

THE CREATION OF THE TITANS AND THE GODS

Out of the original emptiness, which was called Chaos, emerged the first three immortal beings: Gaea (Mother Earth), Tartarus, who ruled the deepest, darkest region of the Underworld, and Eros (Love), whose great beauty inspired the creation of many of the deathless gods. Then Gaea, without any partner, gave birth to Uranus (Father Sky). She made him her equal, so that he would surround her on all sides and would provide a home for the immortal beings. Gaea also gave birth to Ourea (Mountains) and Pontus (Sea).

Gaea then married Uranus, and he ruled over all that came into being. The first immortal children of Gaea and Uranus were the three Hundred-Handed Giants. Each Giant had fifty heads and fifty arms extending from each shoulder. Their next immortal children were the three Cyclopes. Each Cyclops had only one eye, set in the middle of his forehead. They were expert craftsmen, and they later built the palaces for the gods on Mount Olympus.

Uranus feared the terrible strength of these six children, and he hated them because they terrified him. So as each child was born, Uranus took him from his mother, bound him, and hurled him deep into Gaea's being, the earth. Each child fell for nine days and nine nights, finally landing in the region named after its ruler, Tartarus, on the tenth day. There Uranus kept the Hundred-Handed Giants and the Cyclopes, far from the surface of the earth and the light of the sun. His eyes now shone with pride and satisfaction, for he ruled without fear of any challenge to his authority, and he expected to rule forever.

Gaea was outraged by her husband's actions. She longed for her children, and she hated Uranus for what he had done to them. However, she buried her feelings deep in her heart and quietly waited for the time when she could take revenge.

The next immortal children born to Gaea and Uranus were the thirteen Titans. They and their children became the oldest generation of Greek gods. Helios was the god of the sun and drove it across the sky in his chariot. Selene was the goddess of the moon. Oceanus was the god of the river that surrounded the earth. Like her mother, Gaea, Themis was the goddess of prophecy at Delphi. Cronus married his sister Rhea, a goddess of the earth, and in time they became the parents of the Greek gods. Later,

Atlas, by far the strongest of the Titans, held up the sky so that it would not fall upon the earth. Soon thereafter, Prometheus, the most intelligent and clever Titan, created mortal man out of clay and water. His brother, Epimetheus, married Pandora, the first mortal woman.

Gaea decided to use her Titan children as her means of revenge against Uranus. She took a large piece of flint and shaped it into a huge, sharp stone sickle. Then she approached her sons and said, "I want you to punish your father, for he is very cruel. He has imprisoned your brothers in the land of Tartarus against my wishes and against their will."

Almost all of Gaea's sons were so terrified of Uranus that they listened to her command in silence and refused to obey her. But Cronus, the youngest Titan, was very similar to his father in temperament, and he was much more courageous than his brothers. When he saw their reaction, he said, "If no one else will help you, Mother, I certainly will! If our father has been cruel to you and to our brothers, we should take revenge!"

When she heard Cronus's words, Gaea's heart overflowed with pride and satisfaction. It was gratifying to have one son who had the courage to help her. Now Uranus would learn what it was like to endure endless suffering!

So Gaea put the great flint sickle into Cronus's hands. She warned him to be careful with its sharp curved blade. Then she told him where to hide and what she wanted him to do. Later, when Helios had drawn the chariot of the sun across the sky and had retired for the night, Uranus joined his wife by the shore of the sea and lay down to sleep with her.

Selene shed the light of the moon upon the sleeping figure of Uranus. Cronus, from his place of hiding, raised the huge stone sickle and emasculated his father. Then he quickly threw the severed pieces into the sea and said, "Your reign is over, Father! Now I shall reign in your place. You may challenge me, but my power is clearly greater than yours. So, I advise you to submit to your fate."

Uranus, being immortal, could not die. However, he screamed in agony, for his immortality did not prevent him from feeling excruciating pain. Part of his anguish came from the realization that his power had suddenly ended.

From Uranus's blood, which flowed into the earth, Gaea brought forth the three black-clothed Furies. With eyes that dripped poisonous tears and breath that was too foul to bear, these immortal goddesses drove to insanity any child who killed one of his parents.

From the same blood, Gaea also brought forth another group of terrible beings, who were simply called the Giants. They looked fearsome, with their hairy heads and faces and their dragon-like feet. When they wore their shining armor and carried their long spears, they appeared to be invincible.

The severed pieces of Uranus's immortal body remained in the sea, where a white foam surrounded them. In time, Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and sexual desire, was born from them, and she was often called the foam-born goddess.

Cronus became god of the sky, as his father had been before him. Like his father, he feared the Hundred-Handed Giants and the Cyclopes, so he ignored his promise to Gaea and kept his brothers bound and imprisoned in Tartarus.

Gaea, disappointed and angry, watched and waited for the next opportunity to free her children. Being a goddess of prophecy, she enjoyed informing Cronus that one day a son of his would overpower him just as he had overpowered his own father.

"I shall fool the Fates!" he exclaimed to himself, with a clever smile. "If I do not have any children, then I will be able to rule forever!"

However, it was not so easy to change his destiny. Cronus loved his wife, Rhea, and in time she gave birth to a lovely daughter, Hestia. When Rhea proudly presented their baby daughter to Cronus, the words of his fate screamed inside Cronus's head! His great fear of losing power brought a mad, distraught glint into his eyes. Without considering whether the baby was female or male, Cronus took the baby lovingly from his wife, opened his gigantic mouth, and swallowed the infant in one gulp. "Now," he thought with satisfaction, "I have cheated the Fates of their prophecy and my child of his throne!"

Four more children were born to Cronus and Rhea: Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon. Each time Cronus embraced the infant so lovingly that Rhea was certain he would accept this child. However, each time the glint of madness would steal into his eyes as the words of the prophecy roared in his ears, and each time he would open his

gigantic mouth and swallow the infant in one gulp. Then, once again, Cronus would grin with satisfaction and think to himself, "I have cheated the Fates of their prophecy and my child of his throne!"

By this time, Rhea's heart was overflowing with grief. When she was about to give birth to her sixth child, she went to Gaea and said, "Mother, please help me! Cronus has robbed me of our children just as Uranus robbed you of the Hundred-Handed Giants and the Cyclopes. I cannot bear to let him steal this baby too! What can I do? Can we hide the infant from Cronus before he sees it? How can I trick him?"

Gaea replied, "My heart understands your pain, my daughter, and I think I can help you. I know that Cronus is destined to be overpowered by his son just as he overpowered his father before him. Surely the child about to be born to you is the son who is destined to take revenge upon Cronus for his treatment of his father, his brothers, and his own children.

"When your time to give birth arrives," Gaea counseled her daughter, "go to the island of Crete and take refuge in the deep, hidden cave high on the slopes of Mount Dicte. I shall see that nymphs nurse your infant son with goat's milk, and I will have them hang his cradle from a tree so that Cronus will not be able to find him on land, or sea, or in the air. Young boys, the Curetes, will march beneath his cradle, clanging their spears against their bronze shields to smother the sound of his cries.

"And as for how to trick Cronus," Gaea concluded, "he is so crazed with fear that an ordinary rock should be all you need to fool him!"

So it came about that Rhea gave birth to the infant, Zeus, in the cave of Mount Dicte, on Crete. She left her mother, Gaea, in charge of the baby and quickly returned home. She then found a rock about the size of her newborn infant and wrapped it in swaddling clothes as if it were an infant. Soon Cronus entered the room.

"How are you feeling?" he asked her sweetly. "Let me admire our latest child. Not every infant is born into such a royal family!"

Rhea forced herself to think of the fate of her other five children as she handed the well-wrapped rock over to her husband. As usual, Cronus took the bundle she gave him and lovingly embraced it. Then the words of the prophecy screamed in his head, and the look of madness shone forth from his eyes. Beside himself with fear of his

destiny, Cronus opened his gigantic mouth and swallowed the rock in one gulp. "Now," he said to himself, smiling with the greatest satisfaction and relief, "once again, I have cheated the Fates of their prophecy and my child of his throne! I shall rule forever, after all!"

Years passed, and Zeus became a mature god. Cronus never realized that a son had escaped his eye and evaded his gigantic mouth. He ruled untroubled and unthreatened, never thinking that his destiny might be rapidly approaching.

One day when Cronus was thirsty, Rhea gave him a delicious drink. He was delighted and asked for more. A young man came in and handed him the cup, and Cronus had swallowed the drink before it occurred to him that he had never seen the young man before.

"Who is he?" he wondered. "Why should he have brought me the drink? Why does my stomach feel so strange? Did I drink too much? Was the second drink different from the first drink? What if he has poisoned me?"

Suddenly, Cronus felt an excruciating pain in his stomach. He vomited up the rock, followed by Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Demeter, and Hestia, all of whom were fully grown by now.

Rhea then entered the room, with the young stranger, Zeus, by her side. "Your destiny is upon you, Cronus!" she exclaimed. "The Fates prophesied that a son would overpower you just as you overpowered your own father. That son, Zeus, now stands before you. You are reaping the fruits of the seeds you sowed when you swallowed our children and kept your brothers in chains in Tartarus! We will now see whether Zeus will rule with more intelligence and kindness than you did. Your mind has been as blind and your heart as hard as that rock you swallowed!"

"If this stranger, son of mine or not, thinks that he is going to take my kingdom from me, he is not as intelligent as you seem to think he is!" Cronus responded. "Anyone who wants to rule in my place will have to fight me, and all of the other Titans, too!"

So it came to pass that Zeus and his brothers and sisters, the first Greek gods, waged war against Cronus and the Titans who allied themselves with him. The gods

and the Titans were so evenly matched in numbers and in strength that they fought for ten years without victory for either side.

Finally, Gaea, who had given Zeus the poisoned drink to give his father, helped Zeus once again. She told him about her lost children, the Hundred-Handed Giants and the Cyclopes, whom Uranus and Cronus had kept imprisoned beneath the ground at the borders of the earth, and how they were chained in grief and sorrow, far from the light of Helios and the companionship of the deathless gods. She prophesied that the gods would win their war if they brought the Hundred-Handed Giants and the Cyclopes up from Tartarus as their allies.

Zeus and his brothers went down to Tartarus to rescue Gaea's children and encourage their alliance. Once they had killed the guard, removed their uncles' bonds, and fed them, Zeus said, "Listen to these words from my heart. We have been fighting the Titans for ten years without success. If you will repay our kindness to you by fighting on our side, your great strength will make us victorious."

To these words one of the Hundred-Handed Giants replied, "We know that you are fighting to defend the deathless gods from the cruelty of Titan rulers. And we know what it is to be the victims of Titan power. Had you not freed us, we were doomed to face an eternity of darkness, bondage, and isolation. Uranus and his son Cronus do not understand suffering and know nothing of mercy. We know that you will rule the world with greater wisdom. Of course we will fight with you against the Titan tyrant!"

Then one of the Cyclopes said, "In return for our freedom, we present each of you with a special gift. To you, Zeus, we give the gift of thunder and lightning in the form of a thunderbolt, an invincible weapon against any enemy. We will make more of these for you when we set up on Mount Olympus.

"To you, Poseidon," he continued, "we give the trident. Not only is it a superior fishing spear, but you will find it a most effective device for shaking the earth and creating waves at sea. Until then, its three barbed prongs will make it a useful weapon against the Titans.

"And to you, Hades," he concluded, "we give the helmet of invisibility. In times to come, the hero Perseus will need your weapon to kill the monstrous Gorgon, Medusa. Until then, it will serve you well against Cronus and his Titan allies."

With high spirits, Zeus and his allies returned to the upper world and renewed the battle. The Hundred-Handed Giants broke cliffs off the mountains until they had a huge crag in each of their multitude of hands. Then they pelted the Titans with their stone weapons.

The Titans responded with arrows and spears. The combatants could not kill each other, for they were all immortal beings. However, they could injure and overpower one another. The battle caused an upheaval across the earth and sea. The mountains quaked, and even Tartarus felt the impact of the mighty rocks upon the earth high above him.

Then Zeus hurled his invincible lightning bolt, which engulfed in flames whatever it touched. The earth resounded with the roars of mighty thunder as the blazing woods and the scalding sea scorched the air. Finally, the Titans fled beneath the earth into Tartarus, where the Hundred-Handed Giants placed them in chains for eternity in that dark, dismal land. Zeus then commanded the Hundred-Handed Giants to guard the hated Titans forever. However, because of his size and his strength, Zeus forced the Titan Atlas to hold the sky upon his shoulders. The war was over.

When the three male gods drew lots for their kingdoms, Zeus drew the sky, Poseidon the sea, and Hades the Underworld. In addition to maintaining peace and order among all of the immortal beings in the world, Zeus taught human beings to be just in their treatment of one another. Those who did not respect the deathless gods and other mortals were severely punished. Poseidon could use his trident to cause earthquakes as well as storms at sea, but he also taught mortals how to tame horses to work for them and how to build ships. Hades taught mortals to have respect for the dead by conducting proper funeral ceremonies and following certain burial practices.

Zeus married his sister Hera, who became the goddess of marriage and childbirth as well as queen of Olympus. Hestia became the guardian of the home and taught mortals how to build houses. Demeter became the goddess of grain. She taught mortals how to save the kernels of wild corn, plant them where they wanted corn to grow, and harvest the mature plants.

Zeus became the father of many other gods: Athena, the goddess of arts and crafts and defensive war; Apollo, the god of prophecy, medicine, and archery; Artemis, the goddess of the hunt; Hermes, Zeus's messenger; Persephone, the queen of the Underworld; Ares, the god of war; and Hephaestus, the renowned metalsmith. The rule of the Titans had ended. The rule of the gods had begun.