

### **The Competition, Athena & Poseidon**

Nearly every town in ancient Greece had a god that looked after the townspeople. Towns rarely had more than one god to keep an eye on their best interests. Most gods did not share well. So usually, each town had a god to look over it.

Poseidon loved watching over towns. He usually picked coastal towns since he was the Lord of the Sea. Poseidon was a very powerful god. He liked having people build temples in his honor and bring him gifts. They were not very useful gifts for a god, but he enjoyed getting them anyway. As Greece grew and developed, new towns sprang up all the time. Poseidon was always on the lookout for new coastal towns.

He was not the only god who loved to be in charge. Athena, along with other gods, enjoyed that role as well. One day, both Athena and Poseidon claimed a new village.

Most of the time, humans were grateful when they were selected to be under the care of a god. But two gods? That was one too many. Poseidon wanted them to choose which god they wanted. But the people were afraid to choose.

Athena understood their worry. She challenged her uncle Poseidon to a contest. Both gods would give the town a gift. The townspeople could decide which gift was the more useful.

Poseidon slapped his scepter against the side of the mountain. A stream appeared. The people were excited. A source of fresh water was so important! But when they tried to drink the water, they discovered it was not fresh at all. It was salt water!

Athena waved her arm and an olive tree appeared. The people nibbled at the olives. They were delicious! The people were excited. The olive tree would provide wood for building homes. Branches would provide kindling for kitchen stoves and fireplaces. The olives could be used for food. The fruit could be pressed to release oil.

But theirs was a coastal village. The people could not risk angering the Lord of the Sea. As it turned out, they did not have to choose. Poseidon chose for them. He laughed his mighty laugh, sending waves crashing against the shoreline. Poseidon proclaimed his niece the winner!

That's how a small village gained a most powerful and wise guardian, the goddess Athena, a guardian who helped them rise to fame. In her honor, they named their village Athens.

### **Prometheus and the Gift of Fire**

From the very first, humans had trouble with the gods. Most gods thought of humans as toys. But some gods found themselves interested in the human race. Some gods even made friends with the humans. One of those gods was named Prometheus.

The first people created by the gods lived happily together. They thought the gods were wonderful. But their children were not as grateful or as content. The children argued among themselves, and sometimes even argued with the gods.

Zeus was very disappointed at mankind. He decided he was not going to give mankind a most important tool - fire! Without fire, humans were not going to last very long.

Prometheus felt sorry for his human friends. Fire was important for many things - like heat and cooking, and hundreds of others. Prometheus stole a lightning bolt from Zeus and gave it to mankind. That's when man discovered fire.

Zeus was furious. He ordered Prometheus chained to a rock as punishment for stealing his lightning bolt, and for going behind his back to help the humans. To make Prometheus even more miserable, Zeus sent storms to beat angry waves against Prometheus, helplessly chained to his rock. Zeus made the sun shine really brightly now and then to burn his skin. Zeus even sent an eagle to nibble at poor Prometheus' body. It was quite a punishment for a god who had only tried to help mankind. But he had defied Zeus, and that was what made Zeus so angry.

It was Hercules who finally released the helpless god from his chains. By the time Hercules saved him, nearly a thousand years had passed. That's probably not a lot of time if you happen to be immortal. But humans had changed a great deal over 1000 years. By then, Zeus found humans quite entertaining. Zeus no longer cared if anyone rescued Prometheus or not.

### **Echo & Narcissus**

Echo, a spirit of the forest, spotted the most beautiful young man. His name was Narcissus. Echo did something she thought she would never do - she fell in love. But Hera had taken most of her voice. All she do was echo sounds made by others. She could howl like a wolf, buy only if a wolf had just howled. She could sing like a breeze through reeds, but only if the reeds sang first. How could she tell Narcissus that she loved him?

One day, she spotted Narcissus looking into a stream. He seemed enchanted by what he saw.

"Come to me," Narcissus begged, looking into the water.

"Come to me," Echo echoed eagerly.

Narcissus swung about. "Who's there?" he angrily demanded to know.

"Who's there," Echo echoed loudly.

"Stop that!" Narcissus snapped.

"Stop that!" Echo echoed.

"Let's meet," Narcissus said in a much softer voice that he had used so far.

"Let's meet!" Echo echoed happily. She stepped out from behind a tree.

"Go away," Narcissus shouted at her.

"Go away," Echo echoed sadly.

Echo went sadly away.

Things did not go well for Narcissus after that. Narcissus returned to the stream again and again. He stared at the lovely young man he saw in the water. He did not know it was only his reflection.

Hidden from sight, Echo watched Narcissus as he lay by the stream. She repeated everything that Narcissus said. Narcissus ignored her. Day after day he lay by the stream, admiring his own reflection. He stopped eating. He stopped drinking. And finally, he died.

### **The Myth of Orion**

Poseidon, god of the sea, had a son named Orion, who was gifted with great skill as a hunter but cursed with poor judgment. Eos, goddess of the dawn, fell in love with him, but Orion was not true to her. He chose to go hunting with Artemis, the goddess of hunting and the moon. Orion boasted to Artemis that he was such a skilled hunter that he could kill all of the world's wild beasts and monsters. Artemis' brother Apollo did not trust Orion and did not consider him a good match for his sister. When he heard of Orion's boastful claim, he asked Mother Earth to send a huge scorpion to attack Orion. Orion fought valiantly, but he realized that his mortal skills were no match for the scorpion. Hoping for Eos's protection, Orion plunged into the ocean and swam toward the island of Delos to reach him.

As he swam toward the island, though, Eos wasn't waiting for him, but Artemis was. Apollo joined her there. As he and Artemis stood on the shore, he saw a tiny figure far off in the distance and recognized that it was Orion, swimming toward the island. Apollo challenged his sister to hit the small, distant shape in the ocean with her arrow. Artemis shot accurately and killed Orion.

When Artemis realized what she had done, she pleaded with Asclepius, the god of healing, to restore Orion to life. Zeus, King of the gods, forbade Asclepius to do so, so Artemis placed Orion's image in the sky, where the scorpion, the constellation Scorpio, still chases him among the stars.

## **Chaos, Titans, and the New Gods at Battle**

The world began in a state of nothingness called Chaos. Slowly, Mother Earth emerged from Chaos and produced a generation of giants called Titans. Cronos, the king of these Titans, married Rhea, and they had five children. But Cronos was so jealous and power hungry that he swallowed them all. When Rhea had her last child, Zeus, she tricked Cronos into swallowing a stone instead, so that the child would live.

As Zeus grew up, he plotted revenge against his father for swallowing his brothers and sisters. He knew that, because they were immortal, his brothers and sisters had not died when they were swallowed. They were still inside Cronos, waiting to be rescued. One day, Zeus slipped a bitter potion into Cronos' drink. When Cronos choked, Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon came tumbling out of him.

A fierce battle between the Titans and Cronos' children followed. Zeus hurled huge boulders down the side of Mount Olympus. Pan, the young goat god, shouted that the world was ending. The Titans feared the mountain's collapse and fled. The younger gods, called the New Gods, won control of Earth. Zeus banished the Titans, except for Atlas, who was sentenced to hold up Earth forever.

The three brothers, Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, divided the world. Zeus took control of the sky and Mount Olympus, Hades became god of the underworld, and Poseidon controlled the sea. Zeus' three sisters, Hestia, Demeter, and Hera, joined him on Mount Olympus.