

CREATION



Before there was land or sea, people or gods, nothing existed, except Chaos. Chaos was a space of neither order nor disorder. During Chaos's reign, there was no organization of any kind in the universe. There was no sun or moon. There were no mountains or rivers, nor any such features on earth. In fact, there was no earth at all. It was a period of vast emptiness. Even time did not exist. Eventually, Chaos divided itself into the earth, the sky, and the sea. When the division was complete, everything was peaceful and perfect.

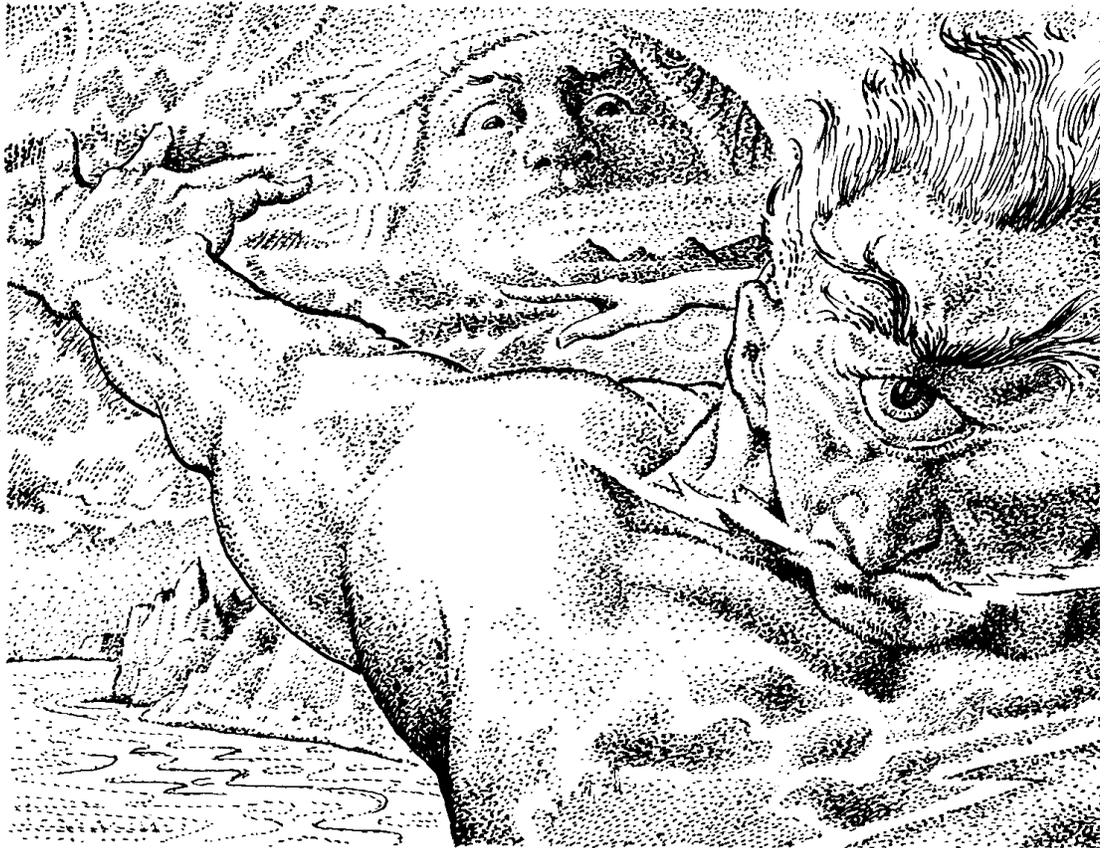
After Chaos divided into the earth, sky, and sea, one goddess came into being without being born to any mother. Her name was Gaia, which means earth, and she took control over the earth as it took shape. Mountains became separate from the plains, and rivers and oceans were formed. Like an artist at a canvas, Gaia was busy creating a beautiful masterpiece. Soon, however, the goddess began to long for children to help populate and rule this magnificent new world.

Gaia's desire for children was so great that eventually she became pregnant by herself. The child she bore was named Uranus, and he became the ruler of the sky. In every way, Uranus was the equal of his mother, and soon Gaia and Uranus had children together.

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Gaia's first three children were monsters, called the Hundred-handed Ones. They were giants, and each had fifty heads and a hundred hands. Although Gaia loved her children and was proud of them, Uranus was afraid that someday one of these children would overthrow him. Because of this fear, Uranus hated the children and forced them back into Gaia's womb.

After the hundred-handed monsters had been born and were pushed back into their mother's womb, Gaia gave birth to three more monstrous children. These were giants called the Cyclopes. Each had but a single eye, which was positioned directly in the middle of his forehead. Although they were frightening to look at, these young gods were exceedingly strong, and they were excellent craftsmen who made thunder and lightning for



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their mother to use as tools and weapons. Unfortunately, Uranus was afraid of these children, too. So, in order to get rid of them, Uranus tied the Cyclopes up and threw them into a deep cavern called Tartarus. Tartarus was far, far away, and Uranus felt safe in believing that he would never see these monster-children again.

Saddened by the loss of the Hundred-handed Ones and the Cyclopes, and angry at the cruel Uranus, Gaia gave birth to a third group of children. These were called the Titans, and there were twelve of them—six goddesses and six gods. They were very different from their older siblings. The Titans were beings with human characteristics, and they were not monsters at all. The goddesses' names were Tethys, Theia, Mnemosyne, Rhea, Themis, and Phoebe.



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The gods' names were Oceanus, Hyperion, Iapetus, Cronus, Crius, and Coeus.

Uranus was still afraid that one day one of his children would overthrow him. Because of this fear, he pushed the Titans back into Gaia's womb alongside their siblings, the Hundred-handed Ones. Gaia was enraged by Uranus's refusal to allow her children to live freely. She desperately wanted her children to live without restraints and to enjoy the world. Finally, she came up with a plan that would allow her children to be born into the world and remain there.

Gaia could speak to the children in her cavernous womb, and she had no trouble convincing them to help with her plan. Cronus, the youngest of the twelve Titans, was the most eager to help his mother. So, the two set out to trick Uranus and free the Titans and the Hundred-handed Ones from their mother's prison-like womb.

Cronus and Gaia waited for the perfect opportunity to enact their plan. Finally, one night, when Uranus came to Gaia's bed, Cronus crept out of Gaia's womb and stabbed his cruel father with a sickle, a curved knife used to harvest crops. As Uranus lay dying, his fears of being overthrown by one of his children having come true, Uranus leaned forward and cursed his son: "Cronus," he pronounced, gasping for breath, "it will come to pass that one of your children will do to you what you have just done to me." Then, with a final shudder, Uranus died, a look of anger and betrayal in his eyes.

After Uranus died, Gaia and her children felt free for the first time. The Titans and the Hundred-handed Ones were reborn from their mother's womb, and the Cyclopes were freed from Tartarus. All of Gaia's children decided to make Cronus their king. Cronus married his sister, the Titan named Rhea, and ruled over the universe for a long, peaceful time.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes real places are named in a myth. Mount Olympus, for example, is a real mountain in the central part of Greece, not far from the Aegean Sea. When Mount Olympus is referred to in myths, however, it becomes more than a mere geographical site. It becomes the home of the Olympians, the generation of gods who succeeded the Titans. These two generations of gods eventually became rivals, fighting a great war for power over the universe. The winners claimed Mount Olympus as their home. Although there is an actual mountain, in these stories, Mount Olympus is a mythical place that humans cannot visit. It is a place outside real time and space.

Mount Olympus is not the same as Olympia, a town in the western part of the Peloponnesus. Like Mount Olympus, Olympia was named for the Olympian gods. There were important shrines in Olympia, an area which was settled even as early as the third millennium B.C.¹ The first Olympic Games were probably held there sometime in the eighth century B.C., although they seem to have been a carryover from an earlier tradition.² The purpose of the games was thought to be a kind of reenactment of the rivalry between the Olympian gods and the Titans, and a commemoration of the triumph of the Olympian gods over the Titans in their war. During the Olympic Games, quarrels were supposed to be set aside in order that athletes be allowed to take part in peaceful competition.

Although people did not believe that the gods took an interest in their individual lives, they often went to the temples to ask the gods for insight and help. Olympia was an important site in this respect. According to Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, professors of Greek

THE WAR BETWEEN THE TITANS AND THE OLYMPIANS



After the death of Uranus, the world was at peace again. Cronus, the king of the Titans, and Rhea, his most noble sister and wife, had matters well in hand. Unfortunately, the curse of his father, Uranus, haunted Cronus day and night. Was it possible that one day he, too, would have a child who would overthrow him?

One day, Rhea announced that she was going to have a baby, but her husband was not happy. Cronus was so afraid that history would repeat itself that he did, in fact, manage to repeat history. Like his father before him, Cronus reasoned that if he could keep his children from growing up, none could ever become strong enough to overpower him. So, when Rhea gave birth to her first child, Cronus quickly grabbed it and swallowed it whole. Rhea was both horrified and saddened at the loss of her firstborn child. In a similar manner, Cronus swallowed all of the next four children that she gave birth to, and Rhea vowed to get them back, any way she could.

By the time Rhea discovered that she was pregnant for the sixth time, she had figured out a plan to trick her husband and save the newborn child from being swallowed whole. So, when it was nearly time for her to

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give birth, Rhea pretended to have her baby. She took a large stone and wrapped it in a baby's blanket. When Cronus came to gobble down the newborn child, Rhea gave him the wrapped-up stone. Quickly, Cronus swallowed the stone, just as he had swallowed the other children. In fact, Cronus's focus on swallowing the newborn god was so great that he did not even realize that he had been tricked.

Later, when the time came for Rhea actually to have her child, she fled to the island of Crete. There, away from the glaring eyes of her husband, Rhea secretly gave birth to a son, whom she named Zeus. He was a beautiful and strong baby, and Rhea knew that when he grew up, he would be a truly powerful god. Rhea realized that she could not return home to her husband with the child. Cronus would only try to destroy the newborn god, as he had done with the others. Therefore, for his protection, Rhea left Zeus to grow up secretly on Crete where he was suckled by a goat and raised by minor native deities called nymphs. While Zeus was a child, Cronus never suspected that he had been tricked and that he actually had a stone resting solidly in his stomach.

When he had grown into a young man, Zeus left Crete to join his mother. Rhea arranged for Zeus to become a servant to his father. Cronus did not know that his new servant was actually his son. One day, Zeus brought his father a cup of wine, which Cronus drank quickly. This cup of wine contained a special potion, which made Cronus throw up. Cronus was so violently ill that he even threw up the stone wrapped in a blanket. Then he threw up all of the children he had swallowed before. The children emerged from their father's stomach as fully grown adults. Their names were Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Demeter, and Hestia. These were Zeus's brothers and sisters, and they were all



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glad to see each other in the light of day. Although they were happy to be free, the six siblings knew they must do something immediately, or their father would swallow them all over again. Quickly, they ran away while their father continued to moan and clutch his stomach.

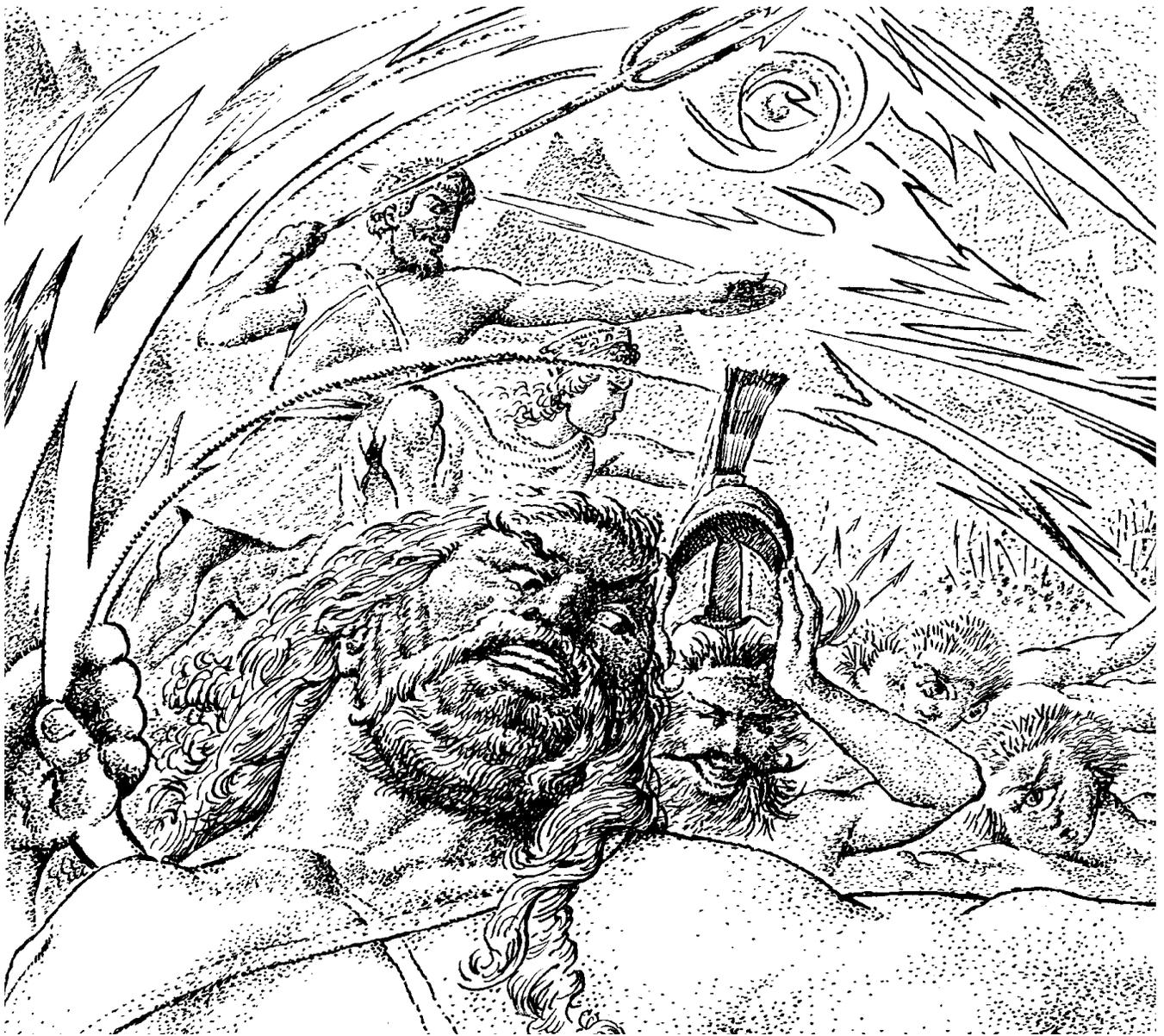
This young generation of gods fled to Mount Olympus to escape their irate father, and because they claimed Mount Olympus as their home, the young gods were called the Olympians. After they had fled to safety, the Olympians quickly formed a plan. At once, they declared war on Cronus and many of the other Titans. The young gods wanted to rule the world in their father's place. Yet their struggle had a dual purpose: while they were fighting for control over the earth, they were also fighting for their lives, since they knew that Cronus would swallow them again if he ever got the chance.

And so a great war began. At first, it seemed likely that the Titans would be victorious and remain in control of the earth. The young Olympian gods felt outnumbered and overpowered. The tide began to turn, however, when a few Titans changed sides and fought with Zeus and his siblings. Prometheus, the son of the Titans Themis and Iapetus, was one who switched his allegiance. Prometheus's name means "one who thinks ahead," and with his ability to see the future he could foresee that the Titans would lose the battle against the Olympian gods. Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus refused to fight against the Olympians because of this foresight.

The Cyclopes and the Hundred-handed Ones also joined the Olympians in their fight against the Titans. They did not feel bound to the Titans, and they believed that the Olympian gods would rule with steadier hands. Zeus asked the one-eyed Cyclopes to make weapons for his army, and these skilled craftsmen made a special weapon

The War Between the Titans and the Olympians

for each of the gods. For Zeus, the leader, the Cyclopes fashioned a special thunderbolt, which could be thrown long distances with great force. For Poseidon, they created a magnificent trident, or three-pronged spear, which could defeat any enemy. Finally, knowing that resistance came in many forms, the Cyclopes made Hades a magic helmet that could make him invisible, even to the immortal eyes of Cronus and the other Titans.



Gods and Goddesses in Greek Mythology



The war between the Titans and the Olympians was terrible. With the help of the Hundred-handed Ones, who fought bravely without ever tiring, the Olympians soon forced the Titans to surrender. After the Titans had given up, Zeus challenged Cronus to a wrestling match. The winner would control Mount Olympus, to which the Titans were still laying claim. After beating Cronus three times, Zeus declared the Olympian gods to be the winners.

After the war, the Olympians sent most of the Titans to Tartarus to be locked up for eternity. The victors built a bronze gate over the mouth of the cavern, and the Hundred-handed Ones were placed outside as guards. Atlas, another child of Iapetus and Themis, who had led the Titans into battle, received a special punishment. He was forced to hold the world on his back for all eternity. This turned out to be a far more challenging task than imprisonment in Tartarus.

Cronus, the former ruler of the universe, was not sent to Tartarus with his siblings. Though Cronus had swallowed his children whole, Zeus and the other Olympians did not want to destroy him in revenge. Instead, Cronus was sent away to live on the Island of the Dead, where he stayed forever. Although originally he had wanted to destroy the Olympian gods, Cronus, once defeated and exiled, sent dreams to his son Zeus to guide him from afar.

After all the punishments were handed out, Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon made a bet to determine who would rule each part of the world. Hades became the lord of the dead and the Underworld, which was sometimes called Hades in his honor. Poseidon gained control of the seas and all the waters on earth. Zeus became the lord of the sky; and since the sky covers everything on earth, he became the king, or father, of the gods.

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After these important decisions were made, the other Olympian gods were also given jobs. Demeter became the goddess of agriculture and of all growing things. Hestia became the goddess of the hearth, or fireplace, and the home. Hera, too, protected the home and became the goddess of marriage and childbirth after she married her brother, Zeus.

Once the Olympians had defeated the Titans and taken on their new roles, they, too, had children. Some of these gods were born under rather extraordinary circumstances. Athena, for example, was born out of the side of Zeus's head. She became the goddess of wisdom and the protector of Athens. Hera became pregnant on her own and gave birth to Hephaestus. Hephaestus was the god of fire and became the blacksmith of the gods. Ares was the child of Hera and Zeus, and he became the god of war.

Apollo, the god of light and music, and his twin sister, Artemis, the maiden goddess of the hunt, were the children of Leto, who was the daughter of the Titans Phoebe and Coeus. The goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite, had an unusual birth: she was born out of the waves of the sea.

Hermes was another son of Zeus. His mother was Maia, one of the daughters of Atlas. Hermes grew very quickly, and he was swift-footed, even as a baby. Later, he became the official messenger of the gods because he was so fast. He was often depicted with wings on his hat and sandals, and because he was always moving about, he was a particular protector of travelers.

These gods and others lived on Mount Olympus after their victory over the Titans. From the height of this great mountain, the new rulers could look down on all of Greece and keep watch over the world, for the control of which they had fought so hard.