

Hercules: Myths and Retcons(tellations)

Intro

Jordan: Hi, I'm Jordan.

Kit: And I'm Kit.

Jordan: Welcome to Starry Time, where stars plus lines

Kit: equal stories.

Jordan: Today we're going to be continuing our exploration of the constellation Hercules, with a focus on the history and the myth of this constellation,

Background

Kit: Just like our other, last several constellations, you know, Andromeda, her parents. Hercules is another Greco- Roman invention, I guess you could say. But in Greek mythology, he's known as Heracles. But nobody seems to care about this distinction in the media. Just, it's always Hercules, even though that's not what the ancient Greeks called him.

Jordan: And we don't really care all that much either. So we'll probably continue with

this convention and use Hercules throughout, even when we use the Greek god names. So, yeah, it's gonna be a little bit of an anachronism, but it's just a more memorable name. Sorry.

Kit: Yes. Um, so given that this guy is a Greco- Roman hero, other cultures didn't necessarily see Hercules among these particular stars.

Jordan: Yeah, in fact, even the earliest Greek descriptions of this constellation didn't call it Hercules either. It was referred to first as the phantom or the kneeler.

Kit: Yeah, and in the Babylonian Star Lore book by Gavin White, which I probably should link in our show notes more often, because I do talk about it a lot uh, White argues that this kneeler name is actually something that's a carryover from two Babylonian constellations, which are the sitting gods and the standing gods.

Jordan: Well, certainly kneeling is between sitting and standing. Yes.

Kit: Yeah. So, makes sense.

Jordan: And in Chinese astronomy, the constellation is part of the Purple Forbidden Enclosure and the Heavenly Market Enclosure.

Kit: Again, so no one to one correlations over time, unlike some of the other constellations that we've talked about, these are just different ways of seeing the same parts of the night sky.

Jordan: Exactly. And before we get into Hercules's story, we should also note that

Hercules himself is already thought of sort of an adaptation of sorts of the much older Mesopotamian hero, Gilgamesh, who, of course, we met in season one.

Kit: Before we get into the myth of Hercules, I have a little Story Time for Starry Time.

Jordan: Okay, go for a little story Time on Starry Time. I like it.

Kit: So, as you know, in high school, I took Latin for my language requirements, which is not a particularly useful language. Um, but in my junior year, we had some kind of myth based assignment, and so my friends and I made a video of the twelve labors of Hercules

Jordan: Oh, great idea. Okay, I don't want to age you, but I would say we didn't quite have the exact video, uh, filmmaking equipment that's readily available as kids do today. So tell me how it went.

Kit: Well, we definitely made it an imovie. It was definitely not recorded on a phone. Like, we had to have like a camcorder. It, um, was digital, but still, um, I looked to see if I had this video here, um, at my home, but I think it's at our mom's house. The only thing I really remember was we like, used Latin in the video. It wasn't all Latin, but we tried to use Latin in it. And I just remember we were screaming, Ecce a lion, like a lot. And Ecce is like, look, you know, like, look, see!

Myth Retelling

Jordan: Incredible. All right, so basically what I'm hearing is that you are an experienced

cinematographer as well as a twelve labors of Hercules expert.

Kit: It is one of the myths I am more familiar with. I would say that, yes.

Jordan: But did you know that Hercules is canonically bisexual?

Kit: I did learn this, yes. Uh, he had four wives, a whole slew of kids, including from the so called 13th labor, and enough lovers, um, that were men, that there's an entire section dedicated to the male lovers of Hercules on the Wikipedia for Hercules

Jordan: Alright, so I can't get much past you when it comes to this guy. Um, but there are a lot of myths associated with Hercules, and we're going to try to stay focused here on his birth and the sort of twelve labors that, you know, high school Kit was apparently obsessed with.

Kit: We may return to the myths of Hercules in a future asterism or episode. He does show up in other of the constellations, but since nobody probably

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Kit: wants a five hour long Hercules myths and retcon episode, I think it makes sense to constrain ourselves just at least little bit.

Jordan: Definitely. All right, let's start with his birth. As you may already be aware, Hercules is the son of Zeus and

Kit: not Hera.

Jordan: Oh, shocker. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. Another one of those stories. Another Zeus cheating on his wife. This time, of course, he's cheating with the mortal woman, Alcmena. Alcmena is a descendant of Perseus and Andromeda by way of their son Electryon. Hesiod describes her as tall, beautiful and wise, and she is married to Amphitryon of Thebes. These two are married and Amphitryon is away at some kind of battle or whatever kings do in ancient Greece. And Zeus is scoping the scope, sees her and is like, oh, Alcmena. That's the one. I don't even know how to say her name, but she's just so my type and he bribes, or perhaps orders, we're not sure, Helios, the god of the sun, to stay down and not rise for three days. And while Helios is not rising, Zeus disguises himself as her husband and sleeps with her. Later that same night, her actual husband does return and also has sex with her.

Kit: Yes, we've got another case of the exceptionally rare super fecundation, though at least this time it's just twins and not quadruplets like the myth of Pollux and Castor, which we discussed in the Gemini episode.

Jordan: But shocking that it's happened twice at all in any myth.

Kit: Right..

Jordan: Alright, so Alcmena is pregnant with twins, and of course, one of them is Zeus's and the other one belongs to her husband.

Kit: Uh, Hera knows what's happening, and she is mad.

Jordan: Per usual. Well, the outcome of all this brainstorming and scheming is that Alcmena's labor is a true hellscape. It's almost never ending. And why does Hera do

this to her? Originally, there is a prophecy slash Zeus agreement that a child born of Perseus's line on a particular day would become King. And with Hera attempting to delay Alcmena's birth, the title fell to Hercules's cousin, Eurystheus.

Kit: Exactly. So the title was supposed to go to Hercules, but by delaying labor for Alcmena, Hera has now given this, made sure that this title was given to Hercules's cousin. Um, and as a side note, Hera was actually going to try to keep Alceme in labor forever. Like, she was just never going to let her give birth, which is truly, truly cruel, even for Hera.

Jordan: Even for Hera. Yeah, she must have been really, really fed up with Zeus here. But, um, some real misdirection of this anger and things don't get better. I mean, Alcmena is rightfully afraid of Hera and leaves Hercules little baby, Hercules, out in the woods. Athena takes pity on her half brother. You know, they both have Zeus as a father and takes him in. Hera sees the sad little baby and starts nursing him even. Not recognizing as Hercules.

Kit: It's almost like she's actually mad at Zeus. That's so weird.

Jordan: Yeah, weird almost, it's like she's not mad at this random little baby that, uh, is a byproduct of Zeus's misbehavior. Anyways, little Hercules baby. Hercules bites her and she pushes him away, which sprays Hera's milk all across the Galaxy. That's actually how the Milky Way was created.

Kit: It's the grossest origin story of the Milky Way, and I hate it. And, um, we should, though separately do a Milky Way myths, origin story. That's a really good asterism idea, but this one I don't like.

Jordan: Oh, you don't really like the idea of spraying her milk across the celestial sky? Um, all because of a bite from a infant. All right, so whether you like it or not, Kit, that is the myth of Hercules's birth, and as he grows up, our hero has super strength and is apparently also super hot, in part due to drinking that divine milk and his heritage as the son of Zeus

Kit: In his youth, Hercules is sent to live in the mountains because he killed his music tutor.

Jordan: Ummmm. What? What?

Kit: Yeah, well, apparently his music tutor was beating him for making errors, and so he was

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Kit: kind of defending himself, but, um, he killed his music tutor with a lyre. And I don't know, it's a bit much.

Jordan: Yeah, that's some. I mean, we all have an angsty teen years, but, um, try not to. Yeah, have any, like, homicide on your record before you make it out of high school. But. All right. It does tell us a bit in the myth about his temper. Perhaps this is some foreshadowing.

Kit: So eventually, Hercules gets married to Megara, a Thebian princess, and all seems to be going okay, uh, until Hera remembers that she really freaking hates this guy. And she, she allegedly,

Jordan: Allegedly.

Kit: Allegedly sends him into a rage where he kills his wife and all of their children.

Jordan: Woeee. This is one of Hera's real just bangers. This is. This whole run from Hera is just peak villain material. Um, you can tell that she's really, um, embodying. We'll get into it in the themes here, but it's relentless, this torture. And when Hercules does regain his senses, he is, of course, devastated and tries however he can, desperately wishing to atone for this behavior. Lucky for him, his cousin, who also hates him, is the high King and gets to decide how Hercules can atone for these murders. And his cousin, who is, of course, King Eurystheus, commands that Hercules must perform ten labors. Now, I'll wait. Before you say wait, I know this one. It should be twelve labors. Kit just made a movie about it. She said twelve. Well, let's just say Eurystheus plays a little fast and loose with his own rules and decides just, um, let's maybe just not count a few of the labors because, you know, he also just hates Hercules

Kit: So Hercules sets off on what should each individually be impossible tasks, which he, of course, somehow completes. The order of these labors varies depending on the source. So we're going to go with the work of Apollodorus here, but we're going to run through them, um, just one after another, keeping it quick here, because this is a long myth. Twelve of them. So number one was to slay the Nemean lion.

Jordan: And we did do a deep dive on this story in season one on the episode Leo. So go check that out for details and our retcons of the first task.

Kit: The second task was to slay the nine headed Lernaean hydra.

Jordan: And Hercules, unfortunately, has his nephew help him slightly in this task. So his cousin says this one doesn't count.

Kit: The third one was to catch the golden hind of Artemis.

Jordan: And a hind is, um, uh, um, uh, uh. A deer.

Kit: Mm hmm.

Jordan: Okay. And this took about a year of chasing and the good graces of his half sister, Artemis. But, Hercules, you did it.

Kit: Fourth was to capture the Erymanthian boar.

Jordan: Which is basically the same story as above, but with no Artemis.

Kit: Yep. Uh, the fifth one was to clean the Augean stables in a day. So before you ask, the Augean stables were home to between a thousand and three thousand cattle who were apparently immortal and whose stable had not been cleared in at least 30 years. So we're talking like, thousands of cattles. 30 years of poop.

Jordan: That's a. Ah, lot of poop.

Kit: Yeah.

Jordan: I mean, after all this chasing after wildlife, these tasks of patience and restraint, this task just seems to be like, this is a job that nobody's wanting to get done for 30

years, and now we can just force some guy to do it. Um. And it's just incredibly gross, you know, 30 years of immortal cattle poop. Um, regardless, Hercules does complete the task by rerouting a river through the stables. Great solution, using your noggin.

Kit: Yeah, definitely. This one is another one, though, that the King cousin decided not to honor because Hercules asked for payment, which, of course, the owner of the stable refused to pay. So they added they had a deal to be paid. And then once Hercules did it, the owner of the cattle refused, which, of course, you know, led Hercules to murder said owner of cattle and then just go on his merry little way. So.

Jordan: Great. So we got two murders on the books already, so I can understand the King cousin's objection to this one. All right, what's next?

Kit: The 6th one was to kill the Stymphalian birds who were human eating birds.

Jordan: Hercules is able to do this by scaring them into flight and then shooting them down with a bow and arrow.

Kit: The 7th task was to capture the Cretan bull, who is the father of the Minotaur.

Jordan: Hand wave. He did it. He captures

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Jordan: the Cretan bull, and then the cousin King sets it free to terrorize people until Theseus comes along.

Kit: Number eight was to steal the mares of Diomedes. Diomedes was the King of Thrace and the son of Ares, and he liked to feed his mares human flesh.

Jordan: I guess once they develop a taste for it, it's hard to tell them no. But of course, this is another task that required necessitated murder.

Kit: Right.

Jordan: So Hercules fed Diomedes to these mares and then muzzled the horses and led them to his cousin King.

Kit: 9Th was to obtain the girdle of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons.

Jordan: And Hercules brought some friends along for this one and it actually went pretty well. And Hippolyta seemed kind of taken by Hercules until Hera came around, messed everything up, disguised herself as an Amazon, and started spreading some rumors that someone was coming to kidnap the Queen. Then the Amazons, of course, started out to protect their queen, and Hercules thought they were coming for him, so he killed Hippolyta. Oops. And took her girdle.

Kit: Okay. Uh, number ten was to steal the cattle of the monster Geryon, who was a giant with three heads or with three bodies and six arms, who guarded cattles with his two headed dog.

Jordan: But Hercules accomplishes this with some help from Helios and by killing the dog and the shepherd with the club and then the owner with the poison arrow. So he's got range and he's got, you know, up close. Hera's seeing that Hercules is getting pretty

close to completing these labors and starts having more of an active role and pops in again, using her gadfly trick that you might remember from previous episodes to upset the cattle and make it extremely difficult for Hercules to herd them home. And also, just incidentally, on his way home, Hercules also has to battle a couple giants.

Kit: You know, ancient Greece was a dangerous place.

Jordan: And that's without your stepmom trying to kill you.

Kit: Right.

Jordan: And during the battle against these giants, he knelt and prayed for help from Zeus which leads to the mythic origin of his kneeling constellation.

Kit: 11Th is to steal three golden apples from the garden of Hesperides, the nymphs of the evening, or the golden light in sunsets.

Jordan: Getting to and or from this labor, we also learned that Hercules kills at least one person and is nearly sacrificed himself. But he does end up getting the help of Atlas, the Titan who holds the world on his shoulders to get the apples. Hercules holds the world for Atlas, while Atlas goes to get the apples, because, of course, they will welcome him in the garden as a father or relative of the nymphs.

Kit: When Atlas gets back, though, he doesn't really want to get back under the heavens, and Hercules has to trick him into taking the world back before he literally runs away.

Jordan: Yeah. And in another version, Hercules forgoes to visit Atlas altogether and kill the dragon that defended the garden.

Kit: Finally, to labor, I know it's a lot. Labor twelve stealing Hades's dog, the three headed Cerberus.

Jordan: To do this task, Hercules became initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries and had Athena and Hermes guide him. In a real twist, though, Hercules asks Hades if he can borrow his dog, and Hades says, sure, you can do it, as long as you don't hurt the pup or use weapons. Fine. So Hercules overpowers the dog with his raw strength and carries him upon his back.

Kit: The cousin King regretted this labor as soon as he saw the dog and ordered Hercules to bring the dog back to Hades, promising to release Hercules from any further labors after returning the dog, which, of course, Hercules did.

Jordan: Yeah. So mostly he just sort of rented the dog from, from Hades or borrowed it. And, uh, some people also discuss a possible 13th labor, which happens much later when Hercules kills a different lion that had been attacking the Thespieae. And the reward for killing the lion was a chance to have sex with the king's 50 daughters, which, of course, Hercules did, and impregnated them all, which sounds like a 14th labor, if you're asking me.

Kit: In one night, this all happens in one night.

Jordan: Yeah.

Kit: So, um, honestly, some of the post labor stories of Hercules are very, very cringe, but I think we have enough to work with here for our retconstellations.

Myth Analysis

Jordan: Oh, definitely. I think you're right. First, though, let's talk a little bit about the themes and the purpose of this myth.

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Kit: I think we talked a little bit about this in a previous episode, maybe in the Cancer or Leo episodes, which, of course, intersect with the Hercules labors. But at its core, this really just seems to be a myth about redemption or the quest for redemption or atonement.

Jordan: Definitely. This story is outlining punishment and penance, though it does seem to undermine itself, since while he's out there serving penance for his crime of murdering his family, he's out there murdering more people and stealing things and killing animals and people, for that matter.

Kit: Yeah, the moral and ethical elements of the atonement are really overshadowed. But I do think, like, ostensibly, the purpose of the myth is about how you get absolution or atonement for something terrible that you've done.

Jordan: Agreed. But at the same time, the myth also has these quest elements that mostly go to show how cool and amazing our hero is. Um, you know, a blockbuster

narrative. And this type of narrative really reminds us our discussion of the Sumerian hero Gilgamesh, of which Hercules is based. Of course, Gilgamesh doesn't have that nice little wrinkle of murdering his family before going on this heroic quest, and he was more in it for glory instead. But it's the same sort of engaging, surreal story that would get listeners coming back and pack the crowds.

Kit: We're willing to ignore all these terrible things that they do because of these sort of incredible feats of strength and cunning, because Hercules, when you really look at these stories, wasn't very shiny and good. He's pretty awful and scary.

Jordan: Yeah, he's pretty scary, to be honest. And they do try to temper these features with the idea that Hera has just been messing him this whole time, which brings out the whole Hera Zeus jealous evil stepmother trope, which we've explored in previous episodes. Another role of these labors is functioning, like many myths, just to explain natural phenomenon and to make sense of the interaction between human and animals and make sense of lions and various creatures that might be perceived as terrorizing a town or a city.

Kit: Yeah. And the origin and birth story of Hercules functions in the same way to explain phenomena like childbirth, how it can last a long time, superfecundation, and maybe even eclipses if the extra long night was something more literal.

Jordan: So, overall, this myth actually does check a lot of boxes. It's understandable why it was so popular and has been passed on in a lot of different versions. It's about thinking between the world and the lines between the mortal and the immortal. It's entertaining. It's got a quest narrative, explains phenomenon in the natural world, and it's trying, uh, albeit roundedly or mostly just badly, to teach something about

atonement. But let's take a quick break and see if our ret- constellations can do just as good a job checking all those boxes.

Retconstellations

Kit: Welcome back to our segment, ret constellation. In this segment, we reimagine, reboot, and revise the myths of our monthly constellation in hopes of modernizing, subverting, deepening the story of the constellation. But sometimes we just want to make them less, you know, cringy. Do you want to start us off this week, Jordan, with your retconstellation of Hercules?

Jordan: Yeah, this one you can go a lot of different ways since it's kind of like this very negative atonement, misplaced blame narrative right from the jump, you know. So if you're wanting to wholesale out the whole story, you can totally retconstellate it and only keep basic bones or you can diverge it at various points from the narrative that's already been established. But I wouldn't say you necessarily need to keep anything here. Me personally, I have decided to keep all of the Hera stuff in, even though it's toxic and abrasive and even cruel. But I wanted to give Hercules a bit more of a happy ending. So unfortunately, yes, he does kill all of his family. I'm keeping all that in. He does go insane. He does do all the labors, except doesn't finish out all twelve. He does the first nine labors. He's supposed to get the girdle of Hippolyta. Guess what? Things are going great with him and the Amazons. When he goes and visits, Hippolyta takes a liking to him. It isn't until

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Jordan: Hera starts spreading these gossip and rumors that ruins everything.

Kit: Mhm.

Jordan: I think we should have given Herc he done enough penance, you know, at this point, I think if he abandons his labors, nine twelfths or the nine tenths of the way through to find love and ultimately finds out that that's the real atonement that he was looking for, that I think story is more important than completing all these cousin King, uh, labors and then still being condemned to a horrible life afterwards. I also like that maybe he just needs a fresh start. You know, a lot people we do grow up with, uh, toxic parents or parents who, um, don't have our best interest at heart, but we get away and we find a like minded community. It just happened to be that for Hercules, I was the warrior cast of the Amazons and Hippolyta. So my retconstellation is either a Hera never finds him in the Amazons. Maybe they just like got a good like system, uh, defense thing going on or b Hera does come down. But Hercules and Hippolyta work together and are like, not here. You know, you go back to Greece, you take care of that, but not here. We're trying to do something else here. And they stand up to her. So that's my Retconstellation of the Hercules myth. How about you, Kit? Where'd you decide to go with this one?

Kit: Uh, well, before I start, I do want to shout out the book that I just finished, which is called Herc. It's written by Phoenicia Rogerson. And it's a re envisioning or Retconstellation of the myth. And it has, like, a very explicit exploration of Hercules queerness, which is really interesting. It was published in September 2023. So, still pretty recent. Um, one of the things I really liked about it is it's not actually told. It's told from all of the people's perspectives around Hercules, not Hercules himself. And so you get to see differing perspectives of how cousin King feels about him and how his

brother feels about him and how his lovers feel about him. Um, and those interpretations are really interesting. And it's interesting to see those characters try to cope with this person in their life that's doing terrible things. And they're like, yes, Hera did it. But there's always this undercurrent of, like, but did Hera do it?

Jordan: How much of it is his fault? Yeah.

Kit: Right. Um, so, yeah, so if you're interested in, like, a very formalized retcon, sort of in the family of stories like Circe or, um, Song of Achilles or A Thousand Ships, like, if that is your jam, um, you might really like Herc. So just wanted to shout that out because it's like a literal retcon of what we're talking about. And I was um, as I was preparing for this show, I was sort of, I was also reading that book. I just finished it. So, yeah.

Jordan: It's got a unique perspective. It just came up September 2023. It's written by Phoenicia Rogerson. And again, the title is H e r c. Herc. Check it out.

Kit: Yeah. Okay. So, now for my retcon, I went a totally different direction. I want to completely reimagine the Wworld of the Olympians and Hercules. And honestly, you know, I just want to give it a more family friendly, wholesome tone. That's what my goal is.

Jordan: I mean, then you agree with me for sure. There's nothing here that necessarily you need to keep to tell a good Hercules story, but, all right. You're promising something family friendly and wholesome. That is a pretty big departure from the original myth. What were you thinking?

Kit: Okay, so I'm gonna start really big here. Hercules is now the son of Hera and Zeus. There's no cheating.

Jordan: Well, that solves a lot of problems. Yeah.

Kit: Right. No terrible childbirth revenge. They have this precious little baby boy. They love him so much. All the other goddesses and gods are so excited to meet the new kiddo. And he is good, and he is strong, and, you know, he's cute, and he snores a little. And that prophecy about a king, uh, you, it doesn't matter. Instead, we have a, you know, maybe we have, uh, some kind of prophecy that says Hercules is going to save the world, and, um, he's going to prevent some kind of thing that would actually put Hades in charge. And so there's this prophecy about him, but it's different.

Jordan: Okay, great. Yeah. So we keep Hercules being someone of great, you know, glorious purpose, a very specific destiny. But now it's to prevent putting the king of the dead in charge. All right. Sense to me, you don't want that guy in charge.

Kit: Absolutely Not.

Jordan: Alright.

Kit: So Hades, of course, wants to be in charge. Who wouldn't? And sends, uh, you know, not. He can't himself go up to get, you know, to get Zeus. That's,

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Kit: you know, that's not possible. So he sends some minions up to take care of the

Hercules problem, but it's hard to find good help. Um, and so basically, they knock Hercules out of, you know, Olympus, and he kind of becomes a little bit mortal. But they don't actually succeed in killing him.

Jordan: No, it's hard to get good help. Yeah.

Kit: It is. And so a couple finds Hercules down in the mortal realm in the sort of mountains. So instead of, you know, killing his tutor and ending up in the mountains, he just kind of gets, you know, tossed out into the mountains. And, yeah. So the couple takes him in. He struggles because he's still kind of strong, you know, like a misfit a little bit.

Jordan: Yeah.

Kit: Um, he's sort of bullied for it. And, um, he has no idea, right, that, like, Zeus is his father. But then he goes to a temple one day when he's feeling really down, and Zeus tells him, like, you're actually my and Hera's son.

Jordan: Woah!

Kit: Right?

Jordan: Yeah.

Kit: And so he's like. And his, and Zeus is like, you can become the god again, but you have to prove yourself as a real hero. And so Hercules is like, okay, I need some training, uh, because he's been a shepherd his whole life. And so he's like, okay, I'm

going. I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna be a hero I'm gonna rejoin my Olympus family. And he eventually finds a satyr to help train him.

Jordan: Kit. Kit.

Kit: Right.

Jordan: Ummmm. Um, I really. I mean, wait a second. Is this Satyr's name, uh, wild guess. is it Phil, by any chance?

Kit: Phil? Well, it's Philoctetes. Is that , you know. it's different.

Jordan: All right, my bad. Okay, carry on. Carry on.

Kit: Great. So Philoctetes is a famous satyr you know, so like, half goat, half human, trains Hercules in, uh, Hercules first real test, he saves Megara, who, of course, in the original story is his wife that he murdered. But in this time, he does not murder her. He just sort of, like, falls in love with her. But she's kind of a complicated lady. Let's add some, like, real depth to Megara. She's got secrets.

Jordan: Can she sing?

Kit: Well, yeah, of course she can sing that because, you know, that's bringing the music element from the original myth in, in a different way.

Jordan: Yep.

Kit: So she, she's loved a hero before. She and Hades kind of have stuff going on, and Hercules, of course, you know, instantly has a big old crush on Megara because she's strong and she's so cool and of course she can sing. Um, at this point, Hades discovers that Hercules is alive. And Hades is, like, so mad, so angry, and starts throwing the hydra and the boar and all these other monsters. So we have kind of the monsters from the twelve labors, and Hercules just keeps winning. Right? Like,

Jordan: Yeah.

Kit: Crushing it.

Jordan: Heck yeah.

Kit: of course. And so Megara, uh, is like, wow, this little wonder boy is kind of impressive. And he's kind of like, really good and golden, um, which is unfortunately, where things take a turn, because Hades uses this to his advantage.

Jordan: Oh no!

Kit: Yeah, traps Megara in the underworld for payment. And Hades demands that Hercules gives up his super strength to bring Megara back from the dead. It's a good plan. So Hercules is sidelined. He's just an, uh, average mortal. Megara is still alive, and Hades makes a plan to, uh, take over Olympus.

Jordan: This is, uh, a brilliant reimagining. I'm just trying to follow it the best I can. I have a few guesses of where the story could go next.

Kit: Uh-huh

Jordan: Is there a chance that. All right, let's say Megara is going to need an out, right? So she should probably die by accident.

Kit: Yes.

Jordan: Which will break Hades vow and restores Hercules strength. And then Hercules could maybe save the day?

Kit: Yeah, exactly. That's exactly what happens. He eventually saves the day, he becomes the god, he rejoins his family in Olympus, uh, but then he decides he wants to, you know, stay and have a life with Megara, and he lives happily ever after. Isn't that beautiful?

Jordan: This is beautiful. Do you think we could do this to the tune of about 100 minutes animated and make about \$600 million if we're lucky. Do you think it's possible? Will the people buy it?

Kit: I think only in the nineties.

Jordan: Mhm. Yeah, it's got some real nineties vibes to it, for sure.

Kit: Yeah, that's, this is the only retcon, you know, that I need of Hercules, which is, of course, the Disney animated film of Hercules. If you have not seen it, you know, treat

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Kit: yourself and go see it.

Jordan: The music is incredible. It is a very desanitized, family friendly, wholesome interpretation that totally retcons the Hercules myth, keeps some of the elements. Um, but, yeah, I think that was a beautiful outline of it, and it wasn't as successful as some of the Disney's films previous to it, but it's a personal favorite of the pod. All right, Kit, now let's find out what the Oracle thinks. Can they beat you and me? Can they beat the house of mouse? Let's find out.

Oracle AI

Kit: So we asked Oracle AI to summarize the myth of the twelve labors of Hercules and then identify any problematic themes. The Oracle identified violence and aggression, gender dynamics and objectification of women, violence against women, deception and trickery, moral ambiguity, treatment of Hera, and reinforcing negative stepmother stereotypes, fatalism and lack of autonomy as problematic elements of the myth. This basically listed everything that could possibly be wrong with it. So then we asked the Oracle to tell us a, you know, one paragraph version of the twelve labors that addresses these problematic elements. So, um, Jordan, would you like to channel the Oracle and tell us the story that the Oracle, you know, told us through the vapors?

Jordan: Kit, as always, it's an honor. Quoth the Oracle. In the ancient world, a noble demigod named Hercules, gifted with incredible strength, embarks on a series of virtuous quests to prove his worth and seek redemption. Instead of being burdened by his labors as punishment, Hercules willingly takes on challenges to cleanse his spirit. His noble deeds include rescuing villages from natural disasters, aiding those in needs,

and taming mythical creatures without resorting to violence. Along his journey, Hercules learns many valuable lessons about empathy, humility, and the responsible use of power. The myth focused on Hercules positive qualities and his transformative journey towards becoming a symbol of virtue and inspiration for generations to come. A lot of gobbledygook here, Oracle. I like that. Very vague.

Kit: Yeah. So this is a little thin. We did restrict the Oracle to a paragraph, so. But I had some follow up questions. You know, sometimes you need the Oracle to clarify. So the first thing, uh, that we asked was why Hercules was seeking redemption in this new myth. So, um, take. Take us away.

Jordan: And the Oracle reported in response to this question, quote, in this version of the myth, Hercules seeks redemption not as a consequence of a crime committed under the influence of madness, aka killing his wife and all of his children because Hera told him to. But as a proactive choice to overcome personal challenges and become a better individual. It's all about self improvement, baby. Editor's notes. Perhaps Hercules, driven by a desire for self improvement and a sense of responsibility, recognizes that his extraordinary abilities can be used for noble and virtuous purposes. He may embark on a quest for redemption to demonstrate the positive impact he can have on the world and to align himself with the values of empathy and compassion. If anyone out there wants to know, this is also the plot of the first Iron Man.

Kit: Well, I mean, um, I also, we also asked the Oracle if they could list the labors of the new myth. So maybe we could just alternate on these, listing these out, uh, as the Oracle has given them to us.

Jordan: Sounds good. All right, I'll start. First new labor of Hercules, self improvement

and building a better individual with a sense of responsibility edition is rescue a stranded village. And in this labor, Hercules aids a village trapped by a flooding river, using his strength to build a protective barrier and guiding the villagers to safety.

Kit: Two is to tame the spirited horses. Hercules befriends a group of wild and spirited horses, taming them through patience and understanding rather than force or, you know, side note, feeding them flesh.

Jordan: They love flesh, though. Labor number three, heal a desolate land. Hercules restores fertility to a barren land through acts of kindness, revitalizing the soil and bringing life back to the region.

Kit: Labor four, bridge the chasm. Hercules, builds a bridge across a dangerous chasm, um, facilitating safe passage for travelers and connecting isolated communities.

Jordan: Labor five,

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Jordan: befriend a fierce creature. Instead of slaying a fearsome creature, Hercules befriends it, demonstrating that understanding and compassion can overcome hostility.

Kit: Number six, harvest the golden wheat. Hercules cultivates a field of golden wheat, sharing the bountiful harvest with those in need.

Jordan: I like that one, it's basically, Hercules invents cereal. Labor Seven, illuminate the night. Hercules brings light to a darkened realm, symbolizing the triumph of

knowledge and wisdom over ignorance.

Kit: Eight, guide lost souls. Hercules helps lost souls find their way, serving as a compassionate guide through the challenges of life. So this is basically Hercules life coach.

Jordan: Yeah. Chat GPT I mean, the Oracle is really losing its way here. Started out strong with the taming of the horses and the bridging of the chasms, but by labor nine, we have protect endangered species.

Kit: Mhm.

Jordan: In which Hercules works to protect and preserve endangered species, a concept which could not have possibly existed in ancient Greece. However, this promotes harmony between humans and the natural world.

Kit: Similarly, number ten is foster peaceful coexistence. Hercules mediates conflicts between different communities, fostering understanding and peaceful coexistence.

Jordan: Yeah, the Hercules United nations, basically, which leads, of course, into labor eleven, which is inspire art and culture. For some, that's a joy. But for Hercules, encouraging the arts and cultural exchange, recognizing the importance of creativity and expression in society, is, um, a labor, but he is happy to help inspire others to reach that goal.

Kit: And finally, the 12th labor is promoting knowledge and education. Hercules established centers of learning and promotes education, emphasizing the power of

knowledge to uplift and empower individuals.

Jordan: So there we have it. Our and the Oracle's reconstallations of the myth of Hercules Let us know what you thought of these retcons over on our socials.

Kit: We're at starrytimepod on the Universodon server and on Twitter as well.

Outro

Jordan: That brings us to the end of our episode this week. Join us next week for the pop culture segment of our exploration of the constellation Hercules

Kit: This has been Kit

Jordan: And Jordan.

Kit: Sisters. Lovers of stars and stories.

Jordan: And we'll see you next time

Kit: On Starry Time. [Music].

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