

## **Under Zeus' Shadow** (*Grecian Mythology*)

Greeks differed in their philosophy about gods and life on earth. Most of their myths reflected honor and glory. They either represented gods, or mortals, executing heroic deeds to receive a respectful placement amongst all gods.

The Greeks believed that in the beginning, the universe was shapeless space and ruled by Chaos, god of light. He had a wife, Nyx, goddess of darkness. But, their firstborn son, Erebus, dethroned his father and conceived more children with his mother. They were called Aether and Hemera, who in turn dethroned their father and mother. Also, they proceeded to have children and their names were Pontus and Gaea as in Sea and Earth. Gaea became a lovely goddess and admired the beauty of the earth.

However, to complete this miracle, she needed to create a sky, Uranus, god of heaven. Earth and Uranus got married and lived very happily on Mount Olympus. They conceived twelve children. Uranus very quickly realized that these children possessed incredible strength. He sent them into the abyss beneath the earth. They became strong and were referred to as Titans. As time passed, they grew tired of their exile and one devised a plan to seek freedom. He decided to conquer his mother's love and then overthrow his father, Uranus. Naturally, he would be the new ruler and agreed to share his New Kingdom with his brothers and sisters.

Cronus succeeded and became the next king. But not before Uranus was able to put a terrible curse on him: "One day, a child of yours will dethrone you, and then take your kingdom". He took a wife, who gave him many children. He didn't forget the curse and found himself to fear the loss of his newly gained power. So, he proceeded to devour each child at birth. Rhea could not tolerate her husband's behavior any longer and made arrangement to immediately hide her next child. That baby became Zeus and, as predicted, he overthrew his father's reign. But, before Zeus was to rule the earth, he too, had to fight the Titans. After years of war, he grew tired of battles and agreed to divide his fortune and to restore peace once again. His two brothers, Pluto, god of the world beneath the earth, and Neptune, god of the sea, were assigned specific tasks. Zeus, then, reigned over earth and his brothers' territories, while living with his wife, Hera, on Mount Olympus. He was the highest of all gods.

The gods enjoyed the company of mortal women and to their delight frequented their chambers. Even Zeus, although married to Hera, goddess of heaven, spared no expense to fancy other women and, thus, conceived many children.

Through remarkable acts some mortal men and women became heroes and raised above their fellow human beings. In fact, after death they were honored for their deeds and venerated into status of immortality. Zeus bestowed the honor upon his newcomers and gave each a position within his kingdom. As a prudent ruler, he devised various ways to test possible contenders, if indeed they were worthy of such positions. This is how the course of obstacles, which later became known as "the twelve labours of Herakles", was introduced as the passing test which could redeem their status.