

Hercules and the Humongous Water Snake

Hercules was the strongest and bravest man in ancient Greece.

Many monsters were slain by his bare hands. The weapons he always carried with him were his bow and arrow and his club. On his head – like a crown – he carried the skull of the Nemean lion that he had strangled with bare hands. The skin of the dead lion fell around his shoulders like a cloak.

None of the supermen we know today can match Hercules's strength and bravery. This is a story about one of his super bravest deeds.

One day King Eurystheus summoned Hercules. "Hercules, go and kill the hydra, the water snake, in her nest at the marshes of Lerna. The people who live there constantly complain about her. She keeps on killing people and livestock. Everybody has tried, but nobody has yet managed to kill her."

Hercules did not like King Eurystheus, but he nevertheless bowed in front of him. Consider it done," he said and smiled, knowing there was no one else that the king could have asked to kill the hydra.

In his living quarters Hercules grabbed the skin of the Nemean lion, threw it around his shoulders, took his club, his bow and arrows and rushed to his chariot.

"Go grab a spear and come with me. I have to go and kill the hydra!"

On his way he saw his nephew, Iolaus.

"Are you not afraid of the monstrous hydra?" Iolaus asked warily.

Hercules laughed. "Why would I be afraid of a water snake? You won't have to do anything. I just need company."

Iolaus did not respond. He knew that the hydra was enormous, as high as a house.

She dragged her massive tail behind her when she moved around in the marshes, tearing down houses and trees and killing people and animals. She had nine venomous snake heads sprouting from her neck. She looked a bit like a huge candelabra. Nobody could kill her. When anybody tried to chop

off one of the moving, hissing heads, another two heads immediately grew from the wound.

When they arrived at Lerna, Hercules reined in his horse. Standing on his chariot he gazed across the big marsh, his hand above his eyes.

“Do you see her?”

Iolaus asked, feeling shaky all over.

“Yes. There she is. There at the fountain. She is half immersed in the water.”

said Hercules. Only the hydra’s neck was visible above the water. The nine snake heads circled around her neck like radars, their pointed tongues continuously moving in and out, in and out.

“She saw us!”

Hercules shouted. The gigantic beast rose up and out of the water and started moving towards them. Iolaus wanted to run away, but his eyes were stuck on the enormous black body moving slowly towards them, swinging her neck from side to side.

The hydra was coming closer and closer to where the two men stood.

Suddenly, with a blood-curdling shout, Hercules jumped off the chariot and rushed into the water. Before the hydra could understand what was going on, Hercules had already chopped off two of her heads with massive blows of his club. The two heads fell into the water. Astonished, Iolaus watched as four new heads grew from the two wounds.

Hercules kept striking the hydra with deadly blows. As soon as he chopped off one head, another two heads would emerge. The horrible hissing sounds became louder and louder as more heads emerged. Hercules’s arm moved like a machine.

Suddenly, a gigantic crab rushed in and sank its powerful claws into his calf muscle. The crab was huge, but Hercules’s leg was on fire. He groaned, grabbed the crab deep into the mud of the marsh, never to be seen again.

“This must stop. Right now!”

yelled Hercules. “Go get a few dry branches and set them alight. Then bring them here.”

Iolaus set a part of the woods next to the marsh on fire, grabbed some burning branches and dragged them over to where Hercules was standing. “Now listen! As soon as I cut off one head, you must stick a burning branch right into the bleeding wound. Just there where the new head will emerge. Sear the wound properly and let’s see if the head will keep on sprouting.” It worked! As soon as Hercules shattered a head with his club, Iolaus seared the wound with a burning branch before a new one could emerge. Finally, a defeated hydra stood there bleeding from eight wounds. Only the head in the centre of the hydra’s neck remained, swinging powerlessly to and fro. With an immense blow, Hercules severed the immortal ninth head. The nine heads fell into the water. Astonished, Iolaus watched as Hercules immediately chopped the hydra into pieces. Blood and gall mixed; a terrible stench filled the air. Hercules felt like gagging and pinched his nose. Hercules, however, took his arrows and dipped them into the lethal blood of the hydra. Then he lifted the hydra up into the air with the muscles of both arms bulging and threw her into a deep hole between the rocks. On top he placed a mountainous rock and set them alight. Hercules then immediately chopped the hydra into pieces. Blood and gall mixed; a terrible stench filled the air. As her blood and gall mixed, a terrible stench filled the air. Hercules felt like gagging and pinched his nose. Hercules, however, took his arrows and dipped them into the lethal blood of the hydra. Then he lifted the hydra up into the air with the muscles of both arms bulging and threw her into a deep hole between the rocks. On top he placed a mountainous rock and set them alight. “Let’s go home, Iolaus,” he said. “Let’s tell the king that the hydra is no more.” Nobody today knows exactly where the hydra was slain. But on a starry night one can still see two flickering stars, called Cancer and Hydra, as a remembrance of Hercules’s brave deed.