



The Labours of Hercules

Agatha Christie , Hugh Fraser (Narrator)

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First published in book form in 1947, The Labours of Hercules comprises an even dozen mysteries starring Christie's most popular sleuth, the ever-dignified Hercule Poirot. The introductory chapter of the collection sets up the rest of the book. At a dinner party, another guest compares the labors of Poirot to those of Hercules, and the little Belgian is not amused. He has already decided to retire, but makes up his mind to take on 12 great cases - each somehow reflecting the labors accomplished by Hercules - as a farewell to crime solving. All of the cases are quite different from each other, from searching for a lost poet to hunting down a particularly ferocious murderer, from solving mysterious deaths of religious cult members to saving a young would-be politician from potential blackmailers. Frequent Christie interpreter Hugh Fraser brings stories like The Cretan Bull and The Apples of the Hesperides to dazzling life.

The Labours of Hercules Details

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From Reader Review The Labours of Hercules for online ebook

Nandakishore Varma says

This one is a special favourite. Hercule Poirot sets out to emulate the twelve labours of his mythical namesake - but using the little grey cells, not muscles. It has got some absolute gems: "The Lernean Hydra", "The Erymanthian Boar", "The Augean Stables", "The Stymphalean Birds", "The Girdle of Hyppolita" and "The Capture of Cerebrus".

Nente says

The premise of the collection does seem a little forced, but it is after all better than the nursery rhymes Christie was so fond of. Many of the stories feature rather ingenious ideas. But they are not detective stories at all! Where's the detection? - in almost all cases Poirot just has a real good look and suddenly he knows; we aren't treated to his thought processes, and there is nothing else to chew upon at all.

Stephen McQuiggan says

The fussy little Belgian decides, like his mythical namesake, to undertake twelve labours before he retires. After that, he plans to do things with marrows. Like a pair of comfy old slippers, and I don't mean that in a derisory way. A marvelous conceit, each labour cleverly, symbolically linked - the cleaning of the Aegean stables transforms into the hushing up of a political scandal etc. No strain on the little grey cells, just warm pleasure. Christie is literary cocaine.

Marijan says

knjiga je zanimljiva, ali je prijevod jednostavno užasan. doima se da prevodilac nije nikad imao veze s engleskim, a bogami niti hrvatskim frazama. patentirana koža? krhotina starog bloka?? doslovno preveden fraze samo se nižu i kvare ?itanje.

Dion Yulianto says

"Ada saatnya ketika kita tidak perlu berhemat," kata Poirot. (hlm. 445)

"Benar sekali, saat di obralan buku misalnya," tambah saya.

Dan, Hercule Poirot selalu benar.

Almeta says

Just finished The Labours of Hercules the 26th volume of Hercule Poirot adventures.

The premise is that Hercule has made a pact with himself to take on only twelve more cases before he retires to take up gardening. Not just any case but one that simulates the twelve labors of the Greek hero Hercules... not by brute strength but by the little gray cells!

So twelve entertaining short stories follow.

Obviously Hercule did not retire at volume 26, for there are a total of 41 volumes under Poirot's moniker.

Nicola says

Not her best work, the short stories are often pretty mediocre and, which is rather worse, Agatha runs off on her pet hobby horse of 'Drugs! Bad! Demon, Devil!' quite a bit. When she does this it becomes slightly reminiscent of that gawds awful nightmare she wrote when, I charitably assume, she had gone totally senile and gaga - Passenger to Frankfurt⁵²⁷].

Katheryn Thompson says

When a Classicist comments on the peculiarity of Hercule Poirot's name, given how little he resembles Hercules, Poirot sets out to prove him wrong, choosing twelve final cases before his retirement based on the twelve labours of Hercules.

Reading Classics and English at university, I naturally love the concept. Although the rigid structure and the shortness of the stories means that the cases aren't overly complicated, they are all interesting in their own right as well as within the overall premise. The links between the cases and the labours of Hercules are also brilliantly imaginative.

Agatha Christie pulls this premise off as perhaps no-one else could.

Michael says

While I respect Agatha Christie for her contributions to the mystery genre, I have to admit I'm not necessarily a big fan of much of her work.

I've liked a good deal of what I've read, but for the most part little of it seems to end up on my list of favorite mystery stories or she on my list of favorite mystery writers.

But every once in a while, I'll admit something about a Christie mystery or story captures my attention and I'm inclined to pick it up. In this case, it's the hook for this collection of short stories.

In the later stages of his career, Hercule Poirot decides that he will take up a series of cases modeled after the

legendary labors of Hercules. Each case must someone tie into one of the feats of the legendary hero.

And so, the great detective launches into a series of puzzles that are all (for the most part) of much lower stakes than the usual Poirot mystery. There are few stories here that deal with a murder and most involve a lost object or getting to the bottom of a particular issue or problem. Poirot engages the gray cells a bit.

However, while it's fun to see Christie tie in the mythological stories of Hercules to the detective pursuits of Poirot, I have to admit that many of these mysteries were a bit too obvious in their solution. In just about half the stories, I deduced the outcome or solution several pages before Poirot did as well as the motivation for the "crime" presented in the story. On the one hand, it's nice that Christie works to put all the details out there and not appear to come up with a solution out of left field. But it's another if the reader is too easily able to discern the solution before the detective in the story and there's no attempts to put in a red herring or two.

Part of this could be the limitation of short story telling. There's less time to develop red herrings in the story.

In the end, I found myself enjoying the idea behind "The Labours of Hercules" more than I did the actual execution of the book.

Richa says

This book is among the better works in the Poirot series. The 1st chapter or the Forward, introduces the premise, which immediately got me hooked. Very different concept.

Congratulations to Agatha Christie for convincingly giving practical instances, explaining the allegory in the 12 labours of Hercules!

She has grasped the crux of it and has beautifully narrated the 12 stories to show how the labours weren't really insane or fantastical.

The Enchanted Library says

3.5/5 stars

Moonlight Reader says

I am admittedly not a short story reader. I have now, however, read every last Hercule Poirot and the vast majority of the rest of the Christie full-length canon, so I have no choice but to dip into Agatha's short stories.

I listened to this as an audiobook, and it was delightful. The stories are loosely linked with a theme, and there is one character - Amy Carnaby - who shows up in two of the stories. I loved Amy Carnaby and I dearly wish that Christie had given her a book or two. I actually preferred her devious competence to Jane Marple's village sagacity. The stories, overall, were well written and delightful. I figured out a couple of them, but that is probably more of a testament to my thorough familiarity with Christie's method than it is to any special perspicacity on my part!

Obsidian says

Many long time Christie fans know that Hercule would go on and on about retiring (at least it felt like it) well in this collection we have Hercule talking about going into retirement and growing the perfect vegetable marrow. This makes me think that the events in this collection all occur before the events in "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd." Poirot's conversation with his friend, Dr. Burton leads into the Greek hero named Hercules and his 12 labors that he undertook. What did make me laugh was Poirot finding Hercules to be a brute who was not smart at all (I tend to agree when you read the Greek myths, Hercules sucks a lot). But, Poirot decides that he will investigate 12 more cases that interest him before setting in the country.

The Nemean Lion (5 stars)-This one tickled my funny bone a lot. We have Poirot becoming intrigued by the case of a gang of thieves who appear to abduct rich women's Pekingese dogs. Reading about how Poirot has to deal with each of these rich women (there are two in this story) and how many of them are pretty terrible people was fun. Due to Poirot being called in to investigate by one of these women's husbands was what made Poirot intrigued. The main reason why I liked this one besides the awesome solution though was that Poirot revealed something about someone else in this story and I loved it. Great ending.

The Lernaean Hydra (4.5 stars)- Poirot investigates when a dentist is being hounded by gossip about being behind the death of his wife. Of course it doesn't help that the man was not really in love with his wife and had fallen for his assistant. The only reason why this case is not five stars was that I guessed at who was behind the whole thing.

The Arcadian Deer (3 stars)-This one was weird to me. Poirot gets stranded in a remote village and is asked to find out about a missing maid. Poirot travels to Italy and Switzerland in this one. And I had so many questions about how much money Poirot has that he is able to do things like this. The solution to this one was pretty odd I thought.

The Erymanthian Boar (5 stars)-Due to Poirot still being in Switzerland due to his last case, he is called upon by a local policeman in helping to track down a highly wanted criminal. I do have to say though, there is a side character called Schwartz who I did find highly annoying. He and Poirot's comments on women traveling alone was aggravating. I imagine that Christie was drawing some ire towards Poirot and this other fictional character. The solution to this one I found to be pretty clever.

The Augean Stables (5 stars)-This once again was a pretty cool case. Poirot was called in to help out the current Prime Minister who is trying to get ahead of the scandal due to his predecessor who is also his father in law. How Poirot goes about dealing with the scandal was quite clever and the ending that came with Poirot almost getting throttled for the first time in his life cracked me up.

The Stymphalean Birds (5 stars)-This story starts off a bit differently. We follow a man (Harold Waring) who is on vacation where he befriends an older woman (Mrs. Rice) and her daughter (Mrs. Elise Clayton) who are also vacationing. Harold becomes increasingly afraid of two older Polish women who seem malevolent to him. Harold also finds himself becoming increasingly attracted to Elise and feels sorry for her based on what her mother has said about her marriage. When Elise's husband shows up and accuses her of having an affair with Harold. Murder ensues. We have Poirot who also seems to be vacationing who comes along and meets Harold who is freaking out over the whole situation. When Poirot reveals all once again you are left surprised. Or at least I was.

The Cretan Bull (3 stars)-This one was a lot of nonsense to me. A woman (Diana) comes to Poirot due to the fact that her fiancée (Hugh Chandler) has called off his marriage claiming that he is going insane. Apparently it's genetic (yeah, not touching that at all) and he has seen signs that he has done some things. Poirot goes down to visit with Diana, her fiancée, and her fiancée's father and his best friend and of course gets to the bottom of things. I have to call boo towards the solution though. Also we have Poirot and his odd brand of justice taking place in this story.

The Horses of Diomedes (2 stars)-A friend of Poirot's, Dr. Michael Stoddart calls for his help. Poirot arrives and Dr. Stoddart tells him about a possible cocaine epidemic going through a crowd. Stoddart is particularly worried about a young woman named Sheila Grant. Sheila is the daughter of a retired general and has three other sisters. Stoddart is worried that Sheila will become addicted which can lead her towards ruin. Poirot meets with Sheila's father and others nearby to see who could possibly be bringing drugs into the area. I have to say that the solution to this one did not make any sense to me at all. And who would even set up something like this?

The Girdle of Hippolyta (3 stars)-A man called Alexander Simpson asks Poirot for help when a painting goes missing. Poirot is told that the painting is most likely on its way to France and Simpson wants him to find it before it is carried off. On top of this case, Poirot is asked to look into a kidnapping of a teenage girl called Winnie King. Winnie goes missing on a train (Christie and her trains) and is later found drugged up. Winnie was supposed to be heading to France to school and what happened to her and why leads Poirot down a long winding path. I just didn't buy the solution in this one at all. It made very little sense to me. Then again maybe I was getting flashbacks to "Mystery of the Blue Train" and got irritated.

The Flock of Geryon (5 stars)-A character we meet in the Case of the Nemean Lion is back in this one. I won't reveal this person's name since it may clue people into the solution in that one. I did enjoy though that Poirot had a side kick again in this one. Poirot is asked to look into a cult and the leader's possible connections to the deaths of some of the older members of the cult who were thinking of leaving money to him.

The Apples of Hesperides (2 stars)-Honestly I was bored with this one from beginning to end. I guess the moral of the story is that rich people get sad too. I don't know. I just was glad to be done with it.

The Capture of Cerebus (3 stars)-Even though this one stars one of Poirot's favorite women, the Countess Vera Rossakoff, I found myself bored. Poirot is invited to visit Hell (a new club in London) and once within its gates he finds that not all is what it seems. He meets a fairly aggravating girl that is engaged to the Countess's son who is away in America. And Poirot also meets a very large dog which would have given Cerebus a run for his money.

Mansuriah Hassan says

THE LABOURS OF HERCULES is a mixture of mystery, adventure, and an unexpected literary conceit. Agatha Christie transforms the ancient Greek mythology of the twelve labours of Hercules into a modern mythology and of the twelve labours of Hercules (Poirot). And the result is quite charming.

The book consists of a short preface and twelve stories. It was an absolutely delightful collection of short stories. I thought connecting them to the Twelve Labours of Hercules was ingenious. Much of its charm comes from the clever manner in which Christie juxtaposes the physical strength of the ancient Hercules

with the mental power of the modern Hercules (Poirot) and the witty way in which she transforms the ancient stories into a 20th Century setting.

The Lernean Hydra becomes malicious gossip; *The Augean Stables* concerns a dirty political scandal; and so on. The stories were exceptionally well thought out and written with tremendous humour. Naturally some stories are better than others, some worked very well for me, others a bit less.

The Nemean Lion which finds a wily lapdog at the center of a dognapping gang; and *The Girdle of Hyppolita*, which concerns a missing art treasure. And from a "mystery" point of view, these are very likely the best of the twelve stories, for on this occasion Christie is much less concerned with creating a head-spinning plot than she is in having fun. But each of the stories has its own charms, with the concluding *The Capture of Cerebus* among my favorites.

I'd recommend this book to those who haven't read many mysteries and are curious to see what they're about

Laurel Young says

Of all Agatha Christie's collections of stories featuring the great Hercule Poirot, this is the one of which the man himself would most approve. It has the order and method, to be sure! A perfect dozen cases, updating the Labours of Hercules for the modern world (well, the 1947 world). The stories have a certain inevitability to them--it would be a shame to name a character Hercule and NOT do something with the classical allusion. The format is both the collection's greatest strength and its weakness. The strength is that it seems so perfectly fitting for Poirot and that it allows Christie to be very clever and imaginative as she comes up with modern counterparts for the Labours. The weakness is that we must suspend a lot of disbelief to accept that Poirot found all these cases in their classical order, and inevitably some of them are a better success than others.

So, for example, the tale of the Nemean Lion is clever and charming (a Pekinese is the "lion"!), but in order to make all twelve stories fit, Poirot is obliged to do some globe-trotting and adventuring that are out of character for him (not quite as bad as *The Big Four*, but still) or to happen to be on the spot for cases that are far outside his normal sphere. I was a bit tired of the Labours conceit by the end, but I did really like some of the symbolism (gossip = the new Hydra, for example) and I loved that Poirot got a hint of love interest in the last story!

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

Twelve Hercule Poirot short stories, framed by the device of having each story relate to one of the labours of Hercules. Some of them are a bit of a stretch, like the Nemean lion being kidnapped Pekingese dogs. I read this once and found it utterly forgettable. Someone recently requested it from me on PaperbackSwap, and I read the first few stories again before sending it off. I wasn't interested enough to read them all.

2.5 stars. For Poirot completists only.

Fred says

The Labours of Hercules is yet another work of wonder by the fantastic Agatha Christie.

Given certain recent circumstances, my reading attention span/frequency has been slightly hit-and-miss, hence why I have just been falling back on Agatha Christie for the past two weeks. To read one of her short story collections was simply fantastic! Here is a breakdown...

The Nemean Lion - 5 stars

An absolute classic! Poirot investigates the kidnapping of a Pekingese dog (you read that correctly). Not his favourite genre of case but certainly one of my favourite short stories in this collection. I would happily read this one again now - simply brilliant and, whilst being a very clever mystery, will make you guffaw as well!!

The Lernean Hydra - 4.5 stars

One of the few stories in this collection that does actually consist of a murder! Poirot investigates the murder of Mrs. Oldfield, and from where the rumour originated that her husband Dr. Oldfield was responsible. Not the most gripping story in the world but still one of my favourites from this collection, as it is one of the only murders and I love its dramatic solution!

The Arcadian Deer - 4 stars

Poirot looks into the reasons of sudden departure of a lady and her maid, the latter of which Poirot's client is in love with. This is a very light, heartwarming mystery with plenty of humour! (The "lorry in Leningrad", haha.)

A wonderful short story that is refreshingly not too intense at all.

The Erythmanthian Boar - 4 stars

The complete opposite! This story follows a master killer Marrascaud who has been tracked to a hotel on a Swiss mountain. Which of the guests is it?

A very dramatic story that is incredibly worthy of credit, again with the typical Christie twist at the end.

The Augean Stables - 3.5 stars

Less of a mystery, more Poirot doing somebody a favour in a very clever way. The Prime Minister and Home Secretary are anxious that a magazine, the X-Ray News, is producing unfortunately true information that could potentially ruin their reputations.

Poirot sorts this for them very much in his way: another quite funny story with an interesting conclusion.

The Stymphalean Birds - 4 stars

The main character is now Harold Waring who unfortunately gets involved in the manslaughter of Philip Clayton, the abusive husband of a woman named Elsie with whom he is in love. How will the two of them, along with Elsie's mother, get out of this sticky situation?

An absolutely fantastic story with a solution you will not expect at all! It also promotes the necessity of foreign languages - I agree with that.

The Cretan Bull - 5 stars

Phenomenal. Another favourite of mine from this collection.

Poirot helps out the assertive Diana Maberly in deducing why Hugo Chandler, her fiancé, has broken off their engagement and why he thinks he is mad! With a poignant ending and a plot which every lover of the classic Christie stuff will devour, this is a pure masterpiece.

The Horses of Diomedes - 3 stars

Poirot, on the behalf of his friend Michael Stoddart, looks into a mysterious person who has been supplying drugs locally, including to the four wild Grant sisters. A very intelligent solution but not my absolute favourite from this collection.

The Girdle of Hippolyta - 4 stars

A very enjoyable and clever story. Poirot investigates both the disappearance of a young schoolgirl and the robbery of a painting...until he reveals the two cases are connected! This one stumped me to no end: for people who love solving the mystery themselves, this one might take a while. The solution however shall not disappoint!

The Flock of Geryon - 3 stars

A character from *The Nemean Lion* returns!

This one follows a group of women who go to stay in a faraway place in order to practice their odd religious sect, hosted by the Great Shepherd Dr. Andersen. It was an interesting and clever mystery but I just got a bit bored. Again, not my complete favourite in the collection but certainly not worth missing out.

The Apples of the Hespierides - 2 stars

My least favourite from this collection. Poirot investigates a valuable, historical goblet which has been stolen from a purchaser of it. After having looked around and seen other people's reviews of this, I am not alone when I say that, again, I was just plain bored throughout. A marginally interesting story with a very good "money does not equal happiness" message...but not that spectacular overall.

The Capture of Cerberus - 4 stars

Yes, ending this collection on a high! This story includes the character of Countess Rossakoff, a subtly hinted love interest for Poirot. A nightclub called "Hell" is being investigated to uncover a drugs ring and to uncover a base for the exchanging of stolen jewels.

Agatha Christie's writing style is fabulous here: I love Poirot's amusing third-person narration and how the Japp-Poirot friendship/mild rivalry is described. An excellent reveal and a heartwarming ending for the book!

Overall, therefore, the Top 3 stories in this collection, in my opinion, are **The Nemean Lion**, **The Lernean Hydra**, and **The Cretan Bull**. Those are the ones I would recommend the most! However, this collection in general is extraordinary and wonderful to read, especially for an Agatha Christie fan.

David Schaafsma says

Only a Poirot completist like me would finish #26, based on either (you choose) a forced or clever premise: Poirot is (supposedly) ready to retire. In appearance he hardly resembles Hercules, but he thinks his mind is equal to Hercules's body and physical exploits. They both rid the world of monsters, in their own fashion. So Poirot chooses 12 cases to close out his career (though it really doesn't), mirroring the 12 Labors of Hercules. So it's a nice idea, clever in its way, but the order and comparisons to the original Labors is (my vote on this issue) forced and artificial.

Part of it for me is that I much prefer the novels of Christie to the short stories, and these are 12 short stories. There are some individual ones that are clever, but they lack the language, the conception, and the complexity of the best of the novels. That said, this is still Christie, it is still Poirot, and so it is still good, if

not in the upper echelon of Poirot books. I see a lot of people really voted “clever” on this one, so okay, that just points to Christie as artist. I thought it was just okay, but compared to the rest of the world of mystery writers it is still pretty great stuff for many. I have several others to suggest if you want to read just one. Not this one, I say. 2.5, rounded up for no particular reason. Maybe it's that amusing mock-epic Hercules comparison idea, if not the performance of that idea.

Richard Derus says

Real Rating: 2.5* of five

Thin gruel.

The *Agatha Christie's Poirot* filmed version isn't a lot better, though a lot prettier to look at; it resembles the book not at all.

Dawn Michelle says

Hercule Poirot is thinking of retiring and has decided to take on only 12 more cases - 12 cases that resemble the 12 labors of Hercules [since he himself is semi-named after the god] and so the book begins. It is a delightful romp through 12 stories, some that tax even the unflappable Poirot. There are several that were my favorite as who was the perpetrator was NOT EVEN CLOSE to being who I thought it was and it was delightful to be proven wrong.

A very delightful listen - Hugh Fraser is one of my favorite narrators and he does Monsieur Hercule Poirot complete justice.
