

The Twelve Labors of Hercules

“You’re doing it wrong, Tiryns.”

Hercules turns around to see Pythia Delphi standing behind him, arms crossed and expression sour. He blinks. “Excuse me?”

A noise of exasperation emanates from the back of her throat and she grabs the clipboard from him. “Look,” she snaps, pulling a pen out of her pocket and underlining several places, “You’re supposed to put the file number here, and the catalogue section over here. You swapped them.”

Annoyed, he snatches the paperwork back and corrects his error. Pythia continues to stand behind him. “What do you want, Delphi?”

“A sacrificial goat.”

He rolls his eyes and picks up another stack of papers. “You obviously have something important to say, since you’re bothering me. Spit it out.”

Pythia grins widely at this invitation and immediately starts babbling. “Alright, so you’re stuck in evidence because they suspended your badge, right? Don’t respond, that was rhetorical– I already know the answer is yes because you gripe about it every day. So, the higher-ups took you out of commission, and you’re obviously unhappy about having to work with us nerds here instead of going out and playing hero. You know, despite the fact that you’re still not even cleared to shoot a gun.”

Wondering why she’s bringing this up, he crosses his arms. “Will you get to your point already?”

She huffs impatiently. "Look, I'm supposed to tell you that there's a way for you to go back to being a homicide detective. There's a catch though... You'll have to do a few... favors for someone.

"What kind of favors?"

She hesitates, but continues when he glares at her. "Your cousin wants you to do a few cases for him. If you're successful, that'll be considered proof that you're fit for service again. Except—"

"How many cases?" he interrupts.

"Do you really want to do this?" Pythia asks skeptically. "This could be the perfect opportunity for him to get you fired, or even killed. Let's not even get started on how your stepmother will take advantage of this. Both of them have been out to get you since you started working in this division."

"Don't worry about me," he waves a hand. "I can deal with Eurystheus and Hera. Just tell me how many cases he wants me to do."

Pythia bites her lip. "Tiryns... I'm not just worried about them. You watched your partner get shot and killed two months ago. Are you really ready to go back into the field?"

He slams the paperwork onto a nearby desk suddenly. "*Don't* talk about Megara."

"You just proved my point. How are you supposed to deal with serial killers and murderers if you can't even talk about your wife's death?"

He looks at the ground. "Just tell me how many things I have to do for Eurystheus."

She exhales sharply. "Ten, but he'll probably find some way to make it more. He hates you, but he also knows that you're good at what you do. He'll try and get as much out of this deal as he can."

"I don't care. As long as I get my job back, I'm happy."

Almost sadly, she shakes her head. "Be careful, Hercules."

The use of his first name startles him and he turns back to her. "I— thank you, Pythia."

She nods slowly as he walks towards the warehouse exit. He knows he's not making a very smart decision. He also knows that he's past the point of caring.

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Eurystheus grins smugly. "I knew you'd take the offer, Herc."

Hercules tenses at the mention of the nickname and it takes all of his willpower not to punch his cousin. "Call it an offer if it makes you happy."

Eurystheus sighs, as if speaking to a petulant child, "You could be a little more enthusiastic about this whole thing, you know. I *am* getting you your job back."

"Don't remind me," Hercules rubs his forehead. "Just tell me when I start."

"How about now?" Eurystheus slides a folder across the desk.

Hercules flips open the cover and skims through the overview. "The Red Lion, serial killer. Credited with the murders of over sixty men and women. Identity confirmed to be Lionel Nemea, resident of Brooklyn." He closes the case folder. "So, what do you want me to do?"

“We received an anonymous tip to his identity and location last week. We got surveillance on him and confirmed that he's the one we're looking for,” Eurystheus folds his hands. “I need *you* to apprehend him.”

“That's it? You just want me to arrest him? No detective work even?”

Eurystheus rolls his eyes. “I'm supposed to evaluate your ability to go back into the field, not the few cognitive skills you possess. And besides, Nemea is incredibly dangerous. You're the only one currently in this division who has prior experience with a serial killer.”

It's not as if he can say no. “Alright. Get me a vest.”

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The job seems easy enough from the start. Nemea has holed himself up in a house with only two exits, one of which Hercules seals with a padlock and plank of wood. He kicks down the door with the other officers, and immediately, Nemea pulls a weapon on them. Hercules tries to shoot him, but as it turns out, the man is wearing a bulletproof vest. A lucky shot clips his shoulder, and Nemea reflexively drops the gun. Hercules takes the opening and lunges forward, tackling him. Not the smartest move, but it works. He manages to land a punch on Nemea's mouth, which subdues him enough so that he can be handcuffed.

When they get back to the station, Eurystheus stares at him incredulously. Hercules can't resist baiting him. “I'm not sure,” he announces loudly, “what was so hard about that one, but thanks for the simple case! I'll have my badge by next week at this rate.”

If he squints, he can almost see the steam coming from Eurystheus' ears as he storms away to his office.

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Eurystheus' next job is slightly harder. A few people have been found dead, seemingly poisoned. He gets shipped out, along with a young toxicologist named Iolaus, to the charming suburb of Lake Lerna. Iolaus ends up being pretty good company, and Hercules begins to think that maybe working for Eurystheus, at least temporarily, wasn't such a bad idea.

After a few days of poking around and Iolaus testing the water, they manage to figure out that the long closed down Hydra Factory on the shore of the lake has been leaking toxic chemicals into the water. It won't be a problem to stop it— one of them simply has to cut off all of the nine power grids inside the factory— but the task has a time limit. The waste will stop generating after the power is cut, but the remaining amounts will flow out of the pipes and contaminate the lake further.

Iolaus suggests that he can seal the pipes as Hercules finds the power switches. Hercules decides to agree with the scientist, and manages to find all nine of the switches in a quick fashion. Iolaus succeeds in blocking off each pipe, except for one. Together, they manage to roll a boulder in front of it. The townspeople thank them, and they return to the station.

To Hercules' dismay and Eurystheus' joy, he finds that the assignment does not count towards his ten tasks, as he received help. As it turns out, Pythia was right.

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His next assignment is to hunt down a fugitive. Despite having some experience with this kind of thing, this case is a completely different matter. The fugitive in question is none other than Hershel Ceryneia, a man who held up several convenience stores before trying to flee the state and the son of a prominent politician. While Hercules doesn't particularly like Diana Ceryneia, she donates large amounts of money to the department every year, and if he managed to mess that up... Well, suffice to say, he wouldn't have a job to go back to at all.

He ends up hunting Ceryneia for several days, finally catching up to him by a river. As the man tries to figure out how to cross it, Hercules manages to hit him in the leg with a tranquilizer dart. He gets him back to the station unharmed, and while Senator Ceryneia is displeased, she seems to understand when he explains that he's simply doing his job. He gets the vague feeling that Eurystheus was purposely trying to get him into trouble, but if the color of his face was any indication, he failed.

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Hercules finds himself completely out of his element in the next case. A crazed criminal, Irwin Erymanthos, has gone on a rampage. With a history of theft, domestic violence, arson, and assault, it's no surprise that he leaves a trail of destruction through the unfortunate suburb he chose to take his anger out on.

Hercules follows Erymanthos easily enough, but somehow, he manages to escape from him every time. Eventually, he ends up in a car chase straight out of a Hollywood movie. The road is narrow from the recent snowfall and icy as well, making Hercules glad that the area was evacuated and there are no pedestrians. Eyeing the snow, he comes up with a quick plan. Turning a sharp corner, he's able to drive Erymanthos'

car into a snowdrift. Erymanthos tries to run in the deep snow bank, to no avail, and Hercules is able to arrest the exhausted man easily.

Upon being locked in the holding cell, Erymanthos begins to scream threats and rattle the bars. Eurystheus hides under his desk in his office and the rest of the department talks about it for years, much to Hercules' delight.

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Eurystheus, Hercules decides, has made it his goal in life to torture him. The next job requires him to clean the infamous Evidence Locker A. Everyone in the department jokes that the locker has the world's largest collection of loose-leaf paper and useless junk, but Hercules finds out for himself that this claim is indeed true. He spends an entire half-hour staring at all of the boxes and wondering how he'll ever accomplish his task in one day.

As it so happens, his questions are answered in the form of an intern named River, who agrees to help him sort through all of the items. By the end of the day, Evidence Locker A is successfully organized and neatly catalogued. The manager, Augeas, is so impressed that he gives Hercules ten dollars.

Of course, Eurystheus uses this against him and insists that this job doesn't count. Hercules goes home that night with great rage and an urge to bang his head against a wall.

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By this point, Hercules thinks that Eurystheus is just mocking him. It's well known that as a child, he had a fear of zombies, so *of course* the next case he gets deals with a group of cannibals. The cannibals in question are currently residing in Styphalia,

so Hercules drives out to the small town and plans meticulously. It's odd, because he almost never plans anything, but these are cannibals he's dealing with and there's no way he's going to end up getting eaten.

Of course, he's a terrible planner, so he asks Athena, from Forensics, for help. She gets a worker from Tech named Hephaestus to help him, and they manage to build a device that will artificially set off fire alarms. Hercules, once he figures out which warehouse the cannibals are hiding in, sets off the building's fire alarm. As the confused cannibals run out of the only exit, they find an entire squadron aiming guns at them. Naturally, they all surrender, and Hercules has never been happier to return home. Thanks to Athena's machinations, Eurystheus doesn't know, or doesn't care, about the help he received, and the job counts as one of the ten.

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The next job involves so many stupid mistakes that it makes Hercules look like a genius. Commissioner Minos, in charge of the neighboring city's police force was supposed to transfer a prisoner to Commissioner Poseidon's department. Except, the prisoner, a Spanish mobster named Toro Crete, somehow managed to escape an armored truck and went on the run. Now, Hercules is supposed to hunt him down and bring him back to the department.

Finding him is easy enough. Hercules sneaks through the back entrance of the shop Crete has been hiding in, and in less than twenty minutes he has overpowered and handcuffed the man. Eurystheus, when they get back to the station, grumbles something about finding harder cases. Hercules disagrees vehemently.

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For his next assignment, Eurystheus orders Hercules to arrest a gang. Ususally, the police try to leave them alone, but this gang, known as the Mares, has been causing a fairly large amount of trouble recently. Led by some upstart named Diomedes, conflict levels have risen to a large level ever since the formation of his group.

Obviously, Hercules can't arrest an entire group without any proof of actual illegal activities. He manages to catch most of them for assault and possession of illegal drugs, but a few of them remain free. Most importantly, Diomedes remains free. Hercules is convinced that if he manages to lock up their leader, the rest of them will be easily taken down.

He ends up finding proof of Diomedes' illegal dealings and arrests him. Diomedes has done enough to be put in jail for twenty years. Without their leader, the Mares fall apart, and soon, he manages to arrest the remainder of them. The entire process takes several years. If he has to deal with gangs one more time, Hercules thinks he'll die of frustration.

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In his next job, Eurystheus wants Hercules to convince an informant named Hippolyta to give him important information. As it turns out, Hippolyta is the CEO of Amazon Industries, and the information pertains to a past case that involves Eurystheus' daughter. She's agreed to talk with him, but Eurystheus warns him that she won't give in easily. Hercules ends up meeting her in a small café, not expecting this to be easy. The two of them chat for a while over coffee, and Hercules finally explains his request. Much to his surprise, Hippolyta seems completely willing to hand over the information.

“Why not?” she asks in response to his surprise. “I have no use for it, so I might as well pass it on to someone who has good intentions.” She slides a USB drive across the table.

After talking for a little more, she stands up to leave. Before she goes, she kisses him on the cheek. “Take care of yourself, Hercules,” she says, and smiles sadly.

A week later, Hippolyta is dead. It’s all over the news– the CEO of a major enterprise found dead in her office. Authorities suspect that she was poisoned. Hercules locks himself in his house for three days and tries to believe that it’s not his fault. Of course it’s not his fault. Just like Megara’s death wasn’t his fault either. Despite telling himself this, he knows that those statements are blatant lies.

Eurystheus is surprisingly silent on the matter, but Hercules knows his cousin well enough to tell that he is gloating.

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After Pythia drags him out of his house and forces him to go to work, Eurystheus puts him on a case involving a drug shipment. Geryon, an infamous dealer in the city’s underworld, has been manufacturing and selling a new drug, nicknamed “cattle”. Not the most flattering name, but it’s appropriate considering what it does to people. Eurystheus has been made aware of a large shipment being smuggled out of the city in a day, so it’s Hercules’ job to intercept the shipment and apprehend Geryon.

He manages to stop the shipment just in time, and with this evidence, arrests Geryon. Unfortunately, another drug dealer named Cacus decides to take advantage of this power vacuum and manages to steal part of the shipment. After a day of searching, Hercules manages to track down the stolen drugs, and he arrests Cacus as well.

He manages to not think about Hippolyta and Megara at all throughout the ordeal, which saddens and relieves him all at once. Perhaps, he's become a little too efficient at not thinking.

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Hercules' next task is to track down a stolen exhibit. Not his usual area, but as of late, Eurystheus seems to be using him as a bloodhound of sorts. The exhibit is a collection of priceless golden apples, relics from the ancient civilization of the Hesperides. He gets a hold of Nereus, an old contact and notorious thief. After interrogating him for several hours, the man tells him that the apples are being kept in a warehouse in the Garden District of the city.

On the way to the warehouse, he stops to give a homeless man some money. The man smiles at him, and informs him that he knows exactly who he is and exactly what he's doing. He goes on to advise him to trick the man named Atlas into getting the apples for him. Hercules continues on his way, feeling slightly on edge. He's not one to take advice from strange men sitting on sidewalks, but it's not like he has a better plan.

As it turns out, the man guarding the door (who's name is indeed Atlas) is entirely willing to get the apples after Hercules offers him a large amount of money. As soon as the apples are retrieved, Atlas demands his reward. Hercules arrests him instead. Eurystheus seems baffled that he was able to come up with this plan, and Hercules refuses to tell him how exactly he did think of it. It's amusing to see Eurystheus exasperated, and besides, it's not like he'll actually admit that a homeless man told him to do it.

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It's his last job for Eurystheus, and Hercules is close to celebrating. He has to track down a thief named Cerberus, which seems easy enough. As it turns out though, the man is almost impossible to catch. After several days of frustration, he interrogates a crime lord, Hades, for the man's location. Hades is a strange man, and agrees to tell him on one condition— that Hercules only uses his own strength to capture the criminal. Hercules goes along with it, and finds out that Cerberus is hiding in the dingy bar on Acheron street.

The man recognizes Hercules as soon as he steps through the door, and immediately turns to run. He keeps his promise to Hades, partly out of ego, and tackles Cerberus to the ground. The thief complains about police brutality. Hercules rolls his eyes.

Eurystheus seems extremely angry that Hercules was even able to find Cerberus, and clearly tries to find a way to make the case not count. He eventually gives up and signs the needed paperwork, almost breaking the pen in half. Hercules mockingly salutes him as he leaves the office, because it's always entertaining to see his cousin's face turn different shades of purple.