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Opening extract from

Percy Jackson and the Greek Gods

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THE BEGINNING AND STUFF

IN THE BEGINNING, I wasn't there. I don't think the Ancient Greeks were, either. Nobody had a pen and paper to take notes, so I can't vouch for what follows, but I can tell you it's what the Greeks *thought* happened.

At first, there was pretty much nothing. A lot of nothing.

The first god, if you can call it that, was Chaos – a gloomy, soupy mist with all the matter in the cosmos just drifting around. Here's a fact for you: *Chaos* literally means the *Gap*, and we're not talking about the clothing store.

Eventually Chaos got less chaotic. Maybe it got bored with being all gloomy and misty. Some of its matter collected and solidified into the earth, which unfortunately developed a living personality. She called herself Gaia, the Earth Mother.

Now Gaia *was* the actual earth – the rocks, the hills, the valleys, the whole enchilada. But she could also take on

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humanlike form. She liked to walk across the earth – which was basically walking across herself – in the shape of a matronly woman with a flowing green dress, curly black hair and a serene smile on her face. The smile hid a nasty disposition. You'll see that soon enough.

After a long time alone, Gaia looked up into the misty nothing above the earth and said to herself: 'You know what would be good? A sky. I could really go for a sky. And it would be nice if he was also a handsome man I could fall in love with, because I'm kind of lonely down here with just these rocks.'

Either Chaos heard her and cooperated, or Gaia simply willed it to happen. Above the earth, the sky formed – a protective dome that was blue in the daytime and black at night. The sky named himself Ouranos – and, yeah, that's another spelling for Uranus. There's pretty much no way you can pronounce that name without people snickering. It just sounds *wrong.* Why he didn't choose a better name for himself – like Deathbringer or José – I don't know, but it might explain why Ouranos was so cranky all the time.

Like Gaia, Ouranos could take human shape and visit the earth – which was good, because the sky is way up there and long-distance relationships never work out.

In physical form, he looked like a tall, buff guy with long-ish dark hair. He wore only a loincloth, and his skin changed colour – sometimes blue with cloudy patterns across his muscles, sometimes dark with glimmering stars. Hey, Gaia dreamed him up to look like that. Don't blame me. Sometimes you'll see pictures of him holding a zodiac wheel, representing all the constellations that pass through the sky over and over for eternity.

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Anyway, Ouranos and Gaia got married.

Happily ever after?

Not exactly.

Part of the problem was that Chaos got a little creation-happy. It thought to its misty, gloomy self, Hey, Earth and Sky. That was fun! I wonder what else I can make.

Soon it created all sorts of other problems – and by that I mean gods. Water collected out of the mist of Chaos, pooled in the deepest parts of the earth and formed the first seas, which naturally developed a consciousness – the god Pontus.

Then Chaos really went nuts and thought, I know! How about a dome like the sky, but at the *bottom* of the earth! That would be awesome!

So another dome came into being beneath the earth, but it was dark and murky and generally not very nice, since it was always hidden from the light of the sky. This was Tartarus, the Pit of Evil; and as you can guess from the name, when he developed a godly personality, he didn't win any popularity contests.

The problem was both Pontus and Tartarus liked Gaia, which put some pressure on her relationship with Ouranos.

A bunch of other primordial gods popped up, but if I tried to name them all we'd be here for weeks. Chaos and Tartarus had a kid together (don't ask how; I don't know) called Nyx, who was the embodiment of Night. Then Nyx, somehow all by herself, had a daughter named Hemera, who was Day. Those two never got along because they were as different as . . . well, you know.

According to some stories, Chaos also created Eros, the god of procreation . . . in other words, mommy gods and daddy

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gods having lots of little baby gods. Other stories claim Eros was the son of Aphrodite. We'll get to her later. I don't know which version is true, but I *do* know Gaia and Ouranos started having kids – with *very* mixed results.

First, they had a batch of twelve – six girls and six boys called the Titans. These kids looked human, but they were much taller and more powerful. You'd figure twelve kids would be enough for anybody, right? I mean, with a family that big, you've basically got your own reality TV show.

Plus, once the Titans were born, things started to go sour with Ouranos and Gaia's marriage. Ouranos spent a lot more time hanging out in the sky. He didn't visit. He didn't help with the kids. Gaia got resentful. The two of them started fighting. As the kids grew older, Ouranos would yell at them and basically act like a horrible dad.

A few times, Gaia and Ouranos tried to patch things up. Gaia decided maybe if they had another set of kids it would bring them closer . . .

I know, right? Bad idea.

She gave birth to triplets. The problem: these new kids defined the word UGLY. They were as big and strong as Titans, except hulking and brutish and in desperate need of a body wax. Worst of all, each kid had a single eye in the middle of his forehead.

Talk about a face only a mother could love. Well, Gaia loved these guys. She named them the Elder Cyclopes, and eventually they would spawn a whole race of other, lesser Cyclopes. But that was much later.

When Ouranos saw the Cyclops triplets, he freaked. 'These cannot be my kids! They don't even look like me!'

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'They *are* your children, you deadbeat!' Gaia screamed back. 'Don't you dare leave me to raise them on my own!'

'Don't worry, I won't,' Ouranos growled.

He stormed off and came back with thick chains made from the night sky's pure darkness. He bound up the Cyclopes and tossed them into Tartarus, which was the only part of creation where Ouranos wouldn't have to look at them.

Harsh, right?

Gaia screamed and wailed, but Ouranos refused to release the Cyclopes. No one else dared to oppose his orders, because by this time he was getting a reputation as a pretty scary dude.

'I am king of the universe!' he bellowed. 'How could I *not* be? I am literally above everything else.'

'I hate you!' Gaia wailed.

'Bah! You will do as I say. I am the first and best of the primordial gods.'

'I was born *before* you!' Gaia protested. 'You wouldn't even be here if I didn't –'

'Don't test me,' he snarled. 'I've got plenty more chains of darkness.'

As you can guess, Gaia threw a total earthquake fit, but she didn't see what else she could do. Her first kids, the Titans, were almost adults now. They felt bad for Mom. They didn't like their dad much either – Gaia was always bad-mouthing him, with good reason – but the Titans were scared of Ouranos and felt helpless to stop him.

I have to keep it together for the kids, Gaia thought. Maybe I should give it one more try with Ouranos.

She arranged a nice romantic evening – candles, roses, soft music. They must have rekindled some of the old magic. A few

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months later, Gaia gave birth to one more set of triplets.

As if she needed more proof that her marriage to Ouranos was dead . . .

The new kids were even more monstrous than the Cyclopes. Each one had a hundred arms all around his chest like sea urchin spines, and fifty teeny, tiny heads clustered on his shoulders. It didn't matter to Gaia. She loved their little faces – all hundred and fifty of them. She called the triplets the Hundred-Handed Ones. She'd barely had time to give them names, though, when Ouranos marched over, took one look at them and snatched them from Gaia's arms. Without a word, he wrapped them in chains and tossed them into Tartarus like bags of recycling.

Clearly, the sky dude had issues.

Well, that was pretty much it for Gaia. She wailed and moaned and caused so many earthquakes that her Titan kids came running to see what was wrong.

'Your father is a complete _____!'

I don't know what she called him, but I have a feeling that's when the first swear words were invented.

She explained what had happened. Then she raised her arms and caused the ground to rumble beneath her. She summoned the hardest substance she could find from her earthy domain, shaped it with her anger and created the first weapon ever made – a curved iron blade about three feet long. She fixed it to a wooden handle made from a nearby tree branch, then showed her invention to the Titans.

'Behold, my children!' she said. 'The instrument of my revenge. I will call it a scythe!'

The Titans muttered among themselves: *What is that for? Why is it curved? How do you spell* scythe*?*

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'One of you needs to step up!' Gaia cried. 'Ouranos isn't worthy to be the king of the cosmos. One of you will kill him and take his place.'

The Titans looked pretty uncomfortable.

'So . . . explain this whole *killing* thing,' said Oceanus. He was the oldest Titan boy, but he mostly hung out in the far reaches of the sea with the primordial water god, whom he called Uncle Pontus. 'What does it mean, to kill?'

'She wants us to exterminate our dad,' Themis guessed. She was one of the smartest girls, and she immediately got the concept of punishing someone for a crime. 'Like, make him not exist any more.'

'Is that even possible?' asked her sister Rhea. 'I thought we were all immortal.'

Gaia snarled in frustration. 'Don't be cowards! It's very simple. You take this sharp pointy blade and you cut your dad into small pieces so he can't bother us again. Whichever of you does this will be the ruler of the universe! Also, I will make you those cookies you used to like, with the sprinkles.'

Now, in modern times, we have a word for this sort of behaviour. We call it *psycho.*

Back then, the rules of behaviour were a lot looser. Maybe you'll feel better about your own relatives, knowing that the first family in creation was also the first *dysfunctional* family.

The Titans started mumbling and pointing to each other, like, 'Hey, you'd be good at killing Dad.'

'Uh, no, I think *you* should do it.'

'I'd love to kill Dad, honestly, but I've got this thing I have to do, so –'

'*I'll* do it!' said a voice from the back.

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The youngest of the twelve shouldered his way forward. Kronos was smaller than his brothers and sisters. He wasn't the smartest or the strongest or the fastest. But he *was* the most power-hungry. I suppose when you're the youngest of twelve kids, you're always looking for ways to stand out and get noticed. The youngest Titan loved the idea of taking over the world, especially if it meant being the boss of all his siblings. The offer of cookies with sprinkles didn't hurt, either.

Kronos stood about nine feet tall, which was runty for a Titan. He didn't look as dangerous as some of his brothers, but the kid was crafty. He'd already got the nickname 'the Crooked One' among his siblings, because he would fight dirty in their wrestling matches and was never where you expected him to be.

He had his mother's smile and dark curly hair. He had his father's cruelty. When he looked at you, you could never tell if he was about to punch you or tell you a joke. His beard was kind of unnerving, too. He was young for a beard, but he'd already started growing his whiskers into a single spike that jutted from his chin like the beak of a raven.

When Kronos saw the scythe, his eyes gleamed. He wanted that iron blade. Alone among his siblings, he understood how much damage it could cause.

And as for killing his dad – why not? Ouranos barely noticed him. Neither did Gaia, for that matter. His parents probably didn't even know his name.

Kronos hated being ignored. He was tired of being the smallest and wearing all those stupid Titan hand-me-downs.

'I'll do it,' he repeated. 'I'll chop up Dad.'

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'My favourite son!' Gaia cried. 'You are *awesome*! I knew I could count on you, uh . . . which one are you again?'

'Kronos.' He managed to keep his smile. Hey, for a scythe, cookies and a chance to commit murder, Kronos could hide his true feelings. 'I will be honoured to kill for you, Mother. But we'll have to do it my way. First, I want you to trick Ouranos into visiting you. Tell him you're sorry. Tell him it's all your fault and you're going to cook him a fancy dinner to apologize. Just get him here tonight and act like you still love him.'

'Ugh!' Gaia gagged. 'Are you crazy?'

'Just pretend,' Kronos insisted. 'Once he's in human form and sitting next to you, I'll jump out and attack him. But I'll need some help.'

He turned to his siblings, who were all suddenly very interested in their own feet.

'Look, guys,' said Kronos, 'if this goes bad, Ouranos is going to take revenge on *all* of us. We can't have any mistakes. I'll need four of you to hold him down and make sure he doesn't escape back into the sky before I finish killing him.'

The others were silent. They were probably trying to picture their shrimpy little brother Kronos taking on their huge violent dad, and they weren't liking the odds.

'Oh, come on!' Kronos chided. 'I'll do the actual slicing and dicing. Four of you just need to hold him. When I'm king, I'll reward those four! I'll give them each a corner of the earth to rule – north, south, east and west. One-time offer. Who's with me?'

The girls were too wise to get involved in murder. They made their excuses and quickly left. The eldest son, Oceanus,

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chewed his thumb nervously. 'I have to get back to the sea, for some, uh, aquatic stuff. Sorry . . .'

That left only four of Kronos's brothers – Koios, Iapetus, Krios and Hyperion.

Kronos smiled at them. He took the scythe from Gaia's hands and tested its point, drawing a drop of golden blood from his own finger. 'So, four volunteers! Nice!'

Iapetus cleared his throat. 'Uh, actually –'

Hyperion jabbed Iapetus with his elbow. 'We're in, Kronos!' he promised. 'You can count on us!'

'Excellent,' Kronos said, which was the first time an evil genius ever said *excellent*. He told them the plan.

That night, amazingly, Ouranos showed up.

He wandered into the valley where he usually met Gaia and frowned when he saw the sumptuous dinner laid out on the table. 'I got your note. Are you serious about making up?'

'Absolutely!' Gaia was dressed in her best green sleeveless dress. Her curly hair was braided with jewels (which were easy for her to get, being the earth) and she smelled of roses and jasmine. She reclined on a sofa in the soft light of the candles and beckoned her husband to come closer.

Ouranos felt underdressed in his loincloth. He hadn't brushed his hair or anything. His night-time skin was dark and covered with stars, but that probably didn't count as 'black tie' for a fancy dinner. He was starting to think he should've at least brushed his teeth.

Was he suspicious? I don't know. Remember, nobody in the history of the cosmos had been lured into an ambush and chopped to pieces before. He was going to be the first. Lucky

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guy. Also, he got lonely hanging out in the sky so much. His only company was the stars, the air god Aither (who was, in fact, a total airhead), and Nyx and Hemera, mother and daughter, who argued with each other every dawn and dusk.

'So . . .' Ouranos's palms felt sweaty. He'd forgotten how beautiful Gaia could be when she wasn't all yelling up in his face. 'You're not angry any more?'

'Not at all!' Gaia assured him.

'And . . . you're okay with me wrapping our kids in chains and throwing them into the abyss?'

Gaia gritted her teeth and forced a smile. 'I am *okay* with it.'

'Good,' he grunted. 'Because those little guys were UGLY.'

Gaia patted the couch. 'Come sit with me, my husband.'

Ouranos grinned and lumbered over.

As soon as he settled in, Kronos whispered from behind the nearest boulder: 'Now.'

His four brothers jumped out from their hiding places. Krios had disguised himself as a bush. Koios had dug a hole for himself and covered it with branches. Hyperion had tucked himself under the couch (it was a large couch), and Iapetus was attempting to look like a tree with his arms out for branches. For some reason, it had worked.

The four brothers grabbed Ouranos. Each one took an arm or a leg and they wrestled their dad to the ground, stretching him out spread-eagled.

Kronos emerged from the shadows. His iron scythe gleamed in the starlight. 'Hello, Father.'

'What is the meaning of this?' Ouranos bellowed. 'Gaia, tell them to release me!'

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'HA!' Gaia rose from her couch. 'You gave our children no mercy, my husband, so you deserve no mercy. Besides, who wears a loincloth to a fancy dinner? I am disgusted!'

Ouranos struggled in vain. 'How dare you! I am the lord of the cosmos!'

'Not any more.' Kronos raised the scythe.

'Beware! If you do this, uh . . . what was your name again?'

'KRONOS!'

'If you do this, Kronos,' said Ouranos, 'I will curse you! Someday, your *own* children will destroy you and take your throne, just as you are doing to me!'

Kronos laughed. 'Let them try.'

He brought down the scythe.

It hit Ouranos right in the . . . well, you know what? I can't even say it. If you're a guy, imagine the most painful place you could possibly be hit.

Yep. That's the place.

Kronos chopped, and Ouranos howled in pain. It was like the most disgusting cheap-budget horror movie you can imagine. Blood was everywhere – except the blood of the gods is golden, and it's called *ichor*.

Droplets of it splattered over the rocks, and the stuff was so powerful that later on, when no one was looking, creatures arose from the ichor – three hissing winged demons called the Furies, the spirits of punishment. They immediately fled into the darkness of Tartarus. Other drops of sky blood fell on fertile soil, where they eventually turned into wild but gentler creatures called *nymphs* and *satyrs*.

Most of the blood just splattered everything. Seriously, those stains were *never* going to come out of Kronos's shirt.

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'Well done, brothers!' Kronos grinned ear to ear, his scythe dripping gold.

Iapetus got sick on the spot. The others laughed and patted each other on the back.

'Oh, my children!' Gaia said. 'I am so proud! Cookies and punch for everyone!'

Before the celebration, Kronos gathered up the remains of his father in the tablecloth. Maybe because he resented his eldest brother, Oceanus, for not helping with the murder, Kronos toted the stuff to the sea and tossed it in. The blood mixed with the salty water, and . . . well, you'll see what came from that later.

Now you're going to ask, *Okay, so, if the sky was killed, why do I look up and still see the sky?*

Answer: *I dunno.*

My guess is that Kronos killed Ouranos's physical form, so the sky god could no longer appear on the earth and claim kingship. They basically exiled him into the air. So he's not dead, exactly, but now he can't do anything but be the harmless dome over the world.

Anyway, Kronos returned to the valley, and all the Titans had a party.

Gaia named Kronos lord of the universe. She made him a cool one-of-a-kind collector's edition golden crown and everything. Kronos kept his promise and gave his four helpful brothers control over the four corners of the earth. Iapetus became the Titan of the west. Hyperion got the east. Koios took the north, and Krios got the south.

That night, Kronos lifted his glass of nectar, which was the immortals' favourite drink. He tried for a confident smile, since

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kings should always look confident, though truthfully he was already starting to worry about Ouranos's curse – that some day Kronos's own children would depose him.

In spite of that, he yelled, 'My siblings, a toast! We have begun a Golden Age!'

And if you like lots of lying, stealing, backstabbing and cannibalism, then read on, because it definitely was a Golden Age for all that.

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