AMAZING IMMORTALS

A GUIDE TO GODS AND GODDESSES AROUND THE WORLD

DINAH WILLIAMS

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A NOTE ABOUT THE PATTERNS:

The border patterns in the book are inspired by elements from each culture, specifically the kuba and mudcloth fabrics in Africa; ancient Mesoamerican textile patterns for the borders of Aztec, Incan and Mayan; the Trinity knot for Celtic; the pattern of ancient lattices for Chinese; the eye of Horus for Egyptian; Kōwhaiwhai patterns for Maori and Hawaiian; the sacred lotus flower for Hindu; geometric patterns in Indigenous textiles and sand painting for Hopi, Inuit, Navajo, and Pueblo; ancient cloud art for Korean; traditional embroidery patterns for Lithuanian; the Helm of Awe symbol for Norse and Finnish; and the tomoe symbol for Shintō.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine you didn't know why the sun traveled across the sky every day. How would you explain it? Without understanding the science, you might look around your world for a logical explanation. Maybe you notice the glare from metal on a chariot wheel and figure that could be the way the sun moves across the sky. The chariot driver would also have to be able to live forever, so the sun could continue to shine, and superhuman, so he could withstand its melting heat. But who would drive such a massive, gleaming chariot? It couldn't be an ordinary person. It would have to be someone amazing—a god!

Suddenly, you've got the beginning of a great story about Bob, what you called the immortal chariot driver who makes the sun rise and set. Because there's no Netflix, everyone wants to hear a great story, especially one that explains something central to their lives. Your neighbors love the tale so much, they tell it when they visit their friend in another town, giving it their own flourish. Soon Bob's story gets retold again and again. Over time, someone writes a version down. Another person carves an illustration from the story into a wall. Plays are written about Bob. Songs are performed.

Soon everyone knows about Bob, who brings the sun that warms the world and makes the plants grow. How can you repay Bob for

being such a great guy? Maybe you build a small altar in your house and give him a little of your food as thanks. The king notices how much everyone loves Bob, and so he builds a big temple where everyone can talk about the glory of Bob in one place. However, in the stories the priests tell at the temple, the king isn't just a fan of Bob's, they're actually related to each other.

People begin to wonder about Bob's life. Where was he born? Is he married? Kids? Parents? An annoying best friend? If so, what do they control in the world? Do they fight? Over time, you've got an entire pantheon of gods that explains everything in your world, from the sun, moon, and stars in the sky to the origin of weather and seasons. There are also stories from the gods that teach lessons or answer some of the bigger questions, such as "Where do we go when we die?" or "How do we fall in love?"

In Bob's now larger-than-life world, there is bound to be epic drama. Who can tell a god what to do? Maybe one day Bob gets annoyed with humanity and takes away the sun with an eclipse. Or he gets in a fistfight with his best friend, which causes the earth to quake. Or maybe he lies to his wife, the goddess of rain, who storms off, causing a drought. Soon, the deities' world is like the Marvel universe, filled with stories of betrayal, intrigue, and romance.

People tell stories about Bob and his fellow gods for hundreds of years. Maybe over time he picks up a new skill, so that not only is he the sun god, but farmers believe he is also the god of corn, which is yellow and grows in the sun. But a hundred miles away on the coast, where no corn is grown and they never heard the first story, Bob becomes the god of the sea. Or maybe another culture wins a war against yours and insists that you now have to worship Susan, their sun god.

With this story of Bob, you can see how gods and goddesses sprung up all over the world. There are thousands of deities, so *Amazing Immortals* contains just a small sampling of their incredible stories. I've avoided gods from the more-familiar pantheons like Greek and Roman and arranged the book by their powers, such as love or weather, so you can see how different cultures explained the same phenomenon. However, this arrangement is a simplification, as the deities often have more than one power, or their powers and story change over time, just like your buddy Bob's.

TERMS

There are a handful of terms that I use throughout the book that you might not recognize. As no one likes to be confused, here's a quick overview:

CHAOS:
A confused state or the world before anything exists

CONSORT:
A husband, wife, or romantic companion

CULTURE:
A nation, people, or social group with similar beliefs

DEITY:
A god or goddess

IMMORTAL:
Able to live forever

PANTHEON:
All of the gods of a people or religion

PATRON:
A deity who is a guardian of a particular place, feature, or occupation

SACRIFICE:
An offering, often a kill, to honor a god

SUPERNATURAL:
Something from beyond the laws of nature

CREATION

Creation myths often begin in darkness, chaos, and water. Sometimes a creator wills themself into existence out of nothing and then produces the world. This is seen in the Aztec's **OMETEOTL**, a dual male-and-female deity that created themself and then gave birth to four sons, who together established the laws of the universe.

Some gods were known for creating humans and their world. The Greek god **PROMETHEUS** crafted man out of clay to resemble the gods. He also stole fire from the gods to give to humans and taught them how to create tools and plant crops, enabling them to survive. Zeus punished Prometheus for doing that by having him chained to a rock and his liver eaten every night, only to grow back and be eaten again the next day.

ABASSI

From his perch in the skies, the African god Abassi created the stars, earth, and nature out of nothing. He also created a man and a woman, and cared for them in the skies with his wife, Atai. One day the humans saw the earth and asked Abassi if they could live there. Afraid they would become smarter and stronger than him, Abassi refused. But Atai proposed a compromise: The humans could live there if they returned to the skies every day to eat and never learned to hunt and farm. They also could not have children, so they could never overpower Abassi. The humans agreed, and they returned each day for their meals when Abassi rang a dinner bell.

However, the woman grew tired of returning to the sky and began growing her own food. The man began to help, and soon they fell in love. They did not return to the skies. Over the years, they had many children, whom they tried to hide from Abassi. But he saw the children and angrily blamed his wife. As punishment, Atai sent death and evil to the world so humans would never become as powerful as the gods.

FUN FACT

A few days before the Efik festival of Ndok, dolls are created in the shape of animals. Evil spirits are supposed to inhabit the dolls, which are then driven away by being thrown into the river during the festival.

SOMETIMES APPEARS AS:

A human with the head of a ram.

ATUM

ALSO KNOWN AS: **THE GREAT HE-SHE, TEM**

Egypt's genderless god Atum willed themself into creation out of a mound of earth that rose from the waters of chaos. Out of their mouth, they spat their children—air (Shu) and moisture (Tefnut)—but the two gods became lost in the darkness. Atum used their all-seeing eye to find them.

Atum's children then gave birth to the Geb, the earth, and Nut, the sky, who gave birth to the gods Osiris, Isis, Set, Nephthys, and Horus. Atum is also considered an ancestor to many of the pharaohs who ruled Egypt.

IN MODERN TIMES

In dozens of Marvel comics, Atum the God Eater has the ability to destroy and absorb the powers of both gods and demons.