

Heracles

Heracles was annoyed. He was also exhausted. For the last twelve months, he'd been running around on errands for the evil mastermind, Miss Conduct. After catching Heracles stealing the world's largest diamond, the villain had chained him up. She had promised to keep him locked up until he could complete a series of twelve annoying and deviant challenges. Now, there was only one left, and he wanted to get it out of the way.

Sighing deeply, he straightened his jumpsuit and knocked on his evil captor's office door. Inside, she was reclining on an expensive leather chair with her feet resting on her desk. Around her, the result of Heracles' labours were displayed like hunting trophies. The World Cup, an urn containing the cricket ashes, a famous boxer's gloves and so on. None of them had been easy but Heracles had completed each task with vigour. Now, he'd find out his final target.

"There is a man who lives on a deserted island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean." Miss Conduct spoke with a thick European accent. "Inside his old wooden hut, he has the rarest treasure man has ever possessed. When man first stole fire from the gods, the original torch was blessed with burning forever. He has that torch."

"And you want me to steal it?" Heracles asked, quite excited by the mention of an old wooden hut.

"No. What I really crave is the reason that nobody has managed to steal it before. His hut is guarded by a three-headed dog. It's as tall as a man with sharp, slathering teeth. That's what I want you to steal. Cerberus."

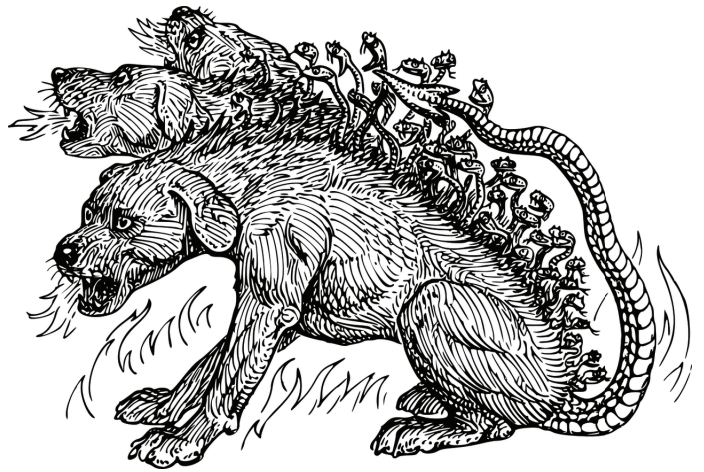
Heracles coughed politely. "Forgive me, but surely the flame is worth a lot more?"

"But if I steal the flame, I can only sell it once. If I steal the dog, I can take over the world!"

That night, Heracles boarded Miss Conduct's helicopter and flew to the mysterious island. There, he found the old wooden hut dark and silent at the foot of a hill. As soon as he knocked on the door, an enormous dog started to bark with a sound that shook the hut.



“I know what you’ve come for!” the owner of the house calmed the dog and spoke through the letterbox. “You can have my dog if you can capture him without using iron or shield. You do that, he’s yours.”



Heracles wandered down to the shore, deep in thought. In his haste to leave, he’d only brought a sword. How could he defeat the enormous dog without using it? Out of nowhere, an idea struck

him. For the rest of the night, all that could be heard at the old man’s hut was the scrape of metal on earth and the occasional grunt.

Next morning, Heracles stood well back from the door and threw a stone against the wood. “Send out your beast,” he yelled, “and I shall capture him without iron or shield.”

The door erupted in an explosion of splinters and anger, and the enraged dog scrambled through the wreckage. Unfortunately for it, Heracles had spent the night digging a very deep pit immediately in front of the door. As it fell into the hole, Heracles leapt forward and threw a net over the beast.

True to her word, Miss Conduct released Heracles from her lair as soon he presented her with Cerberus, but he still visits occasionally, mainly to pose for pictures with the World Cup.

INFERENCE

1. How do you think Heracles feels about his captor in the first two paragraphs?
2. Why do you think Miss Conduct wants the dog so desperately?
3. Why is Heracles excited by the mention of the old wooden hut?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What does “villain” mean in this context?

P

What do you think Heracles would do if Miss Conduct asked him for one last favour?

R

What mustn’t Heracles use to capture the dog?

V

Use a dictionary to find the definition of the word “haste”.