

Cronus was now lord of the universe. Seated upon the highest mountain, he ruled over heaven and earth with a firm hand. The other gods obeyed him and he was worshipped. But Cronus did not set his brothers free from Tartarus,



the pit at the bottom of their earth, and Mother Earth was angry with him and plotted his downfall. No god yet born was strong enough to oppose him, but she knew that one of his

sons would be stronger than he, just as he had been stronger than his father. Cronus was suspicious of his own children, too, but instead of burying them alive as Uranus had done, he ate them! So, every time his wife, the Titaness Rhea, gave birth, he took the newborn and swallowed it. This way, he figured he had nothing to fear. Cronus's wife, Rhea, tolerated his behavior for a while. Then, like Gaea, she plotted against her husband.

Rhea mourned. Her five sisters were all surrounded by their Titan children while she was all alone. When Rhea expected her sixth child, she went to Mother Earth and asked her to help

save the child from his father. This was exactly what Mother Earth had been waiting for. So, she gave her daughter whispered advice and Rhea went away smiling.

When Rhea had given birth to her child, the god Zeus, she hid him. Then she wrapped a large stone in a cloth, and the unsuspecting Cronus ate it, thinking that he was destroying his latest son. Cronus was fooled and swallowed the stone and the little god Zeus was spirited away to a secret cave on the island of Crete. Old Cronus never heard the cries of his young son, for Mother Earth set noisy sprites outside the cave. They made such a clatter beating their shields with their swords that all other sounds were drowned out.

Zeus was tended by gentle nymphs and was nursed by the fairy goat Amaltheia. From the horns of the goat flowed ambrosia and nectar, the food and drink of the gods. Zeus grew rapidly, and it was not long before he strode out of the cave as a great new god. To thank the nymphs for tending him so well, he gave them the horns of the goat. They were horns of plenty and could never be emptied. From the hide of the goat, he made for himself an impenetrable breastplate, the Aegis, and now he was so strong that Cronus could do nothing against him.

A War in Heaven: Zeus Takes Charge

Rhea told Zeus of the evils his father, Cronus, had done. Zeus vowed as he got older that he would destroy his father. And this he did. When he was fully grown, he went back to his mother disguised as a servant. Together he and Rhea made a poison that would cause Cronus to disgorge his other five children. Once free they looked to Zeus for leadership and told him to lead them in the battle against Cronus and the other Titans.



The terrible war raged for ten long years. Cronus was no longer young, so Atlas led the Titans. However, two other Titans, Prometheus and Epimetheus, joined Zeus and his brothers and sisters in the fight. That made the two sides equal in strength. Neither could win.

Finally, wise Mother Earth told Zeus that his side would be victorious if he followed her advice.

"Go down into the dark pit under the earth and release the one-eyed Cyclopes and their hundred-handed brothers, for they shall help you win."

Zeus followed Mother Earth's advice and descended bravely into the dark hole. He killed the guard and freed the prisoners. Then he gave them divine food and drink, and at last their strength returned.

"To Zeus," said one of the Cyclopes, "we give our powerful weapons, the thunderbolt."