh's beauty and could think of nothing else.

As gods and goddesses often did, Ishtar decided that she wanted the handsome mortal for herself. So when the feasting ended, she met Gilgamesh alone in the street.

"Come with me and be my husband, Gilgamesh," she said. "I am powerful and can give you many things. Listen, I'll give you a golden chariot set with jewels. And I'll tame the demons of the storm to pull it for you. People everywhere will bow down to you."

Gilgamesh said nothing and tried to pass her by. He knew this **fickle** goddess was dangerous. But Ishtar blocked his way and drew closer. She was very beautiful and her magic was strong.

"The sweet smell of cedar will fill our house," she continued. "We'll be happy together. Remember that you are part god. Do you deserve less than a goddess for a wife?"

Gilgamesh drew back from her. "Why should I marry you, Ishtar?" he replied. "Your past lovers haven't been very lucky. You loved none of them for long. Shall I list them?"

Ishtar frowned, but Gilgamesh went on. "A great bird once loved you. You thanked him for his love by breaking his wings.

"A handsome shepherd loved you too," continued Gilgamesh. "You turned him into a wolf when you tired of him. His own hounds and shepherd boys drove him from his home and flocks.

"And what about that gardener you turned into a mole?" he added. "I'm sure there were others. Would you care to complete the list, Ishtar?"

"If I was unkind to others," insisted Ishtar, "it was because I had not yet met my one true love. You are the one I love, Gilgamesh. I could never do wrong to you."

But the king was too wise to believe her words. "I would end up as they did, Ishtar," he answered the goddess. "I will never be your husband."

Ishtar bitterly stormed away. Gilgamesh hoped that would be an end to the matter. But he knew that Ishtar had a terrible

temper. There was really no telling what she would do.

Gilgamesh was right to be concerned. Ishtar went directly to her father, Anu—the king of all the gods.

“Father,” the furious goddess cried, “Gilgamesh has insulted me! He has accused me of doing terrible things. Worst of all, he has refused to be my husband!”

Anu looked at his daughter thoughtfully. “You aren’t known for your kindness to your lovers,” he said. “Perhaps Gilgamesh only told the truth.”

Ishtar wept great tears. “But Gilgamesh is different from the others!” she pleaded. “I love him! And he paid me back with **spite!**”

“And what would you have me do about it, daughter?”

“Give me the Bull of Heaven,” she said. “I will turn it against this **arrogant** Gilgamesh.”

“No, Ishtar, you can’t let the Bull of Heaven loose in Uruk,” replied Anu with shock in his voice. “He would kill all the people!”

“Father,” said Ishtar, “if you don’t grant my wish, I’ll throw open the gates of the Underworld. All the dead will escape into the world of the living. Imagine the destruction *that* would cause!”

In the face of this terrible threat, Anu was forced to give in. He handed over the Bull of Heaven to Ishtar to use as she wished.

Ishtar quickly **unleashed** the bull within Uruk’s walls. At once the bull began charging through the city, destroying everything in his path. Each time the great beast snorted, he killed a hundred people. He trampled Uruk’s citizens under his mighty hooves. And when the bull flung his head and stamped his foot, buildings shook and toppled.

It looked as though the entire city would be destroyed. But as the bull approached the palace, Enkidu and Gilgamesh were there to face him.

The bull glared at the two heroes. Then with a roar, he charged straight at Enkidu.

Enkidu dodged the charge and seized the bull by its horns. The beast’s hot breath burned Enkidu’s face, and the hero had

to release him. The bull slashed Enkidu with his tail, knocking the warrior to the ground.

But Enkidu caught hold of the monster’s tail. His grip was firm and could not be shaken. Enkidu held the bull tight.

Then Gilgamesh quickly drew his sword and plunged it into the bull’s neck.

The beast flung himself about for several minutes. Then giving one last snort, he dropped to the ground and died.

“Well, that’s the end of that!” exclaimed Gilgamesh triumphantly. “Even the gods can’t defeat me.”

The goddess Ishtar heard Gilgamesh’s boast. Standing above the celebrating people, she shouted, “Beware, Gilgamesh! You have insulted me for the last time!”

Even angrier than before, the goddess fled into the darkness.

The celebrations in Uruk went on late into the night. Gilgamesh took the giant horns of the Bull of Heaven and hung them on the palace wall.

But Enkidu was worried. Indeed, he had been uneasy ever since they had killed Humbaba. Would the gods punish them for killing their prize bull?

That night Enkidu had a nightmare. All the great gods met together and he listened as they talked.

“We have given these mortals everything they could possibly want!” murmured some. “We even created Enkidu to be Gilgamesh’s friend,” said others.

“These two defiant mortals have gone too far,” said others. “The death of Humbaba was bad enough. But killing the Bull of Heaven is unforgivable. One of them must die!”

Enkidu awoke, troubled by his dream and feeling very ill. By evening he could not rise from his bed.

“I am dying,” he weakly told Gilgamesh. “I knew it was unwise to **mock** the gods. Now they are taking their revenge.”

“Nonsense,” replied Gilgamesh. “Don’t worry. You’ll soon be up and about again.”

But as Gilgamesh looked at his friend’s **wan** face, he grew more and more worried.

“Is Enkidu right?” wondered Gilgamesh. “Are the gods

really going to punish me by taking away my best friend?"

As Enkidu lay in his bed, Gilgamesh never left his side. The king was panicked by the thought of losing Enkidu. But he tried not to let his friend see his worry. Instead, he cheered Enkidu by **recounting** tales of their adventures together.

"How we fought the first time we met!" said Gilgamesh, laughing.

"You were unmovable, like a rock!" replied Enkidu weakly.

"No more immovable than you."

They spoke of the many good days they had spent together. They remembered their long journey to the Cedar Mountain, their fight with Humbaba, and their victorious return. They also spoke of their triumph over the Bull of Heaven.

But Enkidu grew weaker. At last, with a final gasp, he closed his eyes and was silent.

Gilgamesh could find no heartbeat, no breath. He went wild with grief and roared and paced like a wild beast.

"It isn't fair!" he yelled. "It isn't fair that he should die when I was the one who angered the gods!"

But finally Gilgamesh grew quiet. He knew there was nothing he could do to bring his friend back to life. So he shut himself in his palace and grieved alone.

Gilgamesh wasn't the only one filled with sorrow. Everyone in Uruk mourned the passing of Enkidu, the kind hero who had once lived with the animals.



Gilgamesh reigned as king for many more years. He had other adventures too—more than anyone can tell.

Yet the death of his dear friend scarred Gilgamesh. It made him still more bitter that all human life must end. So he searched for the key to everlasting life. But his search was in vain.

Still, Gilgamesh remained a good king. Whenever his old selfishness began to show itself, he would hear his departed

friend Enkidu whisper, "The father of the gods has given you great power. But the gods intend for you to rule justly, not selfishly. Do good for your people. Do not abuse your power."

Even in death, Enkidu never really left Gilgamesh's side.