

## Mythological Origins

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The Olympians were the fourth generation of Greek gods, and the second to dwell on Mt. Olympus. So who were those other gods? What did they have to do with the ordering of the world?

A cosmic yawn spawns a 'yawning chasm' or 'yawning void.' The Greek word for "everything that is the case," what we could call "The Universe," is COSMOS. And at the moment — although "moment" is a time word and makes no sense just now (neither does the phrase "just now") — Cosmos is Chaos and only Chaos because Chaos is the only thing that is the case. "A stretching, a tuning up of the orchestra..." as defined by Stephen Fry in *Mythos*. In the beginning there was Chaos. It was alone in the universe, and somewhat lonely. So he created the primordial deities. Nyx (Night), Erebus (Darkness), Gaia (Earth), Pontos (the sea), and Tartarus (the underworld). An interesting thing about all these primordial beings was that they weren't just personifications of their attributes; they were also manifestations of their aspects. So while Tartarus was the Lord of the ultimate underworld, he was also the underworld itself. Just as Gaia was the Earth, she was also the Earth goddess, and so on.



Nyx and Erebus wed



and had a number of children, known as demiurges. This second set of gods included Morpheus (Sleep), Thanatos (Death), Nemesis (retributive justice), Oineros (dreams), and Eros. Also appearing at this time was Ouranos. Some say he was the son of Gaia, while others claim that he emerged from Chaos and was his own god. Whoever or whatever he was, he mated with Gaia, and they had the

Titans and Titanesses. As you can see in the genealogical table below, the Greeks had lots of gods. Ouranos was very prolific with Gaia. Not only did they have the Titans — male and female, but also what Ouranos considered monsters: the 100-handed, headed (hectohenries), and the original Cyclops. He consigned these "monsters" to Tartarus, thereby angering Gaia. They were her children as well, and she hated what he had done. So she approached her sons — Oceanus, Coeus, Crius, Hyperion, Iapetus, and Cronus to do something about their father. All of them turned her down except for Cronus. Married to his sister Rhea, he was the youngest of the Titans. Not happy being in last place among his siblings, Cronus agreed to help his mother get justice for her imprisoned children. Although Gaia was cheating on Ouranos with Pontus (the sea), she lured her husband to her home. Then she gave him a drink, laced with a sleeping potion. Once Ouranos was out for the count, Cronus came forth with a sickle and chopped off his father's private parts. Awakening with a scream, Ouranos fled Gaia's home and retreated to the eternal sky, where he stays to this day. His private parts fell into what is now the Mediterranean Sea. If you notice the shape of the sea, with the Gibraltar rocks flanking it, you will see a distinctive shape. (Once you look, it's really hard to unsee it.) From the maimed god's semen rose monsters of the deep, and other nasty land creatures, that would plague heroes for eons. Also rising from the waves, on an oyster shell, immortalized by Botticelli's painting, was Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty. Thus, this goddess was not conceived in love but was a parthenogenetic being, born of her father's torment. It's probably why she is so cold to her husband, Hephaestos, and cheats on him with his brother, Ares. She is their great-great-aunt, by the way.

Once Cronus castrated his father, Gaia helped him take over all the Titans.

It was a peaceful age, and Cronus was a good ruler. However, he was paranoid. After all, he castrated his own father. Who was to say that one of his sons wouldn't castrate him? So every time Rhea gave birth, Cronus took the newborn godling and swallowed him or her. This was very upsetting to Rhea, so she went to see her mother, Gaia. The earth goddess was still annoyed because Cronus had not released the 100-handed and the cyclopes from Tartarus. The sixth time Rhea became pregnant, Gaia helped



her have the baby away from Olympus and hide the newborn on Crete in a secret cave on Mount Ida. Rhea duped Cronus by reluctantly handing him a swaddled stone, all the while crying when he swallowed it. Meanwhile, the baby Zeus was raised by a nymph named Amaltheia (and her goat, also named Amaltheia) and another nymph, Melissa (honey), along with a group of very noisy warriors called Kourites. Their noise hid the baby's crying. They all helped the baby god grow strong – strong enough to challenge his father. When the goat Amaltheia died, the nymph skinned it and made the Aegis, Zeus's shield, so that he always had the protection the goat had given him. He carried it often, or allowed Athena, his warrior daughter goddess, to hold it for him. One of the goat's horns was repurposed as the Horn of Plenty (Cornucopia), reflecting that just as she nourished him, her horn would continue to nourish others.

Once grown, he and Rhea plotted the overthrow of Cronus. Rhea gave her husband an emetic that caused him to regurgitate – the opposite of swallowing – the large rock (The Omphalos, which was placed on Mt Parnassus), Hera, Hades, Demeter, Poseidon, and Hestia. Once he had his siblings, Zeus – now considered the oldest, even though he was the youngest, since their growth was stunted in their father's belly – and his siblings declared war on the Titans. Eventually they won, but that is a tale for another day.

