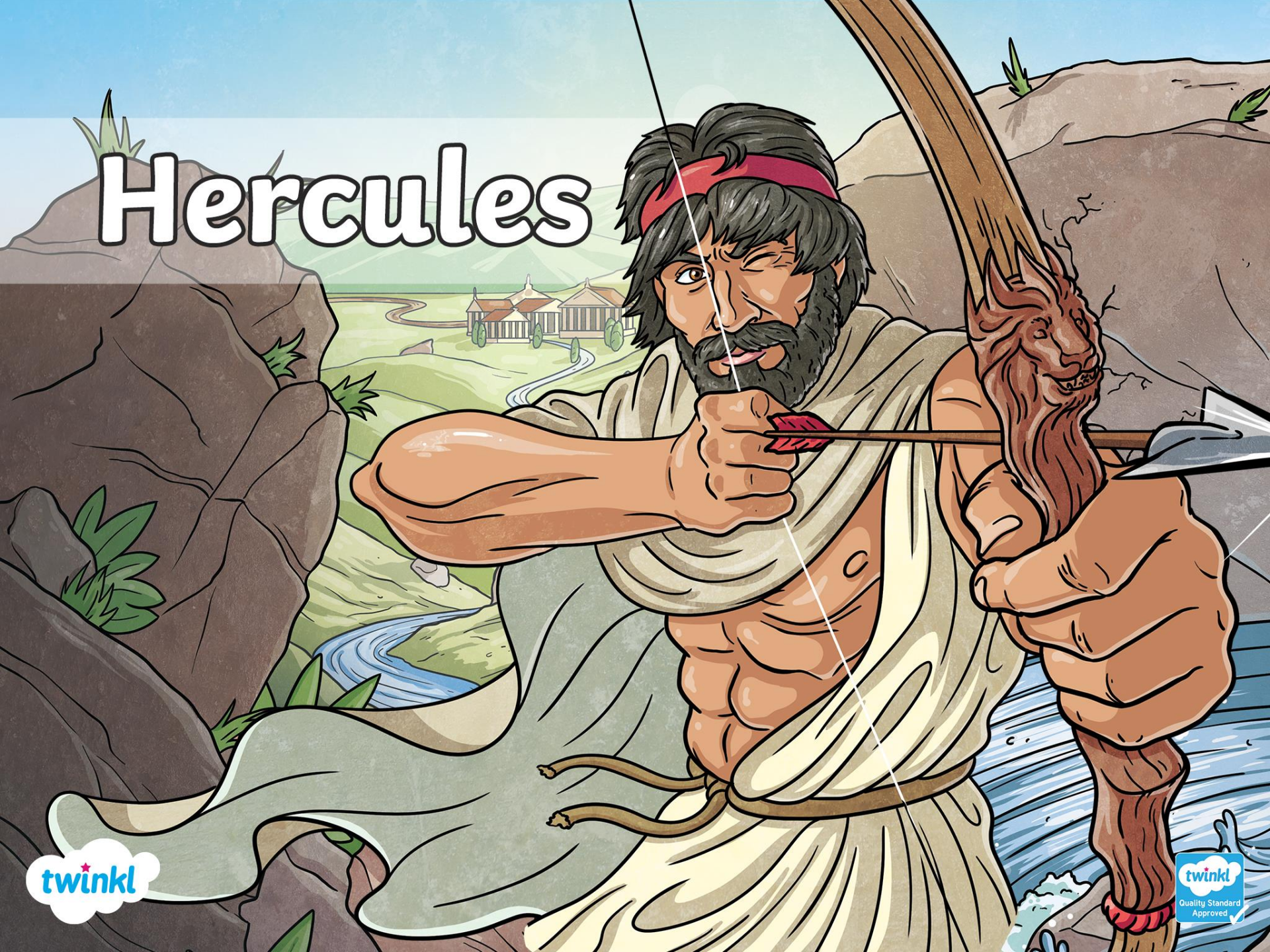
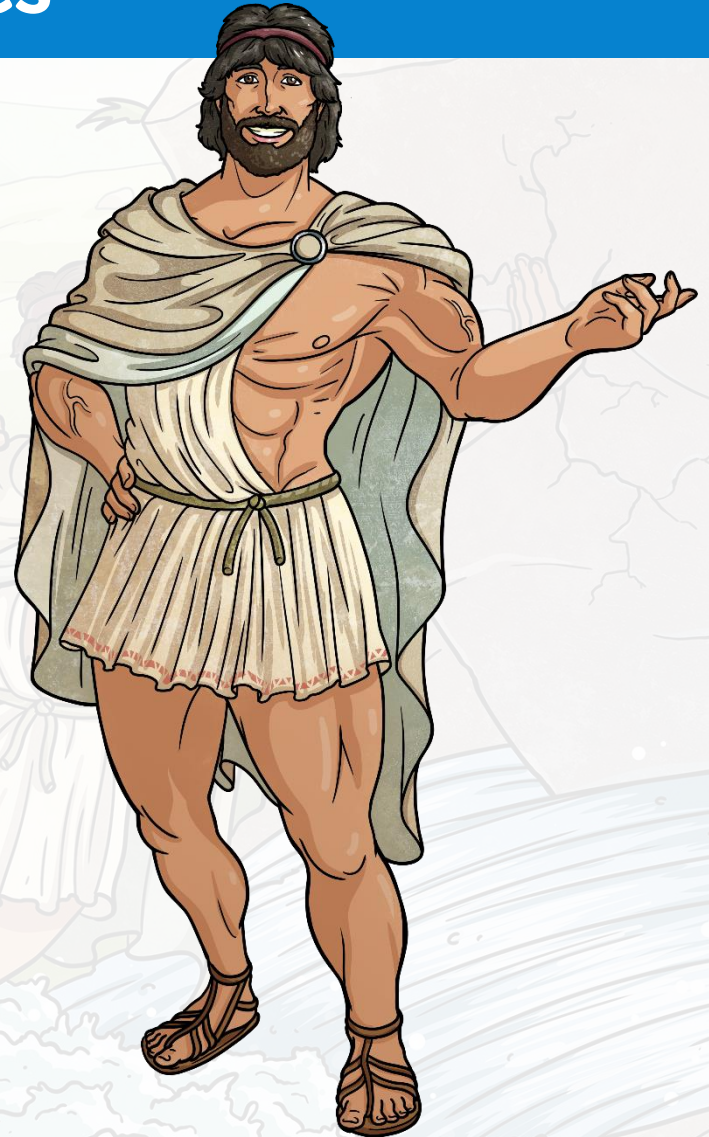


Hercules



Hercules

Thousands of years ago, there lived a man named Hercules. His mother was a **mortal** named Alcmene but his father was Zeus, king of the gods. Because he was a **demi-god**, Hercules was born with a special attribute. He had incredible strength.

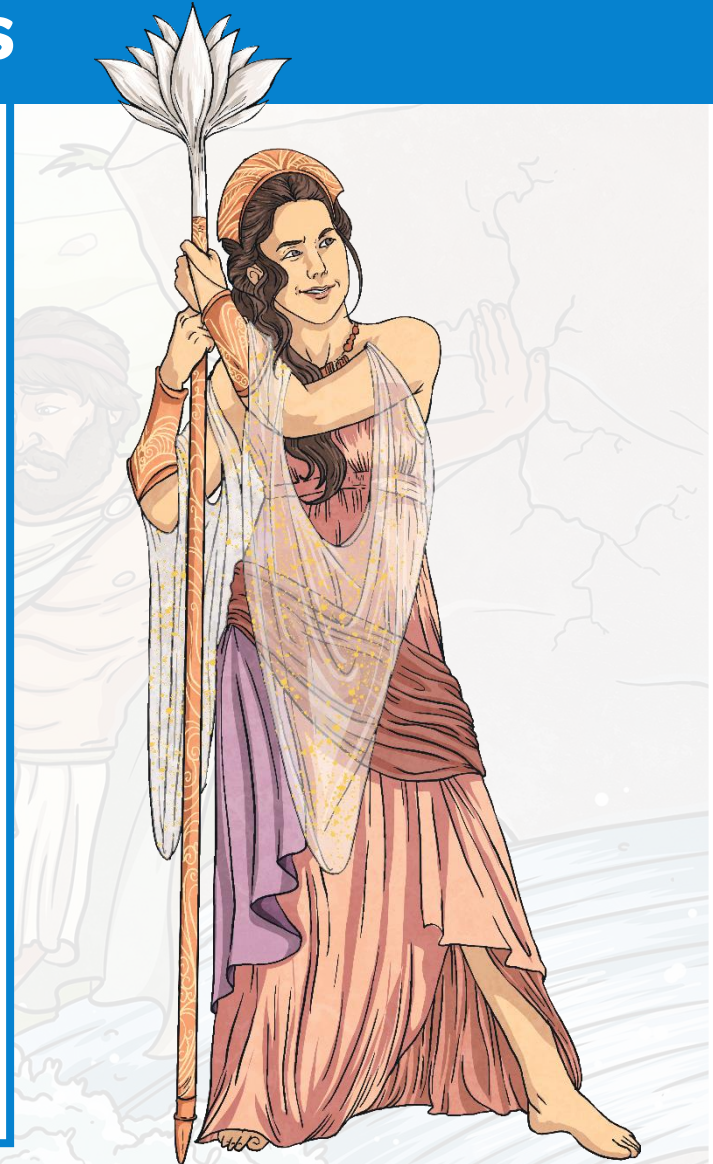


Hercules

Zeus' wife was Hera, goddess of marriage and family. She was jealous of Alcmena and was desperate for revenge.

Firstly, she sent two witches to stop Hercules' birth but they were tricked by Alcmena. Next, she placed venomous serpents in Hercules cradle but the infant Hercules killed the animals.

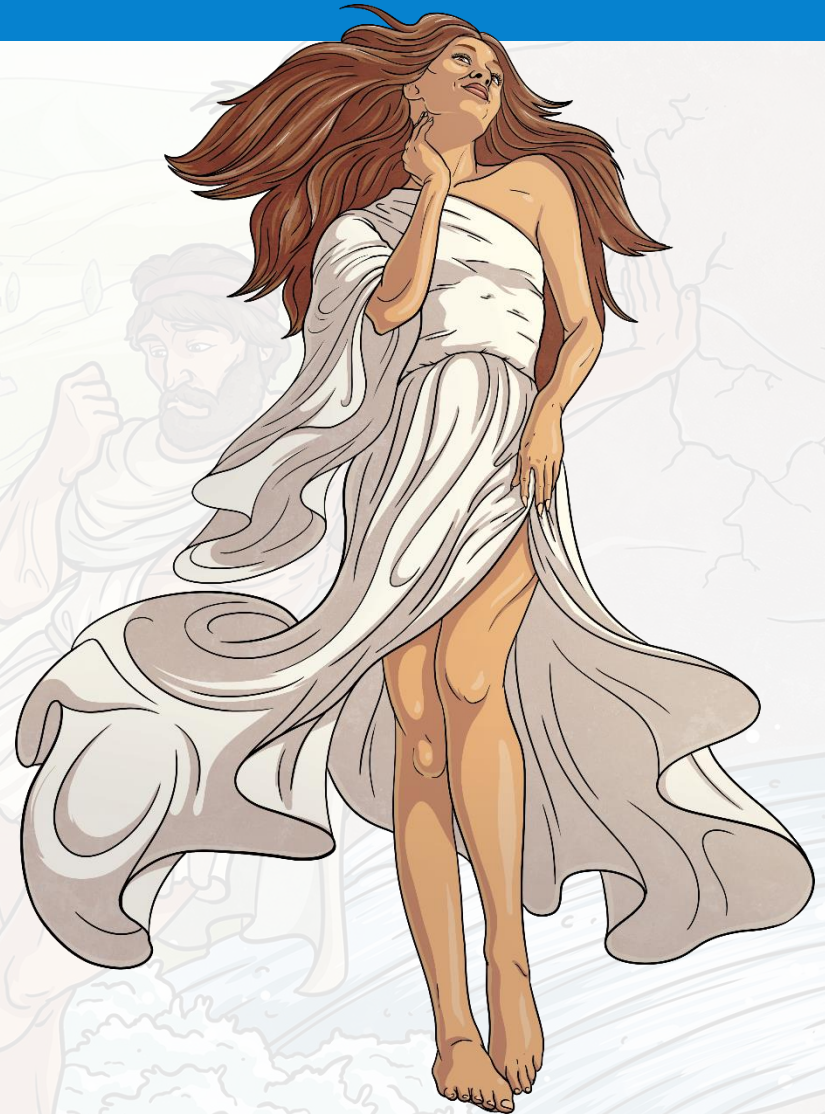
Hercules grew to be wise and strong but still Hera devised ways to bring about his downfall. She thought she had finally succeeded when she placed a curse on him which drove him mad and caused him to do terrible things.



Hercules

Eventually, Hercules came to his senses and realised the terrible things he had done. Overcome with guilt, he wished to find a way to **atone** for his deeds. Hercules visited the **Oracle** at Delphi to seek guidance.

The Oracle told Hercules to visit his cousin, King Eurystheus. There, Eurystheus would give him 12 labours (tasks).
“Only on completion of these 12 labours will you find the forgiveness you so desperately seek,” the Oracle told Hercules.



The Twelve Labours

Hercules set off to see Eurystheus. However, while Hercules was still on his journey, Hera arrived at Eurystheus' court, determined that Hercules would fail.

“King Eurystheus, I bring you a warning,” stated Hera. “Your cousin Hercules is on his way but you must be on your guard.”

“Why?” asked Eurystheus, confused.

“Hercules wishes to steal your crown,” claimed Hera. “When he arrives, you are to set him 12 labours. You must save your throne, Eurystheus! Make the labours as dangerous as possible. If Hercules dies trying to finish one of them, then he won't be able to take your crown.”

Hera managed to convince Eurystheus to go along with her plan.

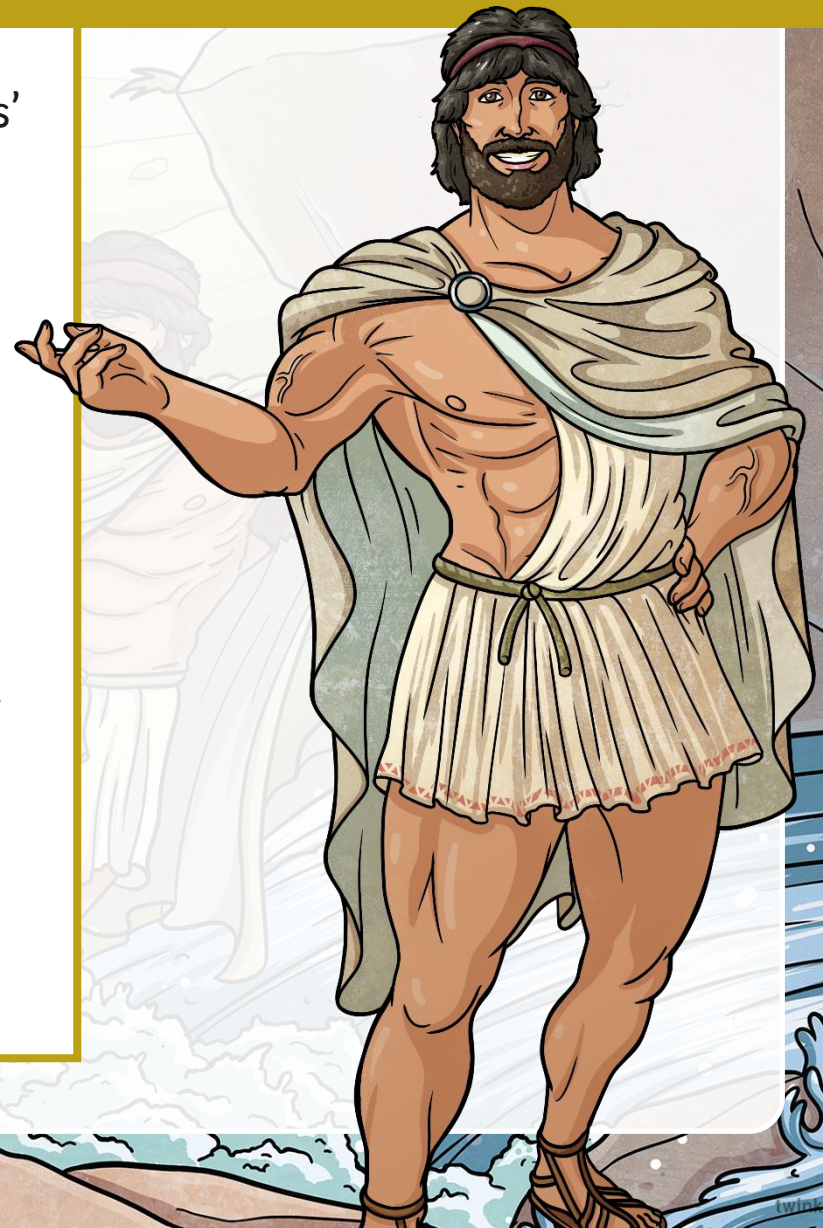
The Twelve Labours

Hercules eventually arrived at Eurystheus' court.

Eurystheus didn't tell Hercules of Hera's visit.

"Good day to you, my cousin," boomed the King. "I know you wish to atone for your terrible deeds. I shall set you 12 endeavours. Should you complete them all, you will be forgiven for your wrong doings. If you fail even a single one, then forgiveness will never be yours."

Desperate for forgiveness and tormented by what he had done, Hercules set off on his first challenge.

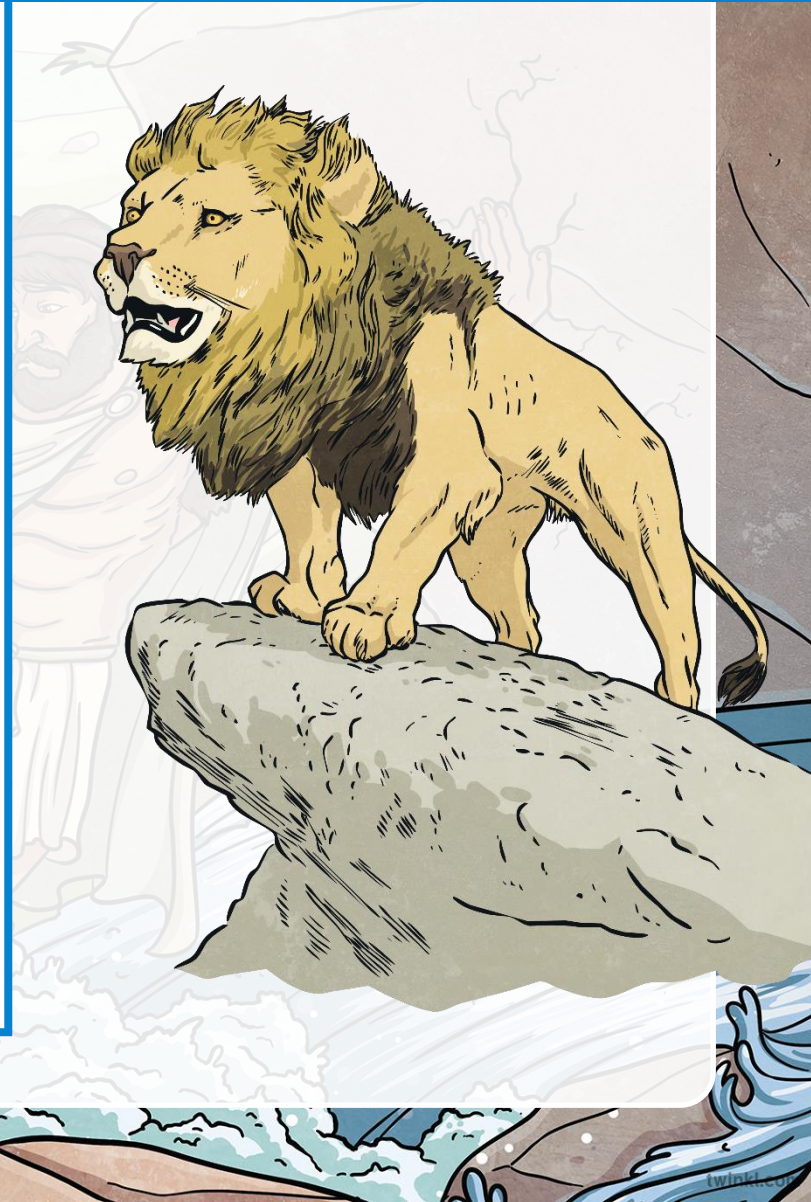


The Nemean Lion

In the land of Nemea, there was a ferocious lion who attacked the Nemeans and had killed many people. Although many hunters had tried to kill the lion, the fearsome beast's skin was so tough that no weapon could penetrate it. Hercules' first labour was to kill the lion and free the Nemeans from their terror.

Hercules trapped the lion in a cave and then used his incredible strength to strangle the mighty beast.

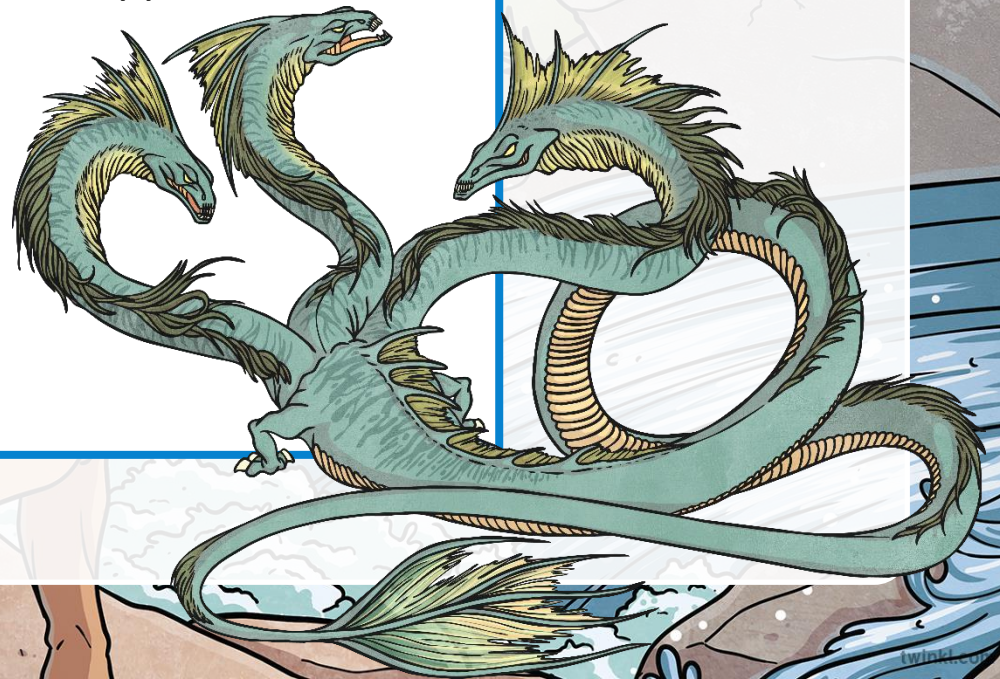
Hercules skinned the lion. He turned the skin into a cloak which he wore for the rest of his days.



The Hydra

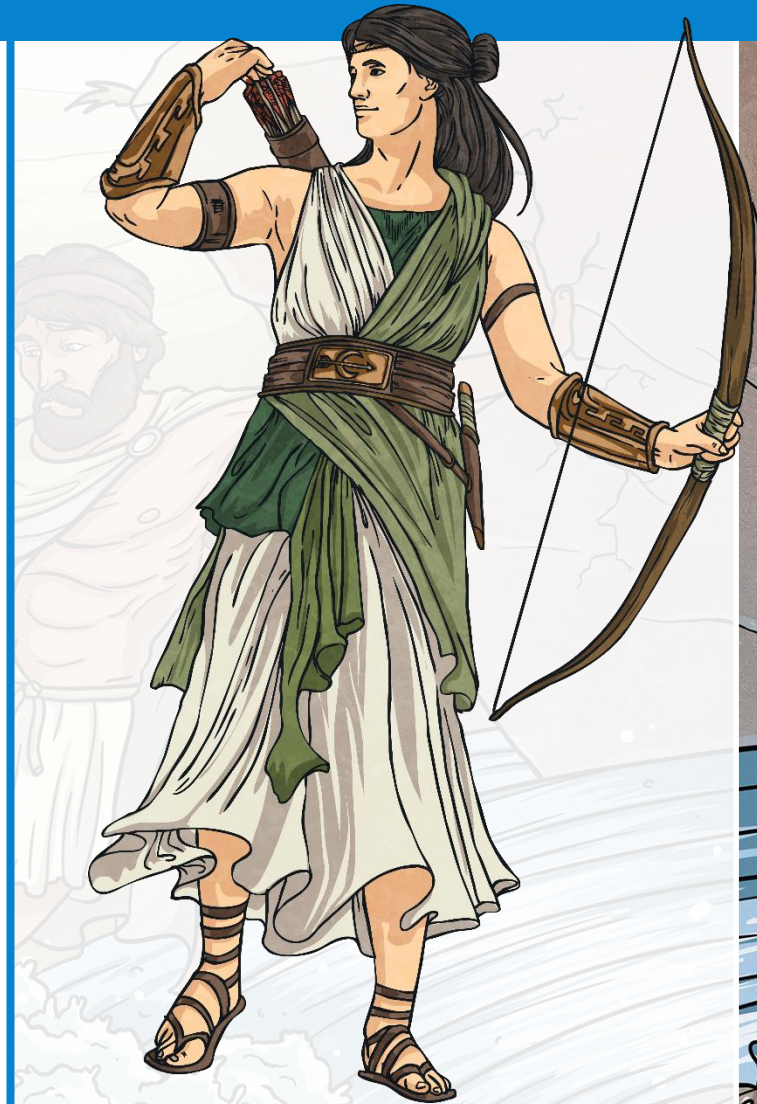
The Hydra was a terrifying, many-headed monster. Many adventurers had tried to destroy the Hydra by cutting off one of its heads, but every time they did, two heads would grow back in its place. With the help of his nephew Iolaus, Hercules lured the Hydra out of its swamp. Swinging his club, Hercules cut off the first head. Iolaus immediately sealed the wound shut with a flaming torch before more heads could appear.

Hercules continued attacking the Hydra until all its heads had been removed. Once the Hydra lay dead at his feet, Hercules dipped several arrows in the monster's poisonous blood.



The Ceryneian Hind

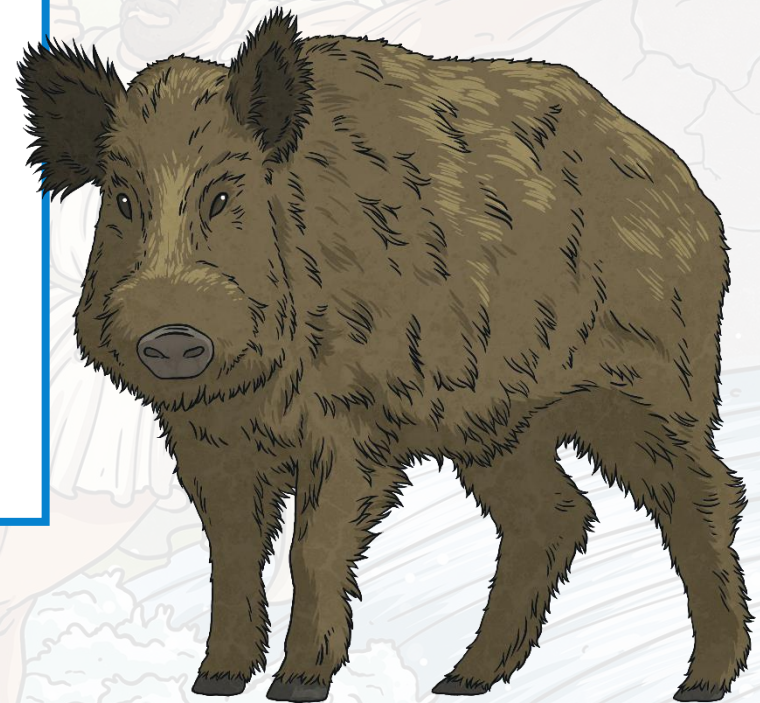
Artemis was the goddess of hunting. She had a beautiful deer which had glistening golden antlers and shining bronze hooves. Many hunters had tried to capture this deer (or hind as it was sometimes called) but none had ever succeeded. For an entire year, Hercules hunted the deer before finally succeeding in killing the animal. When Artemis heard what Hercules had done, she was furious and vowed to kill him. However, when Hercules explained why he had done it, Artemis took pity on him and the chaos Hera had caused him. She used her powers to resurrect the hind and let Hercules go free.



The Erymanthian Boar

On the top of Mount Erymanthus lived a huge boar. Daily, the boar would rush to the villages below, killing all within its sight. Its huge razor-sharp tusks meant no one could attack it.

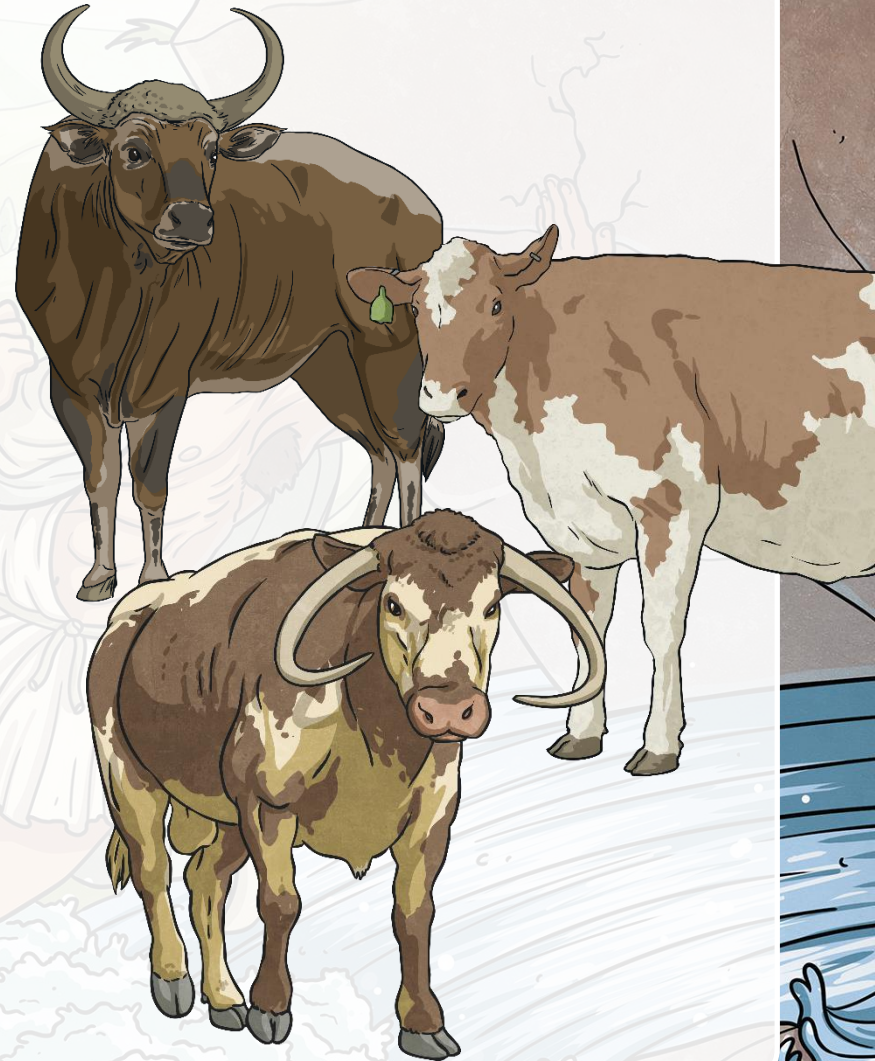
Summoning all his demi-god strength, Hercules chased the boar around the mountain, bellowing as he went, in order to strike fear into the heart of the boar. Eventually, the beast was exhausted and Hercules captured the animal using a huge net.



The Augean Stables

Augean, the King of Elis, had over 1,000 cattle. This was more than any other person in Greece. During the day, the cattle roamed the fields of Elis, enjoying the lush rich grass and refreshing water from streams. At night, all 1,000 cattle took shelter in stables.

Obviously, 1,000 animals produce large amounts of stinky, disgusting waste. Stables housing that many creatures require daily cleaning. However, Augean's stables hadn't been cleaned for over 30 years!



The Augean Stables

Hercules' next task was to clean the Augean stables in a single day. Walking into the dark, dirty, smelly stables, Hercules tried not to breathe through his nose. Even so, he could still smell the horrendous stench.

Summoning all his strength, Hercules knocked holes in two of the stable walls. Then, he dug trenches to divert the courses of two nearby rivers so they flowed right through the stable. As the clear, cool water flowed through the stable, it carried away all the muck. Within a few hours, the stables were clean. Hercules filled in the trenches and rebuilt the stable walls.



The Stymphalian Birds

The next labour of Hercules was to defeat the Stymphalian birds. These birds had beaks of bronze and sharp metallic feathers. They would attack animals and people by lake Stymphalia and had ravaged farmland across the area.

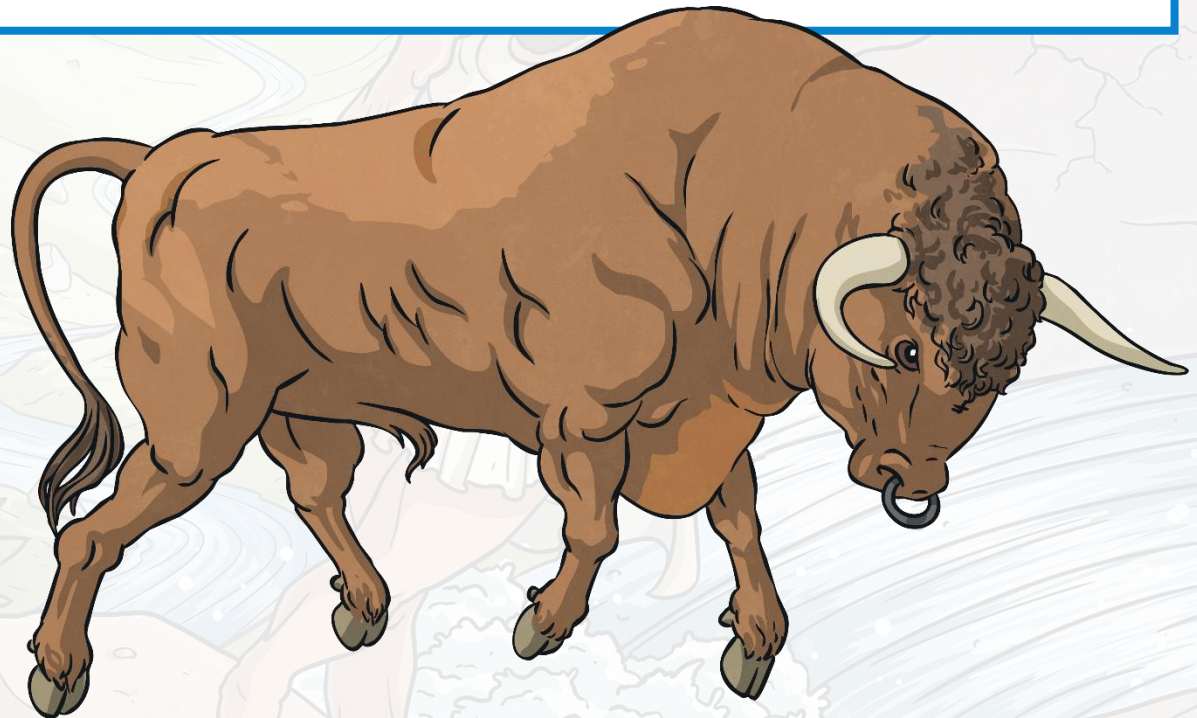
The birds made their nests in boggy swamp land surrounding the lake, so it was impossible for Hercules to get anywhere near them. Athena, goddess of war and wisdom, saw Hercules' confusion and gave him a gift to help him complete the labour. It was a magical rattle made by the blacksmith god, Hephaestus.

As Hercules shook the rattle, the noise startled the birds who all left their nests. As they flew into the air, Hercules drew out his bow and arrow and shot the birds.



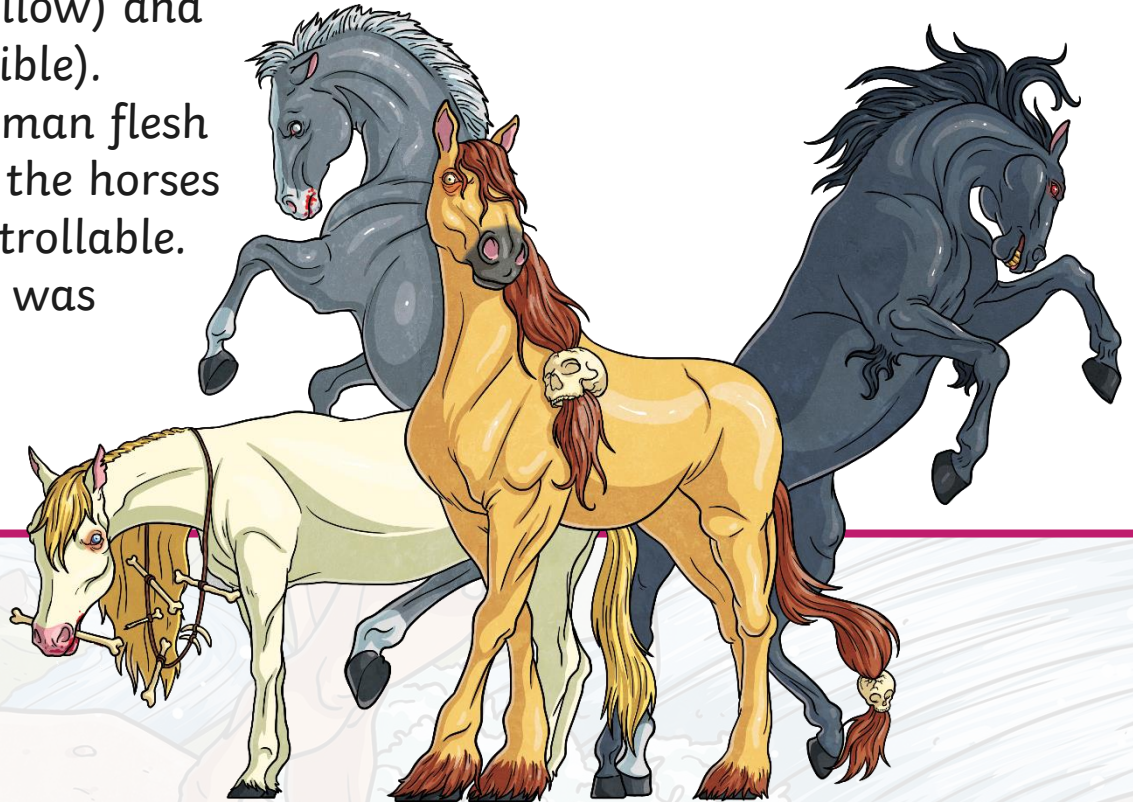
The Cretan Bull

The Cretan bull was a fearsome, angry beast who had escaped captivity. The creature had terrified King Minos and the people of Crete for many years. Since bulls were [sacred](#), it was not allowed for him to be killed. So, in his next labour, Hercules wrestled the bull into submission, tied him up and took him away to leave the island in peace.



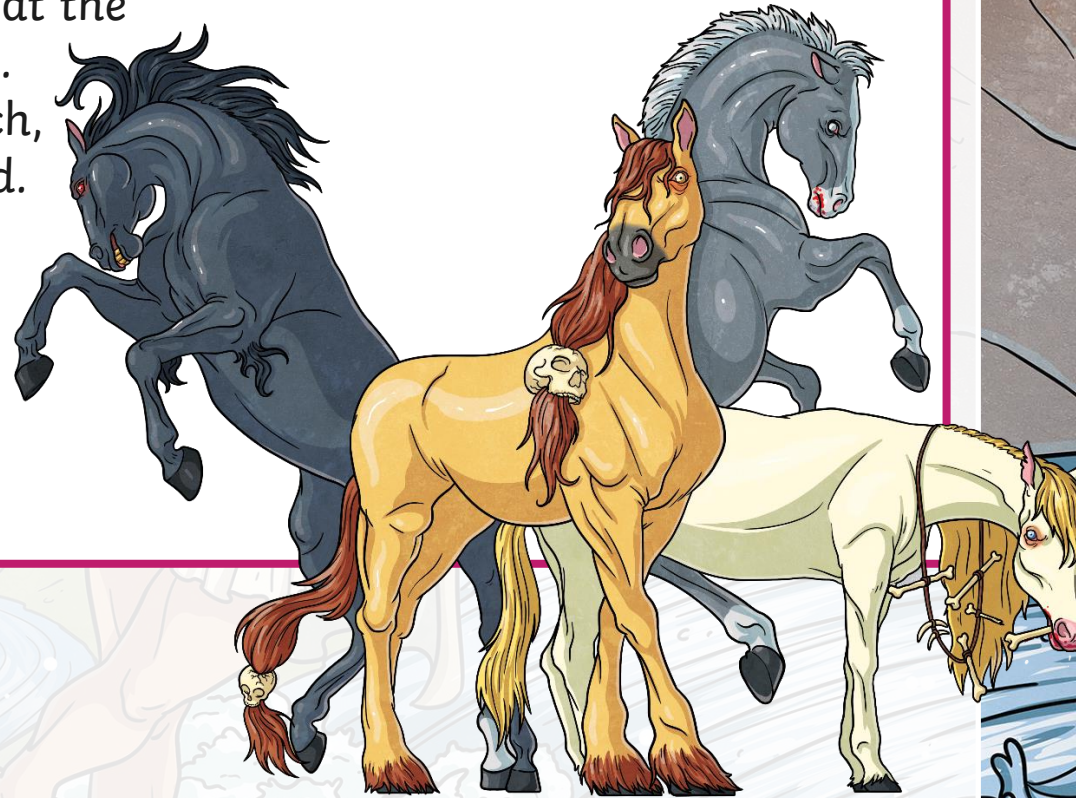
The Horses of Diomedes

Diomedes was King of a tribe called the Bistones. He owned four fearsome, human-eating horses who were named Podargos (meaning swift), Lampon (meaning shining), Xanthos (meaning yellow) and Deinos (meaning terrible). Having feasted on human flesh for such a long time, the horses were mad and uncontrollable. Hercules' next labour was to capture these untameable beasts.



The Horses of Diomedes

There was a section of land near where the horses roamed, which jutted right out into the sea. Hercules managed to corral the horses on to this land. With his demi-god strength, Hercules rapidly dug a trench at the entrance to the stretch of land. The sea flowed along the trench, turning the land into an island. With nothing to eat but juicy green grass, the horses eventually became calm and tame. Hercules was then able to capture the herd.

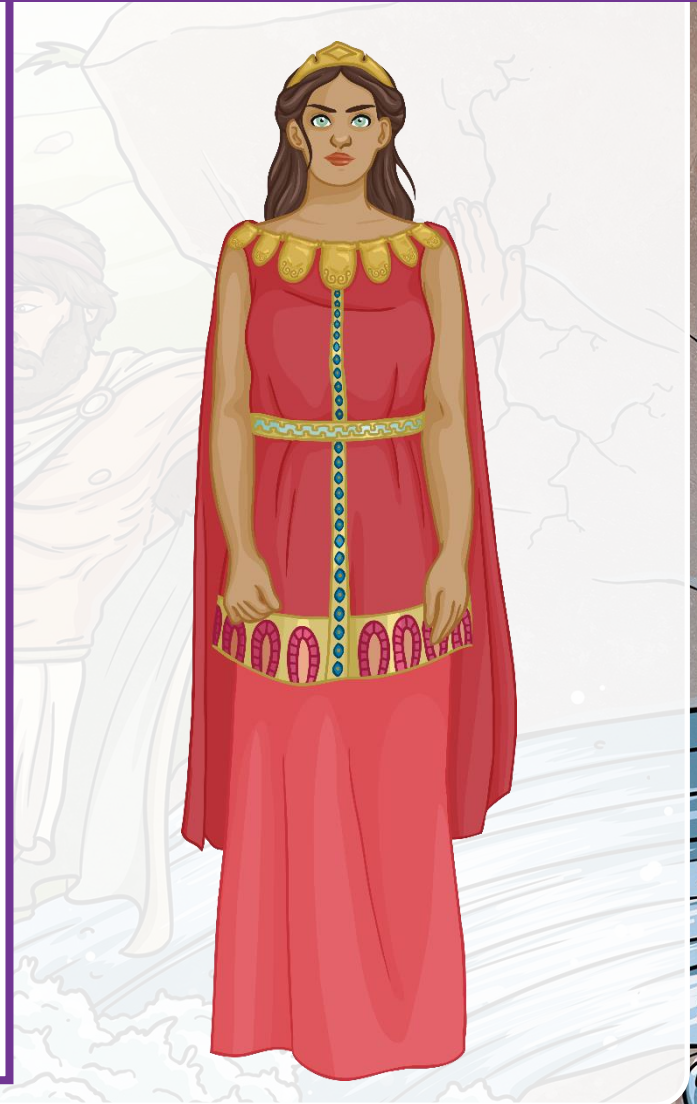


The Belt of Hippolyte

The Amazons were a group of formidable female warriors, led by Queen Hippolyte. Hippolyte had been given a special leather belt by Ares, god of war, in recognition of her fighting skills. Eurystheus wanted this belt for his daughter, Admete, so this became Hercules' next labour.

On his arrival at the land of the Amazons, Hercules was warmly greeted by Hippolyte. Hercules explained the purpose of his visit and initially Hippolyte agreed to give him her belt.

However, Hera realised that Hercules was about to complete another labour and decided to intervene.



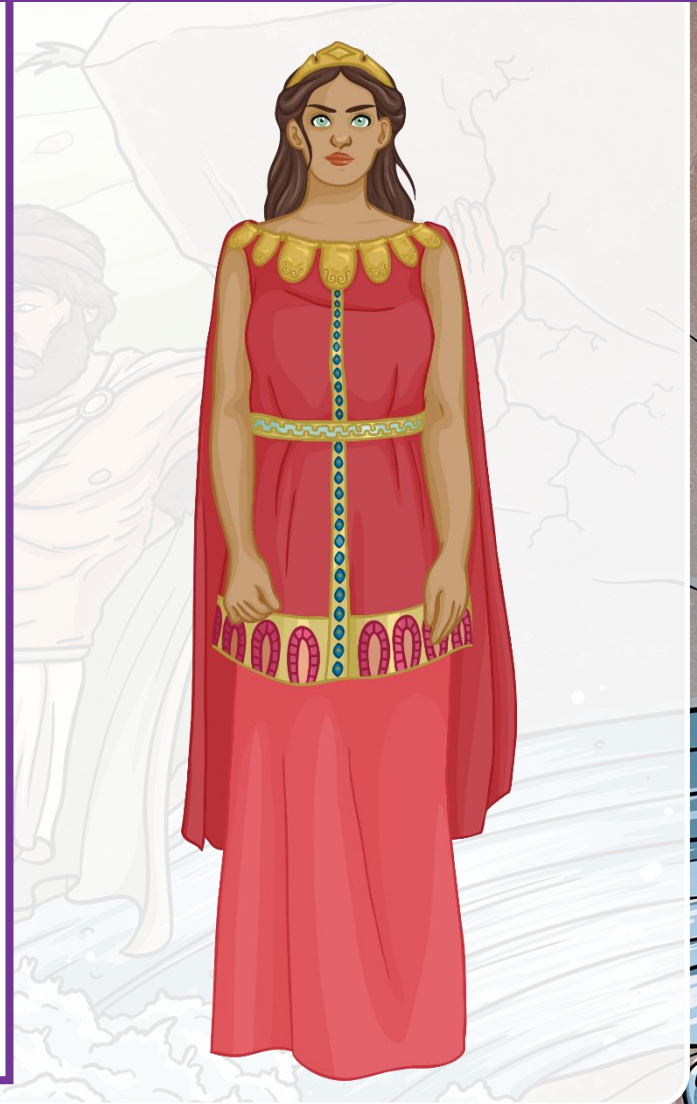
The Belt of Hippolyte

Hera disguised herself as an Amazon warrior and spread a rumour.

“Hercules isn’t here to get our queen’s belt, that is a ruse. He and his men are really here to capture our queen. We must fight them!”

As the rumour spread, the Amazons armed themselves and began to prepare to attack Hercules’ men.

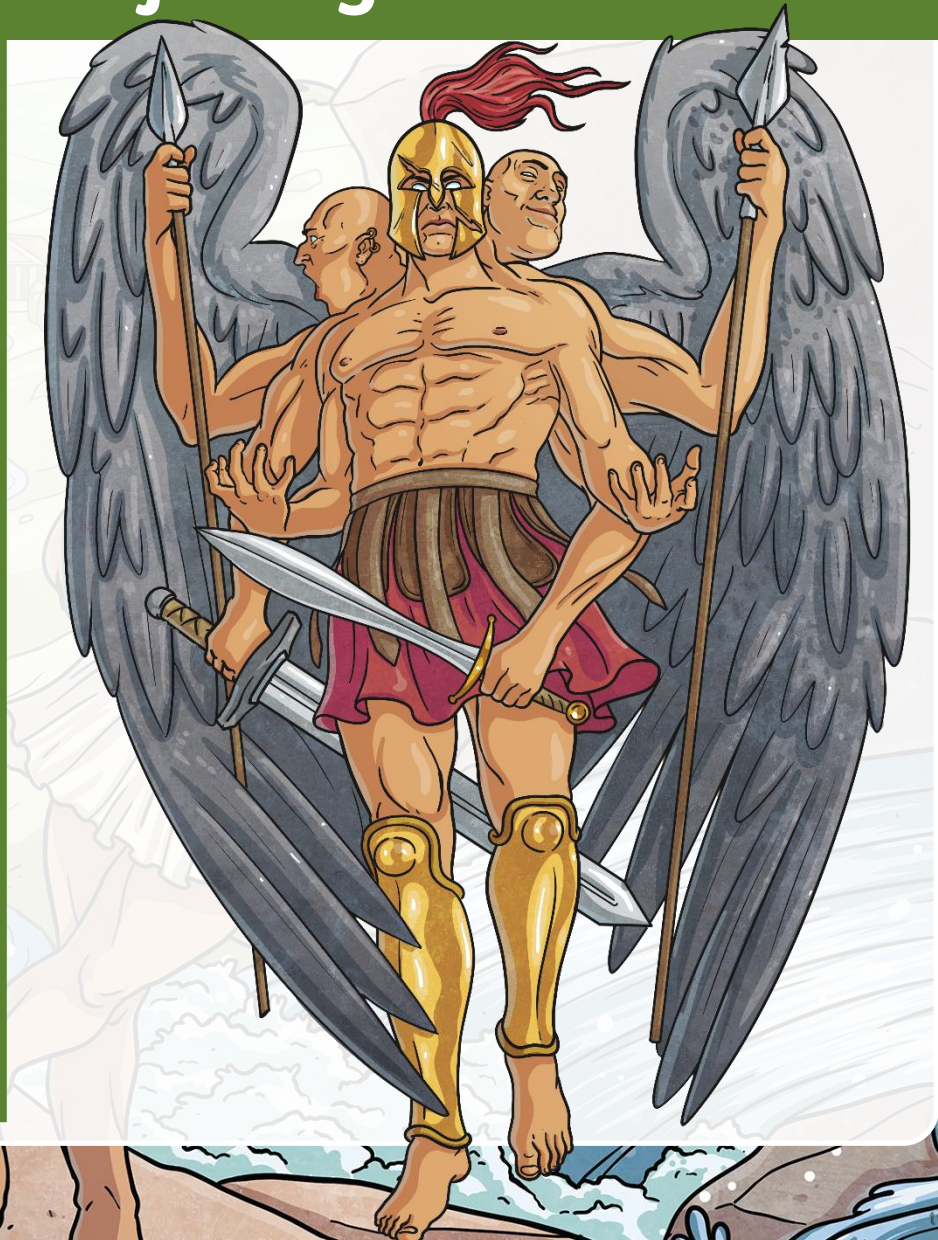
Seeing the women approach, Hercules knew he and his men would never be able to defeat them. As quick as a flash, he seized Hippolyte, took off her belt and hollered to his men to escape to their ship.



The Cattle of Geryon

Geryon was a terrifying winged monster with three heads. His grandmother was Medusa, she of the snake hair who could turn people to stone. Geryon owned a herd of attractive red cattle. Eurystheus envied these cattle and wanted them for himself so gave Hercules the task of getting the cattle.

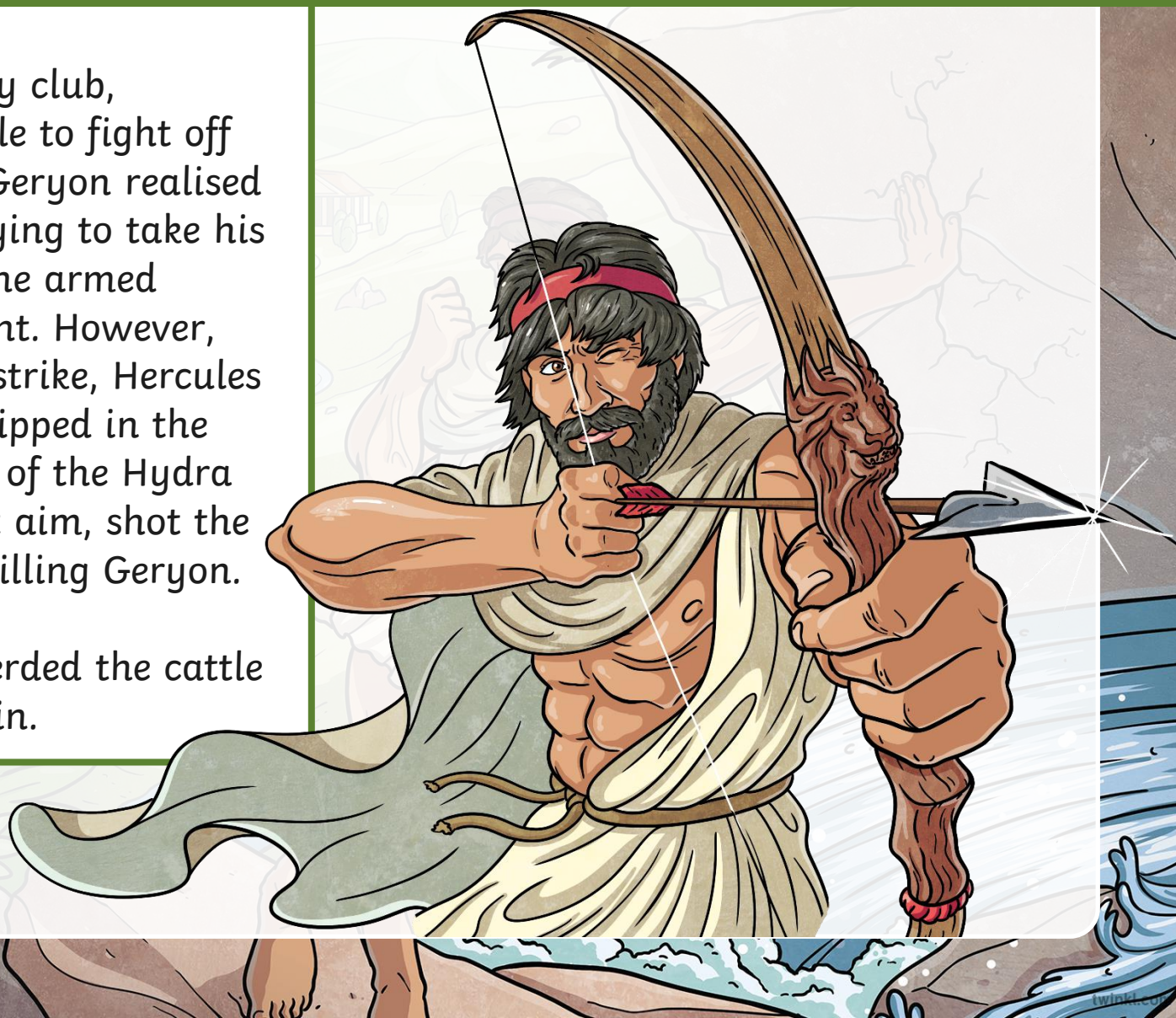
As if facing Geryon would not be dangerous enough, the cattle were guarded by Orthrus a vicious two-headed dog.



The Cattle of Geryon

Wielding a heavy club, Hercules was able to fight off Orthrus. When Geryon realised someone was trying to take his precious cattle, he armed himself for a fight. However, before he could strike, Hercules took an arrow dipped in the venomous blood of the Hydra and with perfect aim, shot the bow, instantly killing Geryon.

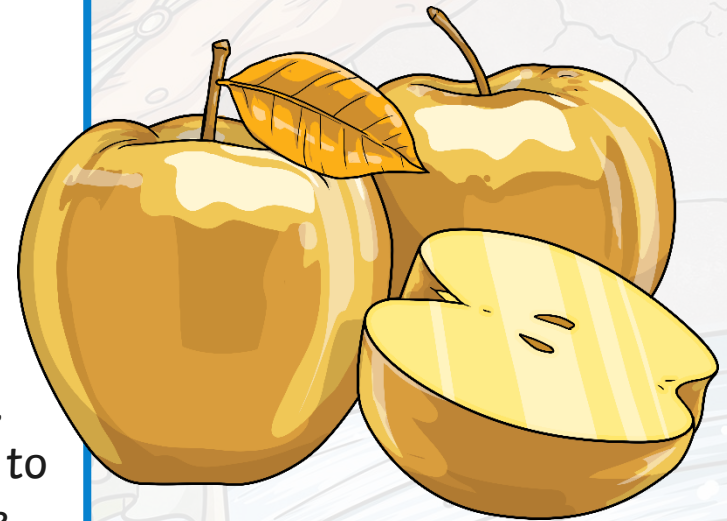
Hercules then herded the cattle back to his cousin.



The Golden Apples of the Hesperides

On their wedding day, Hera had given Zeus a gift of a magical, golden apple tree. The apples were kept hidden at the very north of the world, guarded by Ladon, a dragon with one hundred heads. Also protecting the magical fruit were the Hesperides, a group of spirits in the bodies of beautiful women known as nymphs. Hercules' next task was to steal some of these apples.

The Hesperides' father was Atlas. It was Atlas who carried the world on his shoulders, stopping the sky from falling in. Hercules did a deal with Atlas – he agreed to carry the world on his shoulders for a time if Atlas would pick him some golden apples.

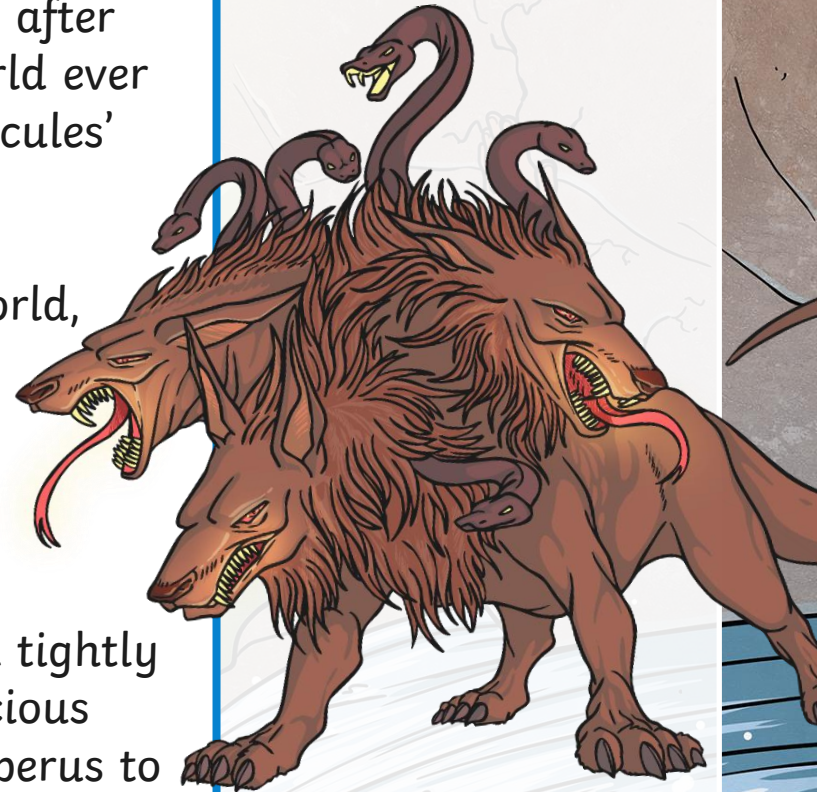


Cerberus

Cerberus was the three-headed dog who guarded the underworld, the place where souls went after death. No person who entered the underworld ever returned. Capturing Cerberus was to be Hercules' final labour.

Hercules went to Hades, god of the underworld, and explained all about his twelve labours. Hades agreed to allow Hercules to try to capture Cerberus on the condition that no weapons were used.

With his mighty strength, Hercules grabbed tightly around each of Cerberus' necks until the vicious dog passed out. Hercules gently carried Cerberus to Eurystheus as proof he had completed the final labour. As promised, Hercules then returned Cerberus to Hades.

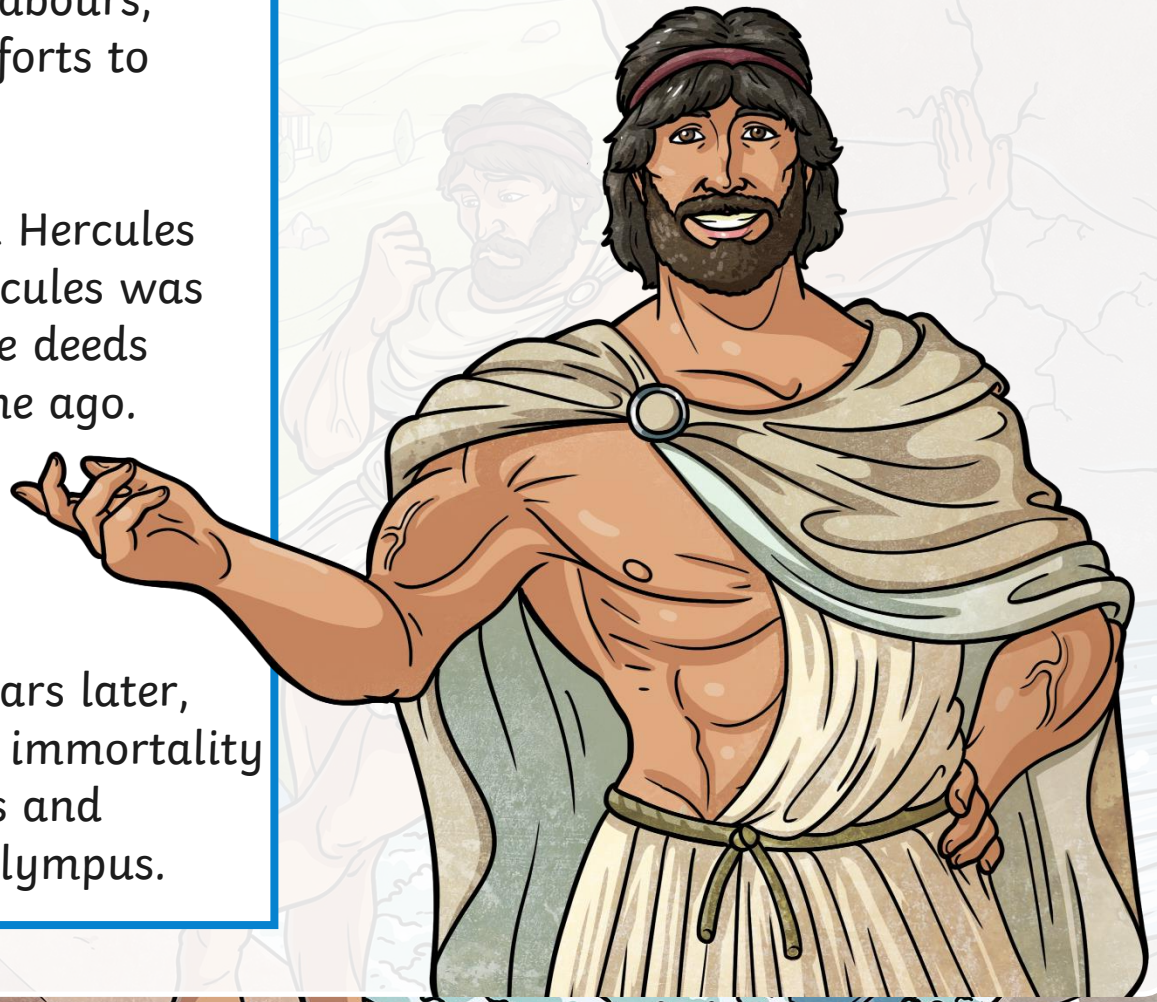


Success

And so, the hero Hercules had completed his twelve labours, despite all of Hera's efforts to make him fail.

The labours had taken Hercules twelve long years. Hercules was forgiven for his terrible deeds committed all that time ago. He continued to have adventures across the known world.

On his death many years later, Zeus granted Hercules immortality and he joined the gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus.



Glossary

atone – To make up for a wrong that has been done.

demi-god – A person who has a god as one parent and a human as the other.

mortal – A human being that can die, rather than a god who cannot.

Oracle – A magical being who could tell the future.

sacred – Something which is connected to a religion.

