

**THE  
TWELVE TASKS  
OF  
HERCULES**



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**Introduction**

Hercules was a hero of ancient Greek myth. He was a demigod, the son of Zeus and Alcmene, and possessed superhuman physical strength and vigour.

Hercules is typically represented as a brawny, muscular, short-necked man of huge proportions.

The Pythian (the Oracle of Delphi) told Hercules that if he would serve \*Eurystheus, the Argive king, for twelve years he would become "immortal". Consequently, Hercules bound himself to Eurystheus who became his tormentor and imposed upon him twelve tasks of great difficulty and danger.

[\*Eurystheus sat on the throne of Mycenae and Tiryns, and was a grandson of Perseus and Andromeda. His father was Sthenelos, which makes Hercules a cousin of Eurystheus.]

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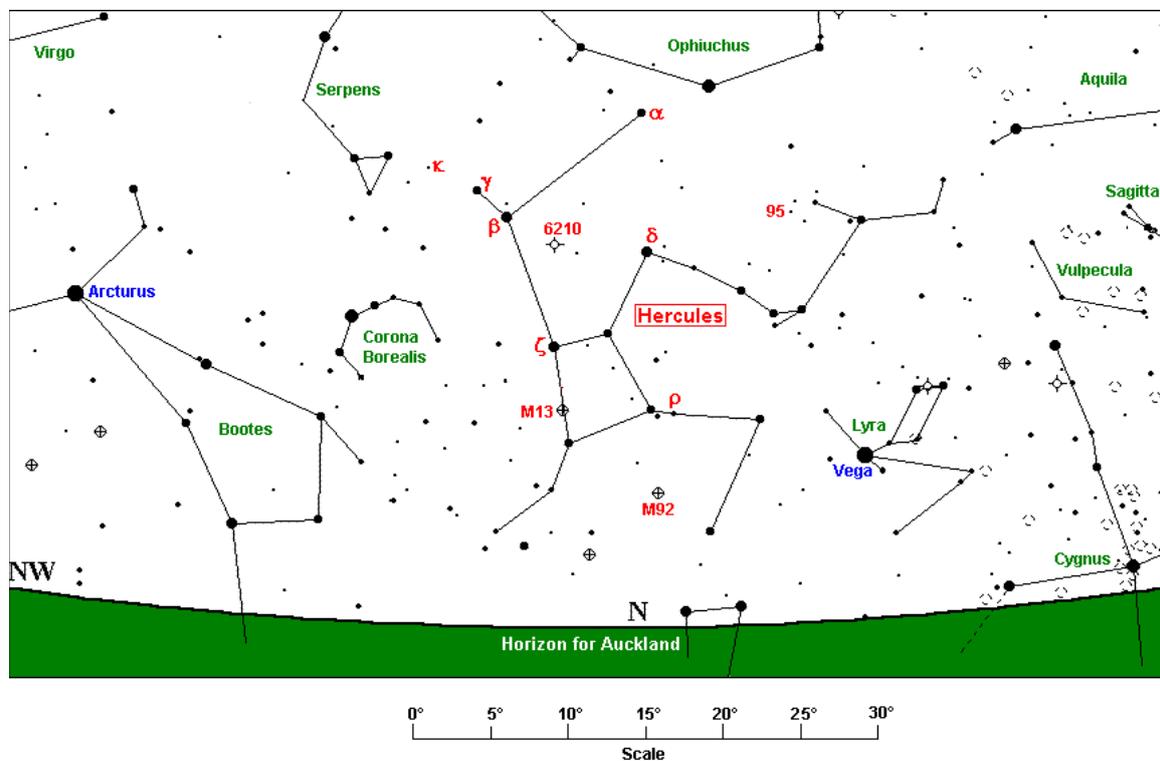
## The twelve tasks of Hercules

- 1) To slay the Nemean lion
- 2) To kill the Lernean hydra
- 3) To catch and retain the Arcadian stag
- 4) To destroy the Erymanthian boar
- 5) To cleanse the stables of King Augeas
- 6) To destroy the cannibal birds of the Lake Stymphalis
- 7) To take captive the Cretan bull
- 8) To catch the horses of the Thracian Diomedes
- 9) To get possession of the girdle of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons
- 10) To take captive the oxen of the monster Geryon
- 11) To get possession of the apples of the Hesperides
- 12) To bring up from the infernal regions the three headed dog Cerberus



(Hercules Killing the Lernean Hydra c. 1528, Gabriel Salmon (1504-1542))

On his ascension, Hercules took his place in the heavens as a constellation, and now resides between Lyra and Corona Borealis.



(The Constellation of Hercules as seen from Auckland)

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## The Death of Hercules

The death of Hercules is described in *Metamorphoses Book IX* by Ovid - On his way home with his bride, Deianeira, Nessus a centaur offers to help Deianeira across a fast flowing river while Heracles swims it. However, Nessus tries to steal Deianeira away while Hercules is still swimming. Enraged by Nessus' betrayal, Hercules shoots him with arrows dipped in the poisoned blood of the Hydra.

Plotting revenge before he succumbed, Nessus gave Deianeira his blood-soaked tunic, telling her that it was a charm that would reignite the love between her and Hercules should he prove to be unfaithful.

Many years later, Deianeira believed that Heracles had betraying her; so she give Heracles the blood-stained tunic to rekindle their love.

It's a disaster, and the poisoned tunic burns off Hercules' skin and exposes his bones. However, being a demi-god, Hercules cannot be killed by the poison, but he is in agony. Consequently, Hercules commits suicide by building a funeral pyre and entering into the flames.

As his body burned, only his immortal side remained.



(The Death of Hercules c. 1528 - Gabriel Salmon (1504-1542))

At this point Zeus' intervenes, and Hercules rises to Olympus and is reborn as a god.

In Olympus, Hercules was reconciled with his old enemy, Hera, and he married her daughter, Hebe.

And thereafter he lived without let or hindrance among the gods.

End

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