Greek Gods and Heroes

40 inspiring icons

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WIDE EYED EDITIONS

Gods, Heroes, and Men



Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Oedipus, and Medea... so many famous names that spark our imagination and draw us into the world of the gods and heroes of ancient Greece.

It all started over 2,500 years ago. Religion was based on the worship of numerous gods and goddesses. The Greeks built temples in their honour, made sculptures of them, recorded their history in paintings and, of course, told stories about them. And these gods didn't just sit on their thrones in Olympus. They loved and hated each other, transformed each other's shapes, played tricks and came down to earth to meddle in human affairs. The heroes were humans with a remarkable destiny. Often children of a god and a human, they achieved extraordinary things and were sometimes even believed to be historical figures, figures who had really existed!

The myths of their adventures teach us about Greek history. They also explain the creation of the world, the laws of nature and the mysteries of life.

That is why for centuries, and today, they are a limitless source of inspiration for painting, literature and film. Not just fascinating stories, the stories of Greek gods and heroes still make us dream and teach us about our world.

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Gaia

Gaia is the goddess of the earth. She gave birth to the sea, the mountains and Uranus (the starry sky). Then, with her son Uranus, king of the gods, she bore a host of extraordinary children: six Titans (who continually fought one another), six Titanesses, three Cyclopes (who each had one eye) and three Hecatonchires (who each had fifty heads and a hundred arms!). Uranus kept these children underground, but at the urging of Gaia, Cronus, the youngest Titan, rebelled and helped his brothers and sisters escape their prison, and Uranus's terrible rule.

FAMILY TREE

Sister of Chaos and Eros

Wife of Uranus

Mother to Uranus, Pontos (the sea) and the mountains

Mother, with Uranus, of six Titans and six Titanesses, three Cyclopes and three Hecatonchires

Mother, with Pontos, of giants and nymphs



DESCENDANTS

Gaia and Uranus warned their son Cronus that if he had a son, the son would defeat him and become king in his place – the Fates had prophesied it.

CONFLICT

The tyrannical Uranus imprisoned Gaia's youngest children. Only her son Cronus volunteered to help, and he attacked his father with a sickle.



TITANS AND TITANESSES

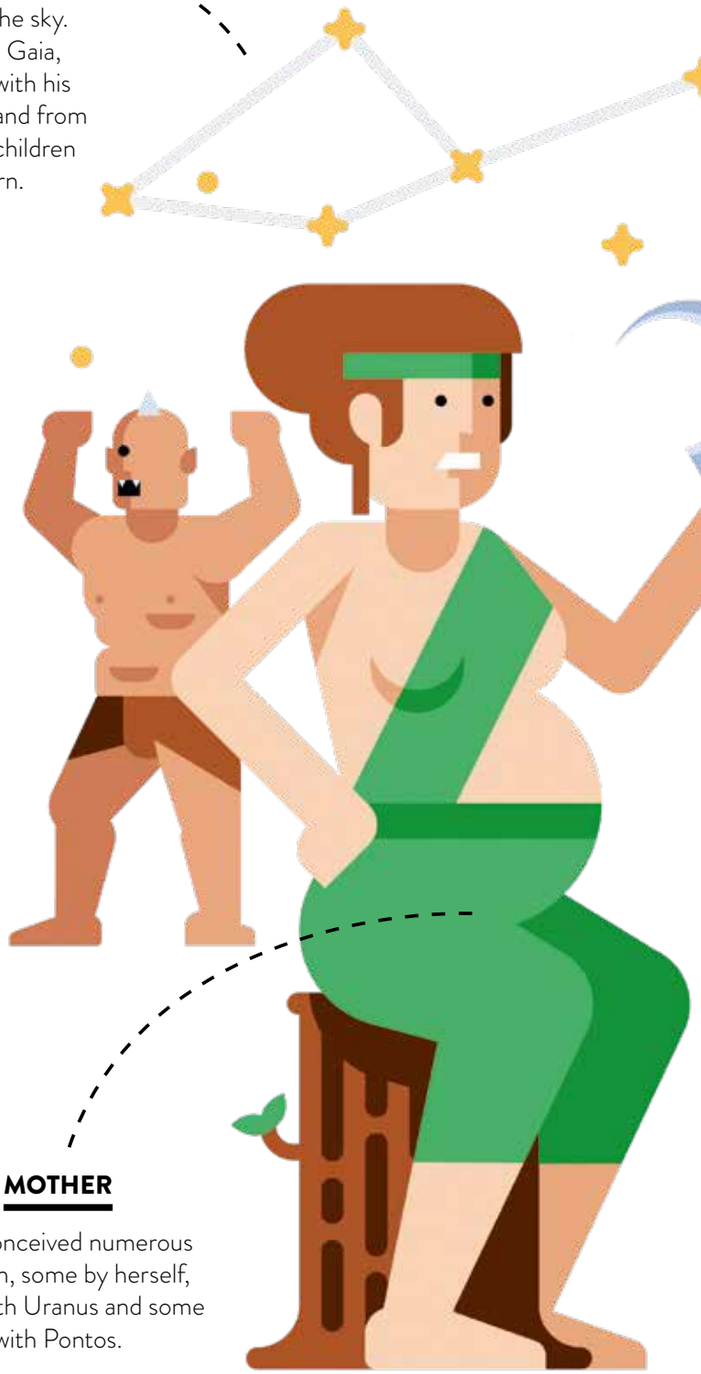
The Titans are always ready for brutal fights, but the Titanesses don't want anything to do with them. The most famous are the Titan Cronus and the Titaness Rhea. Together, they had numerous children, who would become the Olympian gods, including Zeus, the king of the gods, who eventually took the throne from his own father.

FIRST GENERATION

Gaia, the earth, was born after Chaos, and just before Eros, love. The three are elements from nature. The children of Gaia and Uranus were the first gods to have a more or less human form.

STARRY SKY

Uranus is the sky. He covers Gaia, the earth, with his starry coat, and from this union, children are born.



SICKLE

Gaia gave her son Cronus a sickle to attack Uranus.

MOTHER

Gaia conceived numerous children, some by herself, some with Uranus and some with Pontos.

GODDESS
of the earth

ROMAN NAME
Terra Mater

Mother Earth

Cronus

Cronus overthrew his father, Uranus, to became king of the gods, but he was as violent a king as his father had been! A prophesy foretold that one of Cronus's children would seize the throne from him, so each time his wife, Rhea, gave birth and presented their child to him, Cronus would swallow the baby. In the end, Rhea rebelled, hiding her last-born, Zeus, and replacing him with a stone wrapped in a blanket that she presented to her terrible husband. He swallowed the stone without realising the difference, and Zeus was saved.





CONFLICT

Zeus freed his previously swallowed brothers and sisters. Together, they fought their father, Cronus, and the Titans.

HUMANS

According to Hesiod, Cronus was a good god. Under his reign, harvests grew easily and humans lived a life free from care.

A BROKEN FAMILY

Rhea wanted her cruel husband, who had swallowed their children, to die. She told her son Zeus that the Cyclopes and the Hecatonchires could help him win against Cronus. So Zeus freed them and they fought together.

A PLAY ON WORDS

Aristotle enjoyed punning on the name Cronus, as the word chronos means 'time' in Greek. Thus, this violent god is also the god of time passing. But he didn't want time to pass for his children – he wanted to kill them!

FAMILY TREE

Son of Gaia and Uranus

Brother to the other Titans, the Titanesses, the Hecatonchires and the Cyclopes

Husband to Rhea, a Titaness who was also his sister

Father of Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon and Zeus

GOLDEN AGE

According to some stories, Cronus reigns over a world where humans experienced a golden age.

TERRIBLE OLD AGE

Often represented as old and ugly, Cronus lives in fear that one of his children will take the throne from him.



GOD
associated with time

ROMAN NAME
Saturn

SWADDLED STONE

Cronus didn't notice that the 'baby' he swallowed was really a stone wrapped in a blanket.

A hateful god

Zeus

Zeus wasn't always king of the gods. When he was still young, he had to take power from his father, Cronus. Since then, he reigns all-powerful over the skies and Olympus, and he arbitrates any disputes that may arise between the gods. As god of nature, he has power over the human world, and sees that promises are kept and laws adhered to. He is, according to the author Homer, the 'father of gods and men', with men frequently invoking his protection.

LOVERS



His third wife, Hera, who is also his sister, is known for her jealousy... but Zeus did indeed have numerous affairs with other goddesses and mortals!

LORD OF THE SKY

Once their father, Cronus, had been defeated, the Cyclopes gave each god a gift representing their divine futures. They gave Hades a helmet of invisibility, joining him forever to the kingdom of the dead. They gave Zeus thunder and lightning.



DESCENDANTS

Zeus had numerous children from his many affairs. He is father of the Muses, Heracles, Dionysus, Apollo and Hermes.

SHAPE-SHIFTER

To get what he wants, this womaniser is capable of many tricks. He charmed Europa by turning himself into a white bull, into a swan to entice Leda and into a shower of gold to conquer Danae. But his wife, Hera, is sometimes suspicious and comes down to earth. Occasionally, Zeus needs to change his lovers' forms – he changed Io into a heifer!

FAMILY TREE

Son of Rhea and Cronus

Brother of Hades, Demeter, Hestia Hera and Poseidon

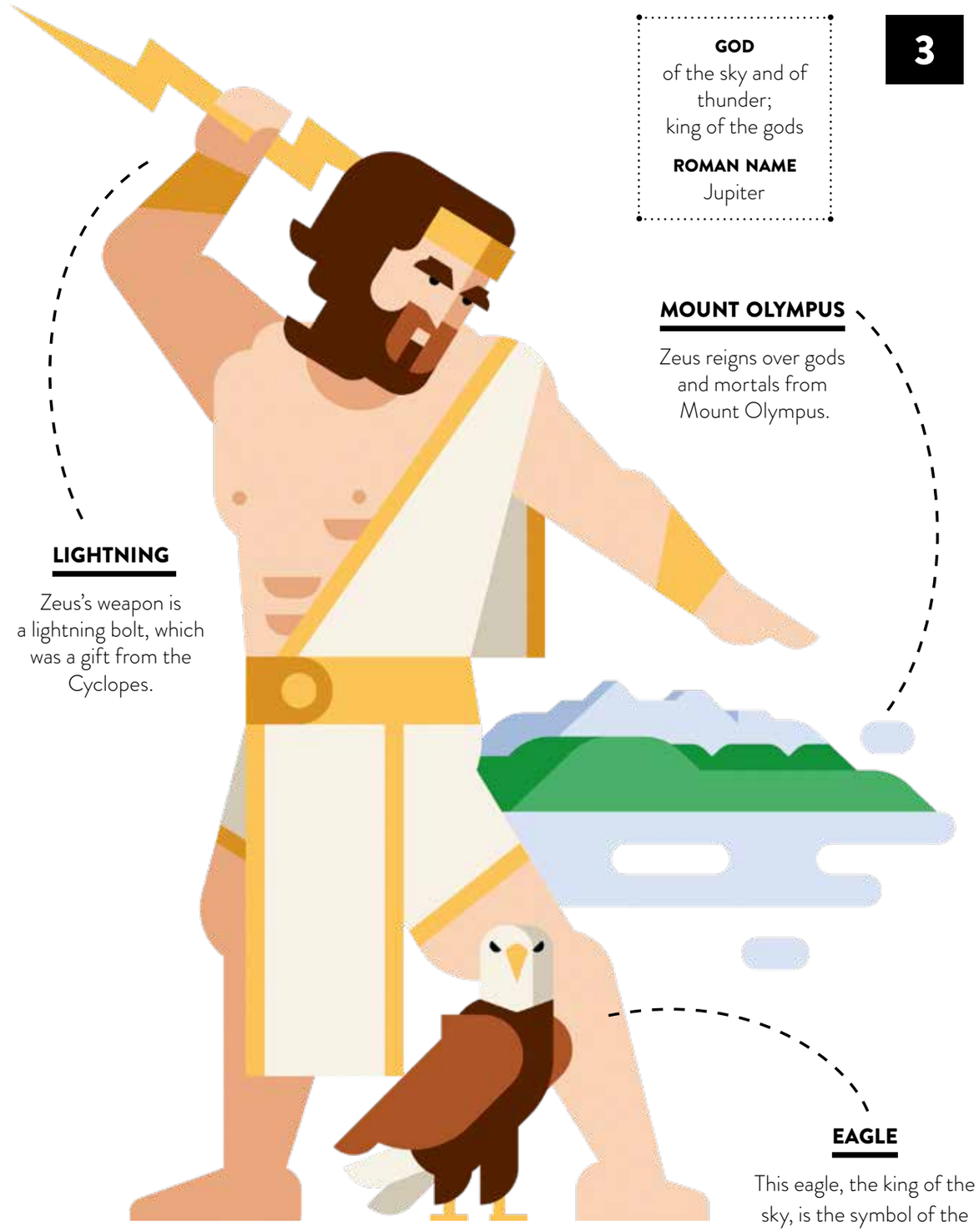
Husband to Metis, mother of Athena

Husband to Themis, mother of the Horai (seasons) and the Moirai (Fates)

Husband to Hera, mother of Hebe, Eileithyia, Hephaestus and Ares

GOD
of the sky and of thunder;
king of the gods

ROMAN NAME
Jupiter



LIGHTNING

Zeus's weapon is a lightning bolt, which was a gift from the Cyclopes.

MOUNT OLYMPUS

Zeus reigns over gods and mortals from Mount Olympus.

EAGLE

This eagle, the king of the sky, is the symbol of the king of the gods.

King of the gods

Themis

Themis is a goddess and sister to the Titans. By marrying Zeus, she ensured that she remained important when he took power. Zeus had been married to another goddess, Metis, but after an oracle prophesied that her unborn son would become king of the gods in his father's place, Zeus ate her. Themis, goddess of justice, has powers of divination and inspires wisdom in humans. She stayed on Mount Olympus even when Zeus later married his sister Hera.



HUMANS

Her daughters the Horai (Justice, Discipline and Peace) watch over the seasons and also justice amongst men.

FAMILY TREE

Daughter of Uranus and Gaia

Sister to the Titans (she's one of the Titanesses)

Zeus's second wife, after Metis and before Hera

Mother of the Horai, Moirai and Astraea

CONFLICT

When Zeus fought the giants, Themis advised him to protect himself with Amalthea's skin. Amalthea was the goat who had fed him when he was a baby.



TELL THE FUTURE

Well before Apollo, Themis prophesied the future at Delphi. She founded the oracle there. She sat on a tripod, as Pythia later would, and answered questions that humans came to ask her. They then had to interpret her often-confusing responses!

THE MOIRAI

Atropos, Clotho and Lachesis are the daughters of Themis and Zeus. Known as the Moirai, or the Fates, they are the mistresses of human destiny: one spins the thread of life, the second measures it, and the third cuts the thread when it's time for death.

SWORD OF JUSTICE

A sword is the tool used once the sentence has been pronounced.

GODDESS
of justice



SCALES

Scales are a symbol of justice: Themis weighs the arguments on each side.

TRIPOD

The tripod is from the sanctuary at Delphi, where Themis gave out her prophesies.

Guardian of laws