

Heracles

Heracles fought back his tears and pushed down the anger he was feeling. He knew that he deserved his punishment, his crime had been unforgivable. However, he knew that he would never have committed it if the goddess Hera hadn't driven him mad for her own entertainment. Now, on the order's of Apollo, he was being forced to serve King Eurystheus for the next twelve years. To make matters worse, the king had ordered him to complete twelve Labours. Each one seemed more impossible than the next.

The only saving grace for Heracles was that the goddess Athena and the god Hermes were sympathetic, and offered to help him where they could.

Close to King Eurystheus's kingdom was the land of Nemea. For many years, a grotesque lion had terrorised the area and killed the people of Nemea. Many hunters had tried to kill it, but its skin was impenetrable. The lion was invulnerable. Heracles's first task was to bring King Eurystheus the hide of the Nemean lion.

On the way to Nemea, Heracles stopped at the house of a poor man named Molorchus. Together they agreed that, if Heracles defeated the lion, they would sacrifice it to Zeus together. If he didn't, then Molorchus would sacrifice another animal in the name of Heracles and make him a hero forever.

It didn't take long for Heracles to find the beast, and he soon realised that the rumours of its skin were true. No arrow he shot or sword he swung would pierce the surface of the Nemean lion. In the end, Heracles was forced to retreat and think of a new plan. How do you kill a monster that cannot be cut with a sword?

Heracles knew he would be forced to rely on his superior strength. He tracked the lion into a cave, where he trapped it and pinned it to the ground. He grasped the lion in his arms and held it tightly around the neck. It took all of his strength but, eventually, he choked the lion to death.

On his way back to King Eurystheus, Heracles and Molorchus sacrificed the lion's body to Zeus, and he kept the skin for the king.

King Eurystheus was amazed at Heracles's success. He was so taken aback that he immediately began to fear the hero. He forbade him from using the gates to the city. The king was so scared that he had a large, bronze jar built and buried halfway in the ground. Whenever Heracles approached, he would run and hide from him.

Heracles knew he had achieved something remarkable, and he hoped that this would be enough to set him free. But, despite his fear, King Eurystheus was determined to uphold Heracles's punishment.



From that point on, Heracles grew used to receiving the king's increasingly dangerous demands through his herald. He never did see the king again, but he knew that his Labours were only just beginning.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. Who told Heracles that he must serve King Eurystheus?
2. How many tasks was Heracles going to have to complete?
3. Why was the lion so hard to kill?
4. Who helped Heracles sacrifice the lion?
5. Why was Hera important to the story?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

Why was Heracles being punished?

V

What does the word "impenetrable" tell you about the lion's skin?

S

What did King Eurystheus do to protect himself from Heracles?

I

Why wasn't Heracles free after the first task?

V

Write an antonym for the word "forbade".

Answers:

1. Apollo
2. 12
3. It's skin was impenetrable
4. Molochus
5. She drove Heracles mad and made him commit his crime

S: He was driven mad by Hera and committed a crime

V: Nothing could pierce it

S: (Look for all three) He hid in a bronze jar, banned him from entering the city gates and delivered his messages through a herald

I: The king was determined that he should complete his punishment

V: Allowed