

After leaving Circe's island, Odysseus and his men continued to run into all sorts of interesting trouble. First they journeyed to the far reaches of the Mediterranean to find the entrance to the Underworld. He journeyed thereto help the soul of one of his crewmen (who had died on Circe's island). While he was among the dead he saw many heroes, including **Theseus**, and men killed during the Trojan War.

After he left the Underworld, Odysseus and his men encountered several treacherous monsters as they made his way back towards home. The first obstacle they came upon where the **Sirens**. The Sirens were a group of beautiful women whose irresistible singing lured sailors to wreck their boats on their rocky island. Odysseus had been warned about these women, and ordered his men to block their ears with wax, so that they would not be able to hear the treacherous music. He himself was rather curious, though, so instead of filling his own ears with wax, Odysseus had the sailors tie him to the mast of the ship. When he heard the Siren's song, Odysseus begged and pleaded with his men to let him go, but the men ignored him and stayed the course.

Not far from the Siren's island, the crew encountered another peril, this time the form of **Scylla** and **Charybdis**, a duo of formidable monsters who guarded the entrance to the straits of Messina. **Scylla** was a monstrous woman with six heads and triple sets of fangs in each mouth. She would sit perched on a rock on one edge of the straits and eat any sailors who strayed too close. Opposite her was **Charybdis**, a monster in the form of a whirlpool, which would swallow up ships that came too near. Needless to say, it was a difficult balancing act to pass through these two menaces. Even though Scylla managed to grab a few sailors and devour them on the spot, the ship eventually pulled through with most of the crew intact.

Having successfully survived those two perils, Odysseus began to be hopeful that the crew would actually be home soon. But it was not to be. After a long journey on the open sea, the boat pulled up on a beach where a large herd of fine, plumb cattle grazed. Odysseus had been warned that the herd was sacred to the god Helios, and he sternly ordered his men not to harm the animals. But the men were so hungry and travel weary, they ignored Odysseus' orders, and killed and ate some of the cows. Odysseus was extremely angry, and ordered the men to get back on the boat and put out to sea at once, but the damage had already been done. Helios destroyed the ship with a lightning bolt and everyone but Odysseus drowned in the raging sea. Odysseus was carried on a bit of wreckage to the island of friendly sea nymph named **Calypso**.

#### HOME AT LAST

When Odysseus washed up on the shores of Ogygia, he was taken in by the friendly sea nymph, **Calypso**. The lonely nymph immediately fell in love with the handsome hero, and treated him kindly. Calypso treated Odysseus well and begged him to marry her. She even promised she would make him immortal if he did. But Odysseus was heartsick for Penelope and Ithaca, and refused her advances. But Calypso was not easily deterred and she refused to let Odysseus leave the island. Every day Odysseus would sit on the shores of the island and weep for his homeland, but the love-crazed nymph refused to let him go. Finally Zeus sent Hermes to demand that the hero be released. Reluctantly Calypso provided him with materials for a ship and sent him on his way.

It made Poseidon (who hated Odysseus because of the whole Polyphemus incident) irate to see things going so smoothly, so he cooked up one last violent storm and shipwrecked Odysseus again. Odysseus managed to cling onto some wreckage and weather the seas until at last he washed ashore in the land of a good and noble people, called the **Phaeacians**. **Nausicaa**, the daughter of the king, found Odysseus lying on the beach half-drowned and took him to the palace. The Phaeacians had heard great things about Odysseus and treated him to a great feast before sending him off on one of their swift, sure boats to Ithaca.

While Odysseus was off having his adventures, his long suffering wife, Penelope, waited for him back home in Ithaca . In addition to having to raise the couple's son and run the kingdom by herself for twenty years, Penelope had some other troubles on her hands. After Odysseus had been gone and unheard from for almost twenty years, most people assumed he was dead. Men began to flock to Ithaca, hoping to grab the island kingdom and the hand of a beautiful woman by marrying Penelope. These men, called **suitors**, would visit Penelope for weeks at a time and always expected to be fed and entertained (as was the Greek custom). So for years on end, Penelope had to put up with the constant pestering of these suitors and pay for housing and feeding them.

Penelope was convinced Odysseus would return, and refused to marry any of the suitors. They were putting increasing pressure on her until Penelope, who was as clever as her husband, developed a ploy to keep them at bay. Penelope happened to be at work weaving a funeral shroud to honor **Laertes**, the father of Odysseus. Penelope promised the suitors that as soon as she finished the shroud, she would pick from among the suitors. So every day she would work on weaving the shroud, but every night, while the suitors were sleeping, she would undo most of the day's work, and so delayed the choice as much as possible.

Now Odysseus was a clever man, and a realist, so he was well aware that there could be trouble brewing at home. He did not doubt the faithfulness of his wife, Penelope, but he did worry that the suitors, who had every reason to want him dead, would make sure he ended up that way at the first available opportunity. So instead of having the Phaeacian ship take him directly to his palace, he asked that it drop him on an abandoned section of the island, far from any towns. From there Odysseus walked up into the hills to a hut he knew belonged to an old and loyal servant of his, a shepherd named **Eumaeus**. When Eumaeus found that his master had returned at last, he was overjoyed and immediately agreed to help his master in any way he could. Odysseus asked about the situation back at the palace. The shepherd told Odysseus about the suitors and warned that they planned to kill him if he came home. Odysseus asked Eumaeus to bring **Telemachus** out to join them at the hut, and together, the three men came up with a plot to foil the suitors.

The first step of their plan was for Odysseus to return to his palace in disguise, so he could observe the suitors. Athena helped matters along by magically disguising him as an old beggar. When Odysseus arrived at the palace, his disguise held. The only one who recognized the master of the house was Odysseus' faithful old dog, **Argus**. The dog was so happy to see his master, his old heart gave out and he

fell dead in the courtyard of the house. For several days Odysseus limped around the palace observing the treacherous suitors. Only one person guessed his true identity. That was **Euryycleia**, an old woman who had been his nanny when he was a small child. She recognized a scar he had gotten in boyhood. The old nurse was sworn to secrecy, and the plan continued.

Telemachus asked Penelope to arrange a contest between the suitors. The contest would settle, once and for all, whom Penelope would marry. Penelope designed the contest to be extremely difficult. To win, a suitor needed to successfully string Odysseus' huge bow and shoot an arrow through twelve ax heads set in a row.

When the day of the contest arrived, Odysseus, Eumaeus and Telemachus were on hand in the great hall where the contest was to be held. While the suitors were distracted with getting ready for the big event, Telemachus saw to it that the door was locked from the outside. Then the contest began. Few suitors were even able to bend the bow enough to string it, let alone shoot an arrow through the row of axes. When all the suitors had tried and failed, Odysseus, still disguised as a beggar, stepped up to the bow. He strung and shot the bow, then let his hood slip back to reveal his true identity. While the suitors stood in a state of shock, Odysseus, Telemachus and Eumaeus took

up weapons they had hidden in the hall in advance and began to cut down the wickedest of the suitors. The three men did not unlock the doors and emerge from the great hall until the suitors were dead.

When Penelope learned what had happened, she was filled with hope that Odysseus had finally returned. But after all that she had been through, she was a bit wary, and wanted one further bit of proof that the man who had returned was really her beloved husband. She asked Odysseus to describe for her the special bed he had built for her so many years before as a wedding present. It was a bed made from living trees, whose branches he had woven together. Odysseus described the bed he had made. Then he folded his trembling wife in a long delayed embrace

**Odysseus**—*clever Greek hero and king of Ithaca; the Odyssey tells the story of his ten year adventure to get home from the Trojan war*

**Penelope**—*Beautiful, faithful wife of Odysseus who waits patiently for his return*

**Telemachus**—*grown son of Odysseus and Penelope; he goes in search of information about his father.*

**Aeolus (EYE-OLE-US)**- *god of the wind*

**Laestrygones (LAS-TRI-GO-NAYS)**- *man eating giants who destroy 11 of Odysseus' ships*

**Circe (SIR-SEE)** - *sorceress who turned Odysseus' men into pigs*

**Sirens**—*group of gorgeous but treacherous women whose beautiful singing lured sailors to their deaths on a rocky island*

**Scylla (SKILL-A)** - *monstrous 6 headed woman who sat on a rock and ate sailors whose boats strayed to close*

**Charybdis (KA-RIB-DIS)**—*Whirlpool that lay opposite Scylla and would eat ships that sailed too close*

**Calypso (KA-LIP-SO)** - *beautiful nymph who fell in love with Odysseus and forced him to stay on her island*

**Nausicaa (NOW-SICK-AH-AH)**-*Phaeacian princess who finds Odysseus*

**Eumaeus (YOU-MY-US)**-*loyal shepherd who warns Odysseus about the plot against him, and helps out*

**Euryycleia (YERI-CLAY-A)**-*Odysseus' childhood nurse who recognizes him because of an old scar*  
**Argus**-*Odysseus' faithful dog, who dies from joy upon seeing his long-lost master*

### **AENEAS: WHERE THE GREATNESS BEGAN**

In previous chapters you have read of the fall of Troy and the adventures of the hero Odysseus, who journeyed for ten years before he reached his homeland. But Odysseus was not the only warrior who suffered through a long journey after the fall of Troy. The hero Aeneas set off on a trip that was almost as long and even more wrenching. Unlike Odysseus, who knew where he wanted to go (home), Aeneas did not even know where he was trying to get.

Aeneas was a Dardanian prince and son of Venus (for the full story see the box below) who had fought bravely at the side of his Trojan cousins. At the end of the war, he was one of the few Trojan heroes to survive the bloodshed. This was because destiny had a different plan for him. It had been foretold that he would escape the wreckage of Troy and found a new city and a new race of people that would be the most powerful the world had ever seen.

Therefore, in the final hours of the battle, as the city burned all around, Venus came to Aeneas and warned him to stop fighting and flee with all the men he could gather. Aeneas listened to his mother and prepared to leave together with his father, wife and son. As he struggled out of the

doomed city, he carried his lame father **Anchises** on his back and held his young son **Ascanius** firmly by the hand. But somewhere in the smoke and confusion, Aeneas became separated from his wife, the Trojan princess **Creusa**. Aeneas was frantic to find his wife, and after he had delivered his father and son to safety, he ran back into the city to find her. Aeneas was not able to find Creusa anywhere, but would not give up his search until her ghost appeared to him. Creusa's ghost urged him to leave while he could and set aside his old life for a new one he would build for himself in a far off land. Aeneas was heartbroken, but he as he wife urged, and left the city without her.

### THE SEARCH FOR HOME BEGINS

Once Aeneas had gathered the Trojan refugees and readied his 20 ships, he set off and sailed through the Hellespont. He decided to head for the wild, empty northern part of Greece, known as Thrace, and settle there. When Aeneas and his men arrived, they were greeted by exceptionally bad omens (including bleeding branches and the ghostly voice of Aeneas' kinsman Polydorus). Because of these omens, Aeneas quickly decided to move on.

His next stop was the island of Delos, where he encountered a priest of Apollo named **Anius**. Anius was a gifted prophet and an old friend of Anchises. He told Aeneas that it was necessary to return to his "Ancient Mother". Unfortunately, like most ancient divinations, this was rather unclear. Aeneas took it to mean he should travel to Crete, the homeland of his ancestor **Teucer** (for the story of Teucer see the box). Unfortunately, this turned out to be a bad guess. When Aeneas and his crews arrived in Crete, they were immediately plagued by the terrible famine which was ravaging the area. So Aeneas immediately decided to try to find his ancient mother elsewhere. He had already tried the homeland of his ancestor Teucer, so now on the advice of the his sacred Trojan household gods, the *penates*, he decided to visit Sicily, the homeland of his ancestor **Dardanus**.

On his way to Sicily, Aeneas blown by a storm to the Strophade Islands, where his men were harassed by filthy bird women called **harpies**. They had metal wings and poisoned talons and terrorized the crews by stealing their food or pooping on it. These were the same harpies who had bothered the hero Jason on his journey. They had been driven to the Strophade islands by the Argonauts Zetes and Calias.

Needless to say, Aeneas and his men quickly moved on, this time heading to the city of **Buthrotum** in Greece. This city had been founded by another Trojan refugee, the seer **Helenus** (the hapless fellow who had been forced to tell the Greeks the items they needed to secure victory at Troy). Helenus was happy to welcome his kinsman, and gave him a further clue about where Aeneas should found his new city. Helenus told him to look for a place where a white sow (female pig) was suckling thirty white piglets. Helenus also gave him directions to Sicily, so Aeneas could try his luck there.

By following Helenus' good directions, Aeneas and his men arrived safely in Sicily. Unfortunately, as soon as they arrived in the Sicilian city of Drepanum, Aeneas' aged father Anchises died. The Trojans were kindly received by the Sicilian king **Acestes**, but soon Aeneas felt it was time to press on to Italy, where he felt his true destiny lay.

Up until this point in his journey, things had gone relatively well, but as he drew near to his goal, things began to go wrong. The main reason for this sudden spate of bad luck was the great hatred the goddess Juno held for Aeneas and the Trojans. Juno had always hated the Trojans on principle (because they were descended from one of Jupiter's illicit love affairs), but she hated them even more after the Trojan prince Paris had snubbed her in favor of Venus in the Golden Apple contest. The fact the Aeneas was the son of Venus just made matters worse. And on top of all that, Juno knew that later in history the descendants of Aeneas (the Romans) would conquer her favorite

city, Carthage (in the Punic Wars).

Therefore Juno began to stir up trouble for poor Aeneas. When Aeneas and his crew finally set sail for Italy, Juno convinced **Aeolus**, the god of the winds, to blow the fleet off course. As a result of the storm Aeolus whipped up, many ships were destroyed and the Trojans were blown all the way to the shores of North Africa.

### **AENEAS & DIDO**

The marooned Trojans soon discovered they had landed near the great city of Carthage. The Queen of Carthage was a beautiful and extremely powerful woman named **Dido**. Dido had founded the city and built it into a powerful and prosperous place. Venus very much wanted Dido to treat her stranded son well. So to ensure a kind reception she sent Cupid to shoot Queen Dido with a golden arrow so that the queen would fall in love with Aeneas and treat him well.

When love-smitten Dido met Aeneas and his crew, she kindly welcomed them into her court, and offered to help in any way she could. Venus's love charm seemed to work even better than anticipated, because soon Dido was overwhelmed with a great passion for the handsome and daring Trojan prince. Forgetting that his destiny lay elsewhere, Aeneas began to fall in love with the exquisite Queen Dido as well. Soon the two were acting like king and queen and rumors of marriage were on everyone's lips.

Meanwhile, on Mt. Olympus, the gods were beginning to get alarmed. It was NOT Aeneas' destiny to marry Dido and settle in Carthage. Therefore, Jupiter sent Mercury to remind Aeneas that his future lay in Italy, where he would found a great race. Aeneas was heartsick and reluctant to leave his lover, but could not deny the will of the gods. He gathered up his men and left at once. Unfortunately, Dido took their forced separation even harder than he had. She was heartbroken at his betrayal and bitterly cursed the gods. Driven mad by her grief and passion, Dido decided on a dreadful plan. She ordered slaves to build a huge pile of wood for a funeral pyre in the palace courtyard. Then she climbed on top of the bonfire and ordered a slave to light it. As the flames began to lick up around her, she thrust a sword into her chest and died amidst the flames. As she died, she cursed Aeneas and all of his descendants. As he sailed off to his destiny, Aeneas himself could see the sickly glow of her funeral fire lighting up the sky above Carthage.

After Aeneas left Carthage, he sailed back to Sicily, where he was again hospitably received by King Acestes. King Acestes was a distant ancestor of Aeneas, and wanted to honor the memory of his recently deceased kinsman Anchises, so held elaborate funeral games in his memory. In ancient times it was customary to honor the death of a great man with such funeral games, which consisted many different contests of strength and speed. In the Aeneid, Vergil describes these contests and their winners at great length.

But just across the straits of Messina, Italy still beckoned to Aeneas, and soon he prepared to set sail once more. At this point, Aeneas and his fellow Trojan refugees had been wandering around the Mediterranean for 7 years. Sicily was one of the few hospitable places they had encountered. Many were reluctant to leave Sicily in favor of the wild frontier of that was Italy. Juno preyed upon this dissatisfaction and stirred up a rebellion that cost Aeneas several ships (see box for details).

### **ITALY AT LAST**

Finally Aeneas set sail for Italy with his remaining ships. He was still quite hazy about exactly where in Italy he should be headed until his father Anchises came to him in a dream and urged him to go to Cumae in Southern. Anchises did not give any more details than that, so Aeneas decided to visit the famous oracle who lived there. This oracle was called the Cumaen Sibyl, and she guarded the entrance to the Underworld. Aeneas hoped she would lead him into the Underworld so he could talk with Anchises and discover more about his destiny.

When Aeneas arrived at the cave of the Sibyl, she told him that before he could enter the underworld, he had to travel to the shores of **Lake Avernus** and find a golden bough (tree branch). This tree branch would serve as sufficient token for Charon, the ferryman of the Underworld, to carry them across the River Styx.

Aeneas fetched the stick and they set off. Once in the Underworld, Aeneas saw many things, including many old friends and enemies. Most heart wrenchingly, he saw Dido. But even when Aeneas tried to apologize to her, she would not talk to him. Instead she turned away, and took shelter in the arms of her husband, Sychaeus. At length Aeneas arrived in the Elysian Fields, where dead heroes lived out eternity in a sort of paradise. Among them was Anchises. Anchises predicted to Aeneas that the race he would found would be very great, and told him all about his many famous descendants. For the purposes of propaganda, Virgil included several members of the ruling Julio-Claudian family among these, including the heir at the time, **Marcellus**. Soon, however, it was time for Aeneas to leave, but he left with better understanding of where he should go, and what his descendants should accomplish.

### ARRIVAL IN LATIUM

Guided by Anchises' advice, Aeneas sailed up the northern coast of Italy, and arrived at an area known as **Latium**, which was ruled by a king named **Latinus**. It was foretold that a foreign hero would come and marry Latinus' daughter, **Lavinia**. Because of this prophecy, Latinus welcomed Aeneas eagerly. For it seemed clear to him that Aeneas was that hero and his daughter would soon be happily married.

Unfortunately, Juno decided that things were starting to go too smoothly for Aeneas again. It would not do to have him marry Lavinia and settle down with no fuss at all. So she stirred up jealousy and mistrust of Aeneas in the heart of Latinus' wife, Queen **Amata**. Amata had good reason to be upset with Aeneas. For she had long wanted her daughter to marry a nearby hero, **Turnus**, prince of the **Rutilians**. She had her heart set on Turnus being her future son-in-law, and set envoys to him.

Turnus decided to march to Latium and press his claim with Lavinia, and soon chaos ruled. King Latinus did not want to settle a conflict that pitted his wife against the famous hero he had been awaiting so long, so he stepped down from the throne, and let the two young heroes settle it between themselves.

### WAR WITH THE RUTILIANS

When Turnus marched into Latium to fight with Aeneas, he brought with him several allies. One was a cruel Etruscan king named **Mezentius** who had been exiled by his own people. Another was a beautiful Volscian warrior princess named **Camilla**. Aeneas on his side, had the help of the Etruscans (who wanted to fight Mezentius) and troops sent by fellow a Trojan settler who lived in southern Italy, Evander. Evander had sent his young son **Pallas**. Once the fighting began, it was a whirlwind of night raids and ambushes, but no one gained a clear upper hand. Aeneas killed Mezentius and his son, and Turnus killed young Pallas. Camilla was tragically killed in an ambush. Finally, to settle the matter, Aeneas agreed to meet Turnus in single combat.

Aeneas eventually got the upper hand in the fighting. He wounded Turnus seriously but as Aeneas pinned him down and prepared to kill him, the Rutilian prince begged for mercy. Turnus said he only wanted to live long to see his aged father one last time. Aeneas was moved by pity, and was about to grant the dying hero his wish. Then he noticed that Turnus was proudly wearing a belt that had belonged to Pallas, the young warrior, and friend of Aeneas that Turnus had killed earlier in the fighting. Pallas had begged for mercy from Turnus and had received none. When Aeneas saw

this belt, he was overcome by fury, and killed Turnus on the spot.

### A NEW RACE BEGINS

With the death of Turnus, local opposition dissolved, and Aeneas soon married Lavinia. He and his wife became rulers of the new city he named for her, **Lavinium**. When Aeneas died, his son Ascanius, who was now known as **Iulus**, became king of Lavinium. The citizens of Lavinium later founded the city of **Alba Longa**, and it was from Alba Longa that Romulus and Remus came. It was based on this long line of descent that the Romans claimed the Trojans as their ancestors. Some, like Julius Caesar, claimed to be a direct descendent of Aeneas, through his son Iulus (supposed ancestor of the Julian *gens*).

**Aeneas (AH-NEE-US)**– Dardanian hero and son of Venus who fled Troy to found the Roman race

**Anchises (ANK-EYE-SEES)**– father of Aeneas, lover of Venus

**Ascanius (ASK-KAY-NEE-US)**–son of Aeneas and Creusa

**Creusa (KRAY-OO-SA)**– daughter of Priam and Hecuba, wife of Aeneas; she was left behind at Troy

**Acestes (AH-KES-TEES)**– King of Sicily; he hosted the Trojans and organized the funeral games for Anchises

**Dido (DIE-DOE)**– (Elyssa) Founder and Queen of Carthage who fell in love with Aeneas and killed herself when he abandoned her

**Sychaeus (ZA-KAY-US)**– Dido's first husband, who was murdered by her brother

**Latinus**– King of Latium

**Latium**– area of Italy where Aeneas settled (Rome is in Latium)

**Queen Amata**– wife of Latinus, mother of Lavinia; she wanted her daughter to marry Turnus.

When she heard Turnus had been killed, she hung herself in despair.

**Lavinia**– daughter of Latinus and Amata; she became Aeneas' wife

**Turnus**– Rutilian prince who fought the Trojans for the hand of Lavinia; he was killed by Aeneas

**Mezentius**– cruel Etruscan king who was an ally of Turnus

**Pallas**– son of Evander who was an ally of Aeneas; he was killed by Turnus; the sight of his belt made Aeneas kill Turnus

**Camilla**– Volscian warrior princess and ally of Turnus who was killed in an ambush

**Lavinium**– name of the city founded by Aeneas

**Iulus**– other name of Ascanius, the supposed ancestor of the Julian clan

### HERCULES

One of the most famous heroes in Classical mythology is Hercules, who was known for his strength and courage. Here is his story...

#### *The Early Days*

Jupiter fell in love with a beautiful mortal woman, named **Alcmene**. Unfortunately for Jupiter, Alcmene was married, and very much loved her husband **Amphitryon**. One day, while Amphitryon was away in battle, Jupiter took his shape and briefly visited Alcmene, pretending he was home early from the fight. When the real Amphitryon returned a few days later, Alcmene was mightily confused. In due time, Alcmene gave birth to two sons. One, **Iphicles**, was the son of Amphitryon. The other, **Hercules**, was the son of Jupiter. When the babes were only a few days old, it was already clear how different the two youngsters would be. Two large snakes (which had been sent by Juno, who was upset by Jupiter's mortal son) slithered into the crib where the babies lay. While Iphicles whimpered in terror, baby Hercules cheerfully strangled the snakes, one in tiny fist.

### *The Twelve Labors*

Hercules grew up to be a great hero, known all over Greece for his strength. But as we read early, Juno did not like him, and as he became more and more famous, the more jealous and angry she got. To punish Hercules, Juno cursed him with a sudden madness that caused him to kill his wife, **Megara**, and his sons. When Hercules came back to his senses, he was horrified by what he had done. He went to the Delphic Oracle and asked how he could make amends for his terrible deeds. The oracle told him to go **King Eurystheus** of Tiryns and perform whatever ten labors the king lay before him.

**1. The Nemean Lion:** The first task the king gave Hercules was slaying a fearsome lion, who was terrorizing the countryside around Nemea. This lion has skin so tough, it could not be penetrated by swords, spears or arrows made of bronze or iron. Hercules tracked down the great lion, and fired arrows from his mighty bow at the beast, but the arrows just bounced off harmlessly. He jabbed at the lion with a huge spear, but left not even a scratch. There seemed to be no way to harm the beast. Finally Hercules jumped on the lion's back, grabbed him by the neck and strangled him to death. Hercules decided that the skin of this lion would make an excellent armor, so he set about skinning the big cat. At first he made no progress, because he could not pierce the lion's skin with any dagger. But then he hit on a clever solution, he used the lion's own claws and fangs to slice through the skin.

**2. The Hydra:** Hercules' next task was to kill a frightful monster called the Hydra, who lived in the swamps around Lerne. The Hydra was a large water snake with many heads and poisonous fangs. Hercules tried to kill the creature by cutting off its heads. But every time he cut off one, two more would grow back where the one had been. To make matters worse, Juno sent a large swamp crab to join in the fight. Hercules decided to get some help of his own. Every time Hercules cut off one of the Hydra's heads, he had his assistant Iolaus seal the stump by burning it with a torch. This kept the heads from growing back. Hercules finally managed to cut off all the Hydra's heads, except one, which was immortal. Hercules took this one and buried under a large rock. As for the crab, Hercules stomped to death. Juno placed her ill-fated helper in the stars as the constellation Cancer, "The Crab".

**3. The Erymanthian Boar:** Next, King Eurystheus ordered Hercules to capture a boar who was ravaged the slopes of Mt. Erymanthus. This was a tricky task, because Hercules did not just have to kill the vicious animal and be done with it. Instead he had to figure out how to capture the live animal, who had been known to gore many a hunter with his tusks, and bring him all the way back to the King. To capture the boar, Hercules came up with a clever plan. He chased the animal into the deep snow near the peaks of the mountain. The boar got tired trying to slog through the high drifts, and Hercules made quick work of capturing him in a net and hauling him back to Tiryns.

**4. The Golden Doe (Hind):** For his next labor, Hercules was asked to capture alive a beautiful doe sacred to Diana (also called the "Golden Hind"). The doe was snow white and had golden antlers (even though it was a female). No one could harm the animal without bringing the wrath of Diana upon them. Eurystheus, who didn't like Hercules much, hoped that the strong hero was also clumsy, and would accidentally hurt the doe in his efforts. But Hercules spent a year carefully tracking the golden doe, and eventually captured her and took her to the King unharmed.

**5. The Stymphalian Birds:** For his fifth labor, Hercules was ordered to clear the shores of Lake Stymphalis of some annoying (and dangerous) birds who had taken up residence there. These birds were so troublesome because they weren't any ordinary birds. Their claws and beaks were made of sharp iron and their feathers were made of bronze. They could shoot their feathers at prey like

arrows. Unfortunately, their preferred prey was people, or large animals. Hercules decided that even if these birds were large and vicious, they were probably frightened of large noises, like most other birds. So he had Vulcan make him a huge bronze rattle (yes, like a baby's rattle) and he shook it and scared the birds into the air. Then he shot some of them with his bow and arrows, and shooed the rest away with the rattle.

**6: The Augean Stables:** By this point, King Eurystheus was running out of good ideas. He had tried giving Hercules dangerous tasks, in hopes that he would get himself killed. He had tried giving him delicate tasks, in hopes that he would offend the gods, and Hercules had handled them all well. So this time, Eurystheus decided to give him the most humiliating, disgusting task he could think of. There lived in Greece a King named Augeus, who kept enormous herds of cattle. The cattle were housed in huge stables that had not been cleaned in years. The stables were filled several feet worth of filth and manure. Eurystheus ordered Hercules to clean out these stables in one day. Not only was this a disgusting job, but an impossible one. But luckily, Hercules had a plan. The River Alpheus flowed nearby. Hercules built a dam out of big stones and diverted the course of the river. He steered the river into the stable and let the waters of the River clear the stables out. So he finished the job in plenty of time, without having to shovel a single pile of manure.

**7. The Cretan Bull:** For his 7th labor, Hercules had to travel to Crete and fetch the snow white bull that Neptune had given to **Minos**, king of Crete. Neptune had given this fine animal to the king to be sacrificed on his behalf. But the Cretan queen, **Pasiphae** had taken a liking to the handsome animal and refused to let her husband sacrifice it. (According to rumor, the monstrous bull-headed Minotaur was the offspring of Pasiphae and this bull). Neptune was furious that the bull had not been sacrificed to him and drove the creature mad. The crazed, fire breathing bull went on rampage and terrorized the Cretan countryside. King Eurystheus figured retrieving such a dangerous and terrible creature was a perfect task for Hercules. But Hercules managed to capture the bull with relatively little fuss and took the animal by boat back to his taskmaster.

**8. The Mares of Diomedes:** For his 8th labor, Hercules had to capture the ferocious mares owned by Diomedes, a Thracian king. Now one doesn't generally think of horses as being particularly ferocious, but these horses were a bit unusual: they ate men. It was definitely going to present a bit of a challenge to bring an entire herd of man-eating mares half way across Greece to Eurystheus without becoming a snack somewhere along the way. Hercules came up with a somewhat novel approach. He realized it was their cruel master Diomedes, who influenced the horses to act this way, so he killed Diomedes and fed him to his own horses. After finishing off their master, the horses were as meek and mild as could be, and lost their appetite for man flesh. After that, Hercules had no problem herding the horses back to Tiryns.

**9. Hippolyta's Girdle:** For his 9th labor, Hercules was sent to the land of the Amazons, to retrieve a special belt, or girdle, worn by the Amazon queen, **Hippolyta**. Eurystheus figured this would be a perilous task because the Amazons, a tribe of warrior women, were not fond of men, and Hercules was about as manly as a person could get. As it turns out, the Queen Hippolyta had heard tell of Hercules and his incredible deeds, and was happy to help a fellow warrior out, man or not, so she freely offered her belt. Juno, however, was furious to see things going so smoothly for Hercules. She went in disguise to some of the Amazon warriors and convinced the women that Hercules was plotting to steal away, or perhaps even kill Queen Hippolyta. In a fury the women launched an attack without even consulting the queen. In the fray that resulted, Hercules killed Hippolyta (who

was trying to break up the fight), because he thought she had betrayed him. After he killed the queen and defeated the other warrior women, Hercules was able to escape with the girdle and return to Greece. Eurystheus presented the hard won girdle to his daughter, **Admete**.

#### 10. The Cattle of Geryon

For his tenth labor, Eurystheus sent Hercules to far off Spain to get a magnificent herd of red cattle that belonged to a monster named **Geryon**. Geryon was a monstrous man who had one set of legs, but three torsos and heads. A two headed dog, **Orthrus**, and a son of Ares/Mars, **Eurytion**, helped Geryon guard the precious cattle. Hercules quickly clubbed to death these two side-kicks, and set to work herding the cattle onto his make-shift ship (which was an enormous golden goblet the sun god Helios had given him—bizarro!). Geryon tried to stop him, but Hercules killed him with a single arrow which he shot through all three of Geryon's hearts. Hercules had a long trip home, since it was a bit awkward to travel such great distances with a large herd of cattle. Along the way, various thieves, kings and monsters tried to steal the beautiful bovines. One of these would be thieves was monster named **Cacus**, who was the son of Hephaestus/Vulcan and Medusa (how's that for parents). This fire-breathing giant lived in a cave along the banks of the Tiber River, on the site of the later city of Rome. When Hercules was passing through with the cattle, Cacus sneaked into his camp at night, and dragged several good beasts off, leading them by their tails (so their tracks would point the wrong way) to his cave. Hercules was not fooled by the ploy, and confronted Cacus in his cave, killing him with his bare hands.

Now the original bargain had been that Hercules complete 10 labors. But Eurystheus, who specialized in making Hercules' life difficult, refused to count the second (the Hydra) and fifth (Stymphalian birds) labors, saying the Hercules had been given help in both of these. (His assistant helped him burn the neck stumps on the Hydra and Athena gave him the rattle he used to scare the birds). Therefore, Hercules had to do two more labors, bringing the total up to the familiar twelve.

#### 11. The Golden Apples of the Hesperides

For his eleventh labor, Hercules was given a particularly difficult task. He had to travel to the farthest ends of the western world to the Garden of the Hesperides. In that garden there was a tree, which Gaia had given to Hera on her wedding day, that grew golden apples. His task was to fetch three of these golden apples. This might not sound to bad, but there were two rather thorny problems. First, was that no one really knew where the garden was. Second, the tree was guarded by an enormous hundred headed dragon named **Ladon**.

To solve the first problem, Hercules captured a sea god and oracle named **Nereus**. Hercules forced the god to tell him where the garden was, and how to get the apples. Nereus told him the best way to get the apples was to talk the Titan **Atlas** into getting them for him. Atlas stood near the garden and held up the sky. It was his daughters, who were nymphs called the **Hesperides**, who tended to the special apple tree. Hercules decided take Nereus' advice and see if Atlas could be convinced to get the apples from his daughters. First he

shot the dragon Ladon dead with his arrows. Then Hercules climbed to the top of Mount Atlas, where the Titan stood, and asked if Atlas would go fetch the apples. To sweeten the deal, Hercules offered to hold up the heavens while Atlas was gone. Atlas was delighted at the prospect of having a break from holding the sky up, and eagerly took on the mission. But by the time he returned with the golden apples, Atlas had decided that maybe he wasn't interested in holding the world anymore at all, now what Hercules had shouldered the task. Atlas offered to take the apples to Eurystheus himself and leave Hercules holding up the heavens forever. Hercules (who knew that Atlas specialized in brawn, not brains) cheerfully told Atlas that this was an excellent idea. Hercules said

he would be happy to take the job if Atlas could just take back the sky for one moment while he got a cushion to put on his neck to make the load more comfortable. Atlas was gullible enough to agree. As soon as the titan had the skies back on his shoulder, Hercules snatched the three golden apples and ran for it, leaving the hollering Titan stuck with his load.

In addition to encountering the wrestler **Antaeus** (whom you can read about above) on his way home, Hercules also encountered the Titan **Prometheus**. Prometheus, who had offended Zeus by giving man the gift of fire, had spent the last 30,000 years chained to a rock having his liver eaten out daily. Hercules shot down the eagle who had been eating the Titan's liver and brokered a deal that allowed Cheiron (the Centaur wounded by a poisonous arrow) to trade in his immortality and take Prometheus' place in the underworld. This win-win situation allowed Prometheus to live and go free, and Cheiron to die, which freed him from the eternal pain caused by the poison.

## 12. Cerberus

Eurystheus decided to save the best for last. For the final labor, he ordered Hercules to bring **Cerberus**, the three headed dog of the Underworld, back to Tiryns alive. When Hercules got to the Underworld, he explained his mission to Hades, who agreed to let him take the dog, if he used no weapons. Hercules picked the dog up in his brawny arms, and carried it back to Eurystheus. The cowardly king was so terrified by the monstrous creature he jumped into a large jar and hid there until Hercules had left to take the dog back to the Underworld. Once he'd gotten Cerberus safely back to the gates of Hades, Hercules was done with his labors and free to go.

## BEYOND THE LABORS...

After his labors, Hercules went on to have many other adventures, and some misadventures. One notable misadventure involved Hercules throwing a youth named **Iphitus** off a tower in a fit of rage. Hercules was tormented by the bad dreams his guilt over this murder caused. Eventually he went to the Delphic Oracle and asked what he should do. The oracle told him to sell himself into slavery for a year and give the proceeds to the heirs of Iphitus. Hercules agreed to do this, and was bought by the a Lydian Queen named **Omphale**. The Queen seemed to have had a rather bizarre sense of humor; in addition to using her slave to rid her kingdom of bandits and a large serpent, she also amused herself by dressing him in drag, and having him do women's work like weaving and cleaning.

After his year of slavery was done, Hercules had several more years of adventures and even helped defend Mt. Olympus in an epic struggle against the Giants. At last he settled down in Calydon, and began to court a woman named **Deianira**, who was said to be a daughter of Dionysus. To win her hand, Hercules had to fight off a rival suitor named **Achelous** who was a shape changing river god. After a harrowing fight in which the god changed into a bull and a snake, Hercules defeated Achelous and married Deianira, by whom he had a son named **Hyllas**.

Hercules loved his wife Deianira and had several happy years with her, but she was ultimately and accidentally responsible for his death. One day, the two were trying to cross the Evenus River. A centaur named **Nessus** often waited on the banks of the river and would ferry people across on his back for a small fee. Hercules decided to swim across, but hired Nessus to carry Deianira. But instead of carrying her across the river, Nessus tried to abduct her. Hercules shot the traitorous centaur with one of his poisoned arrows. As Nessus lay dying, he decided to get back at Hercules any way he could. So he pretended to be remorseful and told Deianira to take a shirt smeared with his blood and weave it into a garment for Hercules. Nessus told her his blood contained a love charm and promised her this would cause the hero to love her forever. Gullible Deianira believed him and tucked away the shirt so she could use it if she ever suspected her husband of being unfaithful.

Later, Deianira became jealous of a woman named **Iole** and gave Hercules the shirt to wear. Instead of being a love charm, it acted like a poison and ate away at his skin. Hercules was in such mortal pain, he asked his son Hyllus to build him a funeral pyre so he could die quickly rather than in the slow agony of the poison. Hyllus built the pyre but was too upset to light it. Finally a nearby shepherd boy named **Philoctetes** agree to light it. In thanks, Hercules gave the boy his bow and arrow. Philoctetes went on to have a long a famous career with this bow (as you may remember from the story of the Trojan war). Hercules climbed onto the fire and allowed himself to be burned. As for Deianira, when she found out what the shirt had done, she killed herself in shame.

Hercules, however, did not die on his funeral pyre. Instead, the fire burned away his mortality and he rose to Mt. Olympus and joined the gods. He finally reconciled with Hera, who had hated him so long, and even married her daughter **Hebe**, who served as the cup bearer to the gods.

### **Terms to know: all bolded**

*The story of Jason and the Argonauts was most famously told by Apollonius Rhodius in a work called the Argonautica. Many other authors, ancient and modern, have also told the tale. If you know anything about this story, you probably know that Jason went in search of the Golden Fleece. Before we get to his hunt for it, let's discuss this Golden Fleece and where it came from in the beginning...*

### **THE GOLDEN RAM**

There was a king of Thebes named **Athamas**. Athamas was married to **Nephele**, a cloud goddess. The couple had two young children, a boy named **Phrixus** and a girl, **Helle**. Now apparently, being married to a cloud presented some difficulties (perhaps she was a bit flighty, tee! heel!). For whatever reason, Athmas, left Nephele, and took a new wife, **Ino**, daughter of Cadmus, the founder of Thebes. Now Ino was from a long line of virtuous women, but we wouldn't have much of a story here, if she had been as virtuous as the rest of her kin. Instead, she was the classic evil step mother. She was very jealous of Phrixus and Helle, and feared that Phrixus would be heir to Athamas' throne instead of her own sons. Ino knew her husband loved the children dearly, and that made it awkward to simply kill the rival children, but she was determined to have them dead. To accomplish this end, Ino concocted a rather elaborate scheme.

First, she secretly got hold of all the grain seed in Thebes, and baked the lot, so none would not sprout. When the seed was planted, and nothing grew, the alarmed populous sent an envoy to the Delphic Oracle to ask what should be done. As the second part of her plot, Ino had the envoy intercepted and bribed. The envoy brought back the false message she planted: that the only way to make the fields grow was to sacrifice Phrixus to the gods. Athamas was horrified, but knew he must comply, if he wanted to save his country. So he had an altar prepared, and brought the boy there to be slaughtered. Nephele, watching from the clouds, begged the gods to save her innocent children. Hermes decided to help out, and sent a flying ram with golden fleece to carry them away. The ram swooped down and carried the children away on its back and headed east, to the far off land of Colchis. Unfortunately, little Helle grew weary on the long ride, and lost her grip of ram's fleece. She slipped off the ram and fell to her death in the waters of the Black Sea. The narrow straits where she fell was thereafter called the **Hellespont** (literally Helle's Sea) in her honor. As for Phrixus, he arrived safely in Colchis. Colchis was a harsh and wild land, ruled by a fierce king named **Aeetes**. Phrixus sacrificed the ram who had saved him (some thanks!) and gave its golden fleece to Aeetes. Aeetes took pity on the hapless boy, and when he came of age, married Phrixus to one of his daughters. Later, however, Aeetes murdered Phrixus.