

Hercules



1 Hercules was half man and half god. His father was Zeus, the king of all the gods. But his mother was a mortal. But he did not know he was part god for quite a while.

2 Hera, Zeus' wife, was very jealous of Hercules. She tried all kinds of ways to kill him, including sending a couple of really big snakes into his crib. He was just a baby, but Hercules crushed those snakes and barely noticed.

3 Zeus admired strength. He loved his little son. But he figured that sooner or later, Hera might actually kill little Hercules. To keep Hercules safe from attack, Zeus sent him to live with a mortal family on earth.

4 Hercules grew up loved and noble. But he didn't fit in on earth. He was too big and too strong. One day, his earth father told him he was a god, well, part god anyway.

5 The rest of the story of Hercules is a series of stories, tasks, and adventures, as Hercules earned his way into the heavens, to take his place with the gods.

6 *According to legend* Eurystheus was the mortal cousin of Hercules. When Eurystheus was crowned king of Tiryns (a little village in the city-state of Argos), Hera helped Eurystheus design 12 Labors (missions or tasks) that Hercules had to complete.

7 Supposedly, when Hercules had completed the 12 missions, he would earn his immortality. That's what the Oracle at Delphi had said. Actually, the oracle had said, "If you complete 12 Labors, immortality will be yours." Of course, being an oracle, she never explained what she meant by "immortality" - would he live forever in legend or for real? Hercules never asked. (She would not have told him anyway.)

8 The truth was that Eurystheus was afraid of Hercules. He did not want Hercules coming after his crown. It would never have occurred to Hercules to do so. But an evil little man like Eurystheus would never have believed that. Each time Eurystheus and Hera gave Hercules a task to accomplish, they were sure that Hercules would never live through it.

9 But Hercules surprised them. He not only lived, he had great adventures, discovered true friends, and rid the world of some really nasty critters.