

HERCULES

**SO YOU WATCHED THE
DISNEY MOVIE HERCULES?**

**YOU MUST KNOW EVERYTHING
ABOUT GREEK AND ROMAN GODS**



HERCULES

After all, he will kill Megara and their future sons.

BIRTH

- The lovely mortal woman Alcmene unknowingly catches the eye of everybody's favorite “frolicking: god – Zeus, king of the gods.
- One night, Zeus disguises himself as Alcmene's husband, Amphytrion, and sleeps with the pretty lady. She becomes pregnant with Hercules.
- That same night, Amphytrion comes home and also gets romantic with his wife. She conceives another baby boy named Iphicles. (Didn't she wonder why her husband showed up twice?)
- Hera, Zeus' wife, is none too pleased that her cheating husband is up to his old tricks again.
- Hera is now raging mad and decides to send two big snakes to eat Hercules in his cradle. To Hercules, however, the snakes are just fun toys, and he squeezes and squeezes them until they're dead.
 - What's interesting is that the name Hercules basically means glory by the aid of Hera.
- Everybody around is amazed at how strong a baby he is.

TWELVE LABORS

- Hercules' hometown of Thebes has had to pay a tribute every year to the Minyans.
- Our hero obliterates the Minyans
- Thebes is more than a little grateful to Hercules, so they give Hercules the princess, Megara, as a bride.
- Everything is happy for a while, and Hercules and Megara have a bunch of kids.
- Hera, Queen of the Gods, steps in to ruin his life.
 - (Hera hates Hercules because he's the illegitimate son of her husband, Zeus.)
- The Queen of the Gods gets seriously nasty and causes Hercules to go crazy and kill Megara and all of his children (Whoa.)

TWELVE LABORS

- Needless to say, Hercules feels more than a little guilty about killing his kids and wife.
- Theseus convinces Hercules to go back to Athens, but he has a hard time living with the murders on his conscience.
- So our hero goes to the Oracle of Delphi to figure out how to atone for the damage he's done.
- The Oracle tells him that he has to submit himself to be the servant of his cousin, King Eurystheus of Mycenae.
- Eurystheus tells Hercules that he has to perform twelve labors for him.
- "Okey dokie," says Hercules, "What do you want me to do?"

THE FIRST LABOR: THE NEMEAN LION

- So, there was this place called Nemea, which was being troubled by a giant lion that couldn't be pierced by sword or spear.
- Eurystheus orders Hercules to go and kill this monster.
- Hercules goes to Nemea, finds the lion, and strangles it to death.
 - (You don't need a sword when you're Hercules.)

THE SECOND LABOR: THE HYDRA

- Eurystheus orders Hercules to go kill the Hydra.
- This monster was a huge venomous snake with a nine heads (some say more).
- The Hydra was particularly hard to kill because when you cut off one head, two more sprouted in its place.
- Hercules defeats this nasty creature with the help of his nephew Iolaus.
- When Hercules slices off one of the Hydra's heads, Iolaus cauterizes the stub with a burning brand, which keeps the head from growing back.
- Hercules defeats the Hydra and buries the immortal head under a rock.

THE THIRD LABOR: ARTEMIS' STAG

- Now the king orders Hercules to capture an incredibly fast deer with golden horns that was sacred to Artemis
- Some say that Hercules snared the deer with nets, others say he pounced on it while it was asleep, and still others say that he just ran behind it until it got too tired to run anymore.
- No matter who you talk to, though, everybody agrees that Hercules caught the stag and brought it back to Eurystheus.

THE FOURTH LABOR: ERYMANTHIAN BOAR

- Next, Eurystheus orders Hercules to capture a giant boar and bring it back alive.
- Of course, Hercules totally pulls it off and traps it in the snow.

THE FIFTH LABOR: AUGEAN STABLES

- Okay, so this Labor is totally gross.
- Hercules has to go to the stables of a dude named Augeas, who apparently had more cattle than anybody else in the world, but had also never bothered to clean up after them.
- Hercules manages to pull this off by diverting the course of two great rivers, which washes through the stables and takes away all the poo.

THE SIXTH LABOR: STYMPHALIAN BIRDS

- Hercules is ordered to get rid of a flock of possibly man-eating birds.
- With the help of Athena, he just shoots them all with his arrows.

THE SEVENTH LABOR: THE CRETAN BULL

- Next, Hercules has to travel to the island of Crete and captures the divine bull, who is said to be the father of the Minotaur, the monster that the hero Theseus later defeats.
- He manages to get the bull and travel back to Eurystheus.

THE EIGHTH LABOR: HORSES OF DIOMEDES

- Next, Hercules is sent to capture the horses of King Diomedes.
- "Capturing Horses," you say, "That doesn't seem too hard."
- Oh yeah, what if those horses just happen to be man-eaters? That's right... King Diomedes is in the habit of feeding his horses the flesh of people that get on his nerves.
- When Hercules shows up, though, he kills Diomedes, and Hercules takes the horses away.

THE NINTH LABOR: THE GIRDLE OF HIPPOLYTA

- Ninth on the agenda is obtaining the belt of Hippolyta (a.k.a. Hippolyte), the queen of the Amazons.
- The Amazons were a tribe of warrior women, who only dealt with men when they felt like having babies. They either killed or got rid of any male children that came along and only raised the females.
- Hercules goes to their queen and asks her nicely for her belt.
- Amazingly, she agrees.
- Hera decides that this one was way too easy for Hercules, and she rallies the other warrior women against Hercules.
- Hercules kills Hippolyta and, after kicking a lot of Amazon butt, he sails away with her belt.

THE TENTH LABOR: CATTLE OF GERYON

- The tenth labor is a pretty intense one. Hercules has to sail all the way to an island called Erytheia, which is way out in what we now call the Atlantic Ocean.
- (To the ancient Greeks, this was the end of the world. They thought the Atlantic was "Oceanus," a giant river that encircled the world.)
- On the island of Erytheia there is a giant named Geryon, who has three bodies.
- Hercules herds the cattle into his boat and sails back.

THE ELEVENTH LABOR: THE GOLDEN APPLES OF THE HESPERIDES

- Eurystheus tells Hercules to go fetch some golden apples from the nymphs known as the Hesperides.
- Incidentally, these golden apples were Hera's wedding gift when she married Zeus.
- To get the apples, Hercules enlists the help of the Titan Atlas, who is doomed by Zeus to hold the sky up on his back.
- Hercules tells Atlas that he'll hold the sky up for a little while if the Titan wouldn't mind fetching some of those lovely golden apples.

THE ELEVENTH LABOR: THE GOLDEN APPLES OF THE HESPERIDES

- Atlas, who is seriously sick of holding up the sky, agrees.
- When he comes back with the apples, however, he suggests that Hercules keep the sky on his shoulders .
- But Hercules tells the Titan to take back the sky for a second while Hercules puts a pad on his shoulders to ease his burden.
- When Atlas takes the sky back, Hercules says, "See ya!" and heads off with the apples.
 - (In some versions, Atlas isn't even part of it, and Hercules has to slay a dragon with a hundred heads named Ladon to get the golden apples.)

THE TWELFTH LABOR: CERBERUS

- For the twelfth and final labor, Eurystheus thinks up pretty much the worst thing he can imagine: Hercules has to bring back the three-headed hellhound, Cerberus, Hades' vicious beast that guards the gates of the underworld.
- Hercules makes his way down under and pops in on Hades, god of the dead.
- While in the palace, Hercules comes across his fellow Greek hero, Theseus, with his butt stuck to the Chair of Forgetfulness.
 - The story goes that Theseus had pretty stupidly agreed to help his buddy try to woo Persephone, Hades' wife. As punishment, Hades magically glued Theseus and his friend to a bench.
- Hercules pulls with all his might and yanks Theseus from the chair.

THE TWELFTH LABOR: CERBERUS

- Hercules goes before Hades and asks to borrow Cerberus for a bit, so that the hero can complete his final labor.
- Hades is cool with it as long as Hercules can wrestle the three-headed dog into submission without using any weapons. "No worries," says Hercules.
- Our hero finds Cerberus and squeezes the animal with his muscle bound arms. Cerberus bites, scratches, and puts up quite a fight, but Hercules refuses to let go.
- Eventually, Cerberus realizes he's been beaten and chills out.
- Hercules takes Cerberus back for Eurystheus to see and then returns the hellhound to Hades.
- With that Hercules' Twelve Labors are complete. He has finally atoned for killing his wife and children.
 - Some say that he was made immortal as a reward for completing all of the ridiculously hard tasks that Eurystheus assigned him.

OTHER ADVENTURES AND DEATH

Marriage to Deianira

- Hercules sees a smoking hot girl named Deianira and decides that he has to have her as a bride.
- The trouble is that she was already engaged to a river god named Achelous, so Hercules and Achelous duke it out over the lovely Deianira. Even though Achelous can turn himself into lots of fearsome forms, like a bull, Hercules wins the day by snapping off Achelous' horn and makes off with his new bride.

Sacking Troy

- The people of Troy are in big trouble, because their king, Laomedon, ticked off both Apollo and Poseidon
- See, Poseidon and Apollo helped build the walls of Troy, but the Trojan king refused to pay the god of the sea for his work. Poseidon is mad and has sent the Cetus, a sea monster, to attack.
- Laomedon does what any good father would do and chains his daughter to a rock to be sacrificed to the sea monster.
 - (Hmm, this sounds an awful lot like the story of Perseus and Andromeda.)

OTHER ADVENTURES AND DEATH

- About this time, Hercules strolls by and decides to step in. The hero says he'll kill the Cetus as long as Laomedon gives him the horses that that Troy once received from Zeus.
- Laomedon agrees to give Hercules the horses.
- Hercules runs out to the beach and slays Cetus just before it devours the beautiful princess.
- Unfortunately, Laomedon proves once again that he's a total crook and refuses to give the horses to Hercules.
- "We'll see about that," says Hercules.
- The hero slaughters Laomedon and captures the city.
- He gives the maiden to one of his friends named Telamon.
 - None of the ancient writers seem to be able to agree on when this story took place. Some say that it took place during Hercules' Twelve Labors.
 - Others say it was on his way back home from hanging out with the Argonauts.
 - Still others say it was either after or during his years with queen, Omphale...

OTHER ADVENTURES AND DEATH

Freeing Prometheus

- Prometheus was doomed by Zeus to be chained to a rock forever, because he stole Zeus's sacred fire and gave it mankind. Every day an eagle would come and eat out Prometheus's liver.
- According to some versions of the myth, Hercules ends Prometheus' horrible torment and shot the eagle with one of his poisoned arrows.
- Then Hercules pulls his "favorite son" card and talks Zeus out of dreaming up a new punishment for Prometheus.
- Some say this mini-adventure happened during Hercules' Twelve Labors, and that Prometheus advised Hercules to get Atlas, Prometheus' brother, to help Hercules in finding the Golden Apples of the Hesperides. Others say that this happened after the Twelve Labors.

OTHER ADVENTURES AND DEATH

Life with Omphale

- Hercules, shockingly, kills a kid who was just trying to serve him water.
- He also, shockingly, kills another kid because King Eurytus insults him.
- As punishment for King Eurytus's son's murder, Zeus sent Hercules to serve Queen Omphale.
- The queen decides it would be fun to play some cross-dressing games with Hercules. She orders him to wear women's clothing and do women's work like weaving or spinning.
- When Hercules is finally free of Queen Omphale, he swears revenge on King Eurytus.

Defeating Death

- Hercules visits his friend, Admetus's house.
- His buddy is dressed in mourning clothes, but still tells Hercules to stay.
- Hercules makes merry that night, but when he realizes that he's been partying it up the same day his friend's wife died, he becomes very upset.
- Hercules is so upset with himself that he goes to the grave of his friend's wife to wrestle Death so he can bring her back to his friend's house.

OTHER ADVENTURES AND DEATH

Hercules Gets His Revenge

- Remember that lad Hercules killed because his father insulted Hercules?
 - Yeah, me neither.
- Well, that kid's father was Eurytus— remember how Zeus sent Hercules to become a living Barbie for Queen Omphale?--Well, Eurytus's son's murder was the reason.
- Hercules gets his revenge by finally killing Eurytus and taking his city.
 - But Eurytus will get the last laugh.
 - To get to that part, let's look at a flashback, shall we?
- Hercules and his wife, Deianira are crossing a river and have to use the services of a ferryman named Nessus.
- Nessus is a centaur, a creature with the upper torso of a man, but the body of a horse.
- Like a lot of other centaurs, Nessus is all about the ladies all of the time.
- When he's giving Deianira a ride across the river he tries to force himself on her.
- Hercules hears Deianira scream and shoots Nessus.

OTHER ADVENTURES AND DEATH

- As Nessus is dying, he tells Deianira that his blood is a magical love potion. He assures her that she can use it to make sure that Hercules is always faithful to her.
- For some unknown reason, Deianira believes the nasty centaur and takes some of his blood in a little bottle.
- A few years later, another young lady named Iole catches the eye of Hercules. Afraid that she is going to lose her husband to the new girl, Deianira pours the blood of Nessus onto a robe and gives it to Hercules.
- Hercules' skin feels like it is on fire – in some versions of the myth it actually does catch on fire. It turns out that Nessus' blood is still full of Hydra venom.
- Deianira is totally horrified by what she's done and kills herself.
- There's no hope for Hercules either; To escape the burning torture, Hercules decides he's going to go out in style and have his whole body literally set on fire. A guy named Philoctetes sets the hero ablaze.
- Hercules rises to Mount Olympus, and he becomes a full-fledged god.
- On Olympus, his lifelong enemy, Hera, finally decides to be nice to him, and she allows him to marry her daughter, Hebe, goddess of youth.

HERO'S JOURNEY- 12 LABORS

Stage 1: Ordinary World

- We begin in Hercules' hometown of Thebes. He's a total stud, a global hero, and the most popular mortal known to man.

Stage 2: Call to Adventure

- For some reason, Hercules' hometown of Thebes has to pay homage every year to Minyans, but Hercules obliterates them. The King of Thebes is so happy that he lets Hercules marry his daughter, Megara. Everything is coming up roses for Hercules, the man of the hour.

Stage 3: Refusal

- Zeus' wife, Hera, hates Hercules with the passion of a thousand fires. She wants to ruin his life. Hera decides to drive Hercules to insanity. This causes Hercules to behave in some seriously un-hero-like ways. He kills his own children. You could argue that he kind of refuses his role of "hero" by behaving in such a heinous way.

HERO'S JOURNEY- 12 LABORS

Stage 4: Meeting with the Mentor

- Hercules goes to the Oracle of Delphi. The Oracle tells him he can atone or make up for his horrible crimes by serving King Eurystheus.

Stage 5: Crossing the Threshold

- Hercules offers to serve King Eurystheus in order to atone for the crimes he has committed. King Eurystheus tells him he must successfully complete ten labors. Hercules agrees.

Stage 6: Tests, Allies, Enemies

- Hercules tackles the ten labors perfectly. He does so with the help of certain gods and allies, and he encounters several enemies and foes along the way.

HERO'S JOURNEY- 12 LABORS

Stage 7: Approach to Inmost Cave

- For his tenth and last labor, Hercules must retrieve the cattle of Geryon. He must sail across the Atlantic Ocean to do this. The Greeks believed that there really was an edge of the world, and Hercules was totally not scared to travel there.

Stage 8: Ordeal

- King Eurystheus tells Hercules that two of the labors weren't completed in a satisfactory way, because Hercules had help with them. So, King Eurystheus commands Hercules to complete two additional labors. Hercules says, "bring it." After successfully capturing the Golden Apples of Hesperides, Hercules' final task is the most difficult and terrifying one. He must venture to the underworld and bring Cerberus, the vicious three-headed guard dog, to the surface for King Eurystheus to see. Basically, Hercules has to go to the land of the dead and return alive. Oh, and he must bring a little souvenir back with him. He successfully does this, and this time, he really and truly proves himself a hero.

Stage 9: Reward (Seizing the Sword)

- After completing these twelve labors, Hercules is finally able to atone for the murder of his children. His guilty conscience is wiped clean.

HERO'S JOURNEY- 12 LABORS

Stage 10: The Road Back

- Hercules is able to return to a “normal” monster-butt-kicking life

Stage 11: Resurrection

- Some say that Hercules is made immortal after completing these twelve labors. Others say he is granted immortality a little later on.

Stage 12: Return with Elixir

- Regardless of when he was made immortal, one thing is certain: Hercules eventually becomes a real god.

THEME: VIOLENCE

- Pretty much every story of Hercules has the same ending: "And then Hercules slaughtered [insert nasty monster or villain]." There's no getting around the fact that he was an incredibly violent guy. The dude just seriously loved to kill stuff.
- Sometimes he even got out of control and killed innocents. Of course, most of the time the people and beasties he killed were a threat to all humankind, and Hercules is remembered and worshipped as a hero.

Questions About Violence

- Which story of Hercules seems the most violent to you? Why do you think so?
- What is an example of a time when Hercules is violent without cause?
- What is a good reason to use violence?
- Hercules seems to lose control and go berserk on a regular basis. Do you think that made him seem more heroic to the ancient Greeks or less? Why?

THEME: DEATH AND IMMORTALITY

- Hercules was never just a mere mortal. He was born with a divine blood. His father is the greatest god of all, Zeus. But he was still mortal. One thing that makes the end of Hercules' life stick out from the rest is the fact that he becomes a god. Hercules eventually heads up to Mount Olympus and becomes immortal. Not all heroes get to be gods, so this is an extra super special event.

Questions About Death and Immortality

- Why do you think Hercules was made a god while other mortal heroes – even other sons of Zeus, like Perseus – were not?
- For a guy who can't seem to stay in one place for too long, do you think Hercules would be bored in Olympus?

THEME: JEALOUSY

- From his birth to his death, Hercules has been plagued by jealousy. As a mortal son of Zeus, Hera has seen him as a hated reminder of her husband's cheating ways. She has hounded the hero for years.
- In Hercules' later adventures, another lady in his life has some jealousy issues: his wife Deianira. Worried that she's going to lose Hercules to a pretty, young girl, Deianira poisons her husband with a potion that she thinks will make him love only her.

Questions About Jealousy

- We find it interesting that Hercules dies as a result of his wife's jealousy. Is Deianira much like Hera? And is Hercules like his cheating dad, Zeus?
- Why do you think that Hera got over her jealousy of Hercules?

HERCULES

- Think of the biggest, hunkiest dude that you've ever laid eyes on. Now multiply that by the biggest number you can imagine. There you go: Hercules. He wasn't just a hero to the ancient Greeks, he was a god

HERA

- The queen of the gods absolutely despises Hercules, because he is yet another reminder of her husband Zeus' cheating, philandering ways. Most of the time, Hera takes out her anger on Zeus' many mistresses, but instead of lashing out at Alcmene, Hercules' mother, the Hera focuses all her venom on Hercules.
- Surprisingly, Hera and Hercules make amends. When he becomes a god, she agrees to let him marry her daughter, Hebe.

ALCMENE

- Alcmene, Hercules' mother, is a granddaughter of the great hero Perseus. Because of her, Hercules gets tons of awesome hero genes, which help to make him so amazing. Some say that Alcmene's heritage is a big part of the reason that Zeus chooses to conceive a baby with her. Of course, the fact that she's smokin' hot is probably a factor as well.
- It's said that Alcmene was incredibly faithful to her husband, Amphitryon, which is probably why Zeus decides to seduce her by disguising himself as her husband. (Maybe that's also why Hera, the goddess of marriage, didn't harass Alcmene all that much. Just a thought.)

AMPHYTRION

- Amphytrion is Hercules' foster father.
- He seems to take it in stride that his wife has been impregnated by Zeus. But, then again, what exactly can you do against the king of the gods?

ZEUS

- There are a ton of Greek myths that start with some pretty woman catching the eye of Zeus, the king of the gods. Nymphs, goddesses, girls – Zeus loved them all. So, when we hear of his lust for Alcmene, Hercules' mother, we are far from surprised. Plenty of gods, demigods, heroes, and beautiful maidens entered into the world because Zeus had a thing for some chick.
- With Alcmene, Zeus changes up his usual strategy a bit by seducing her in the form of a man, in this case Amphytrion, her husband. Usually, Zeus does his seducing in the form of an animal, or something even more spectacular. With Leda he was a swan, with Europa he was a bull, and with Danae he was a shower of gold. With faithful Alcmene, however, Zeus thinks the best way to pull it off is to disguise himself as her own husband.

MEGARA

- The future must've looked rosy for Megara when she first married Hercules.
- Her hubby was already a famous hero
- When Hera makes Hercules go crazy and kill her and their kids, though, Megara's pretty little life totally falls apart.

OMPHALE

- Hercules starts out as the slave of this beautiful Libyan queen.
- Omphale is most famous for making the mighty hero dress in women's clothing and do the work that was normal for women back then.

DEIANIRA

- You'd think Hercules might think twice before he married someone whose name meant "husband destroyer."
- Nevertheless, Hercules got hitched to Deianira.
- Deianira ended up earning her name by accidentally causing the death of the greatest hero of all time.

NESSUS

- Nessus is a centaur.
- Nessus tries to force himself on Hercules' wife, Deianira.
- For this crime, Hercules kills Nessus.
- In the end, however, Nessus shows that he's not just any stupid old centaur.
- By tricking Deianira into thinking that his poisoned blood is a love potion, Nessus ends up causing the death of Hercules.

WHY IT MATTERS

- It's hard to describe how wildly popular Hercules was back in the day.
 - Imagine everybody literally worshipping Harry Potter as a god. There you go. That's how much people liked Hercules. We're not exaggerating either. There really were shrines to Hercules all over the ancient world, where he was worshiped as a champion and protector of mankind.
- But was the most famous hero-turned-god ever a real person? No one really knows. Some say that he was a Greek king long ago who probably did some pretty awesome things. Then when he died, the stories about him got more and more exaggerated until he became the superhuman Hercules that we know today. On the other hand, some say that he was never a real person at all, but instead the character was a combination of a lot of local heroes from all over the place whose legends eventually crystallized in the form of the greatest Greek hero of all time.
- He pops up in Homer's Iliad, his ghost makes a cameo in the Odyssey, and he's talked about in Hesiod's Shield of Hercules and Theogony. He also pops up in two famous extant tragedies: Hercules by Euripides, and The Women of Trachis by Sophocles. Later on, several of his stories were told by the Roman poet Ovid in his epic poem the Metamorphoses.
- Hercules' popularity continued on through the centuries and hasn't died down yet. We might not worship him as a god anymore, but most recently the great hero got his own Disney movie, a long running TV series, and his own comic book from Marvel. Not too shabby for somebody who might never have existed at all.