

# Gaia

In the beginning, there was Chaos, the abyss. Out of it first emerged Gaia, the earth, which is the foundation of all. Next came Tartaros, the depth in the Earth where condemned dead souls go to their punishment, and Eros, the love that overwhelms bodies and minds, and Erebus, the darkness, and Nyx, the night. Erebus and Nyx made love and from their union came Aether, the air, and Hemera, the day.

Gaia, the divine personification of the earth, gave birth to three offspring without any sexual concourse. Gaia's first such child was Uranus, the starry heavens that fit around her perfectly and that provide a home for the immortals. Then she gave birth to the mountains, where the Nymphs live in the hills and the forests. Then she gave birth to Pontos, the sea on which sailors challenge the raging waves. Then Gaia lay with Uranus, the heavens, and she gave birth to Okeanos, the ocean that circles the world. Thus in three generations, from Chaos in the first, to Gaia, Tartaros, Eros, Erebus, and Nyx in the second, and to Aether, Hemera, Uranus, Pontos, and Okeanos in the third, the entire world as we know it came to be.

Gaia and Uranus went on to have twelve children, known as the Titans, and Gaia gave rise to many others as well. Uranus, loathing all these children, would push them back into Gaia, who suffered horribly with the pressure. Gaia created flint, and from it she made a sickle, and she urged her sons to use the sickle on their father. The youngest of the twelve Titans, Kronos, took the sickle and, when Uranus came to lie down with Gaia, Kronos cut off his father's genitals and threw them in the sea. From the resulting sea foam came Aphrodite, the goddess of love and the only Olympian god not descended from a Titan.

The twelve children of Gaia and Uranus, the twelve Titans, intermarried and had many children, and from them grandchildren as well. Among the Titans Kronos, who had emasculated his father Uranus, became the ruler and mated with his sister Rhea. Because Gaia and Uranus had prophesied that Kronos would be unseated by one of his children, Kronos swallowed the children that Rhea bore, who were Poseidon, Hades, Hestia, Demeter, and Hera. To foil Kronos, Rhea give birth to her next child, Zeus, in secret and kept him hidden. She bound up a stone in a cloth and gave it to Kronos, who swallowed the stone thinking it was the next of the children that he sought to contain. When Zeus was grown, he and Gaia conspired to make Kronos vomit up the five elder siblings of Zeus.

Zeus, son of Kronos, went on to lead his siblings in a great struggle against the Titans, in a war that lasted ten years, until finally the twelve Titans were defeated and confined to Tartaros. Zeus and his siblings and their offspring went on to be the

Olympian gods who rule the world today from Mount Olympos. It is to them that we make our sacrifices, to seek their favor or appease their wrath with our humble offerings of barley, meat, and wine. It is for them that we hold the athletic contests known as the Pythian Games that honor Apollo, the Isthmian Games that honor Poseidon, and the Nemean and Olympic Games that honor Zeus.

Prometheus, one of the Titans, made the first humans from clay, and he brought them fire from Mt. Olympos. However, Zeus, as king of the gods and no friend of Prometheus, became disgusted with the behavior of humans. He and his brother, Poseidon, caused rains to fall and rivers to flood, so that all of the humans would be drowned. However, Zeus finally saw one blameless couple huddled in a boat, trying to ride out the flood, and eventually he decided that they could survive.

These two survivors were Deucalion, a son of Prometheus, and Pyrrha, a daughter of Epimetheus and Pandora. When the little boat bearing Deucalion and Pyrrha came to rest in the muddy and mossy landscape, they decided that they must consult the oracle of the Titan goddess Themis to see what they should do, alone in this strange world. Themis told them, "Go forth from my temple, cover your heads, and throw your mother's bones over your shoulders." Pyrrha was horrified at the idea of the committing this sacrilege to the spirit of her mother. Deucalion, similarly horrified and perplexed, pondered the words of the oracle and finally said, "Perhaps the oracle means our mother Gaia, the Earth, and the bones of which she speaks are the stones of the Earth". Neither Deucalion nor Pyrrha was sure that this was right, but they pulled their robes over their heads, picked up stones, and threw them over their shoulders. After a bit, the stones slowly softened, and they began to change shape, and eventually they took the form of humans and became human. Those transformed stones are the ancestors of the humans of today, and that is why we have the hardness and endurance that we possess, having come from the stones of our Mother Earth.