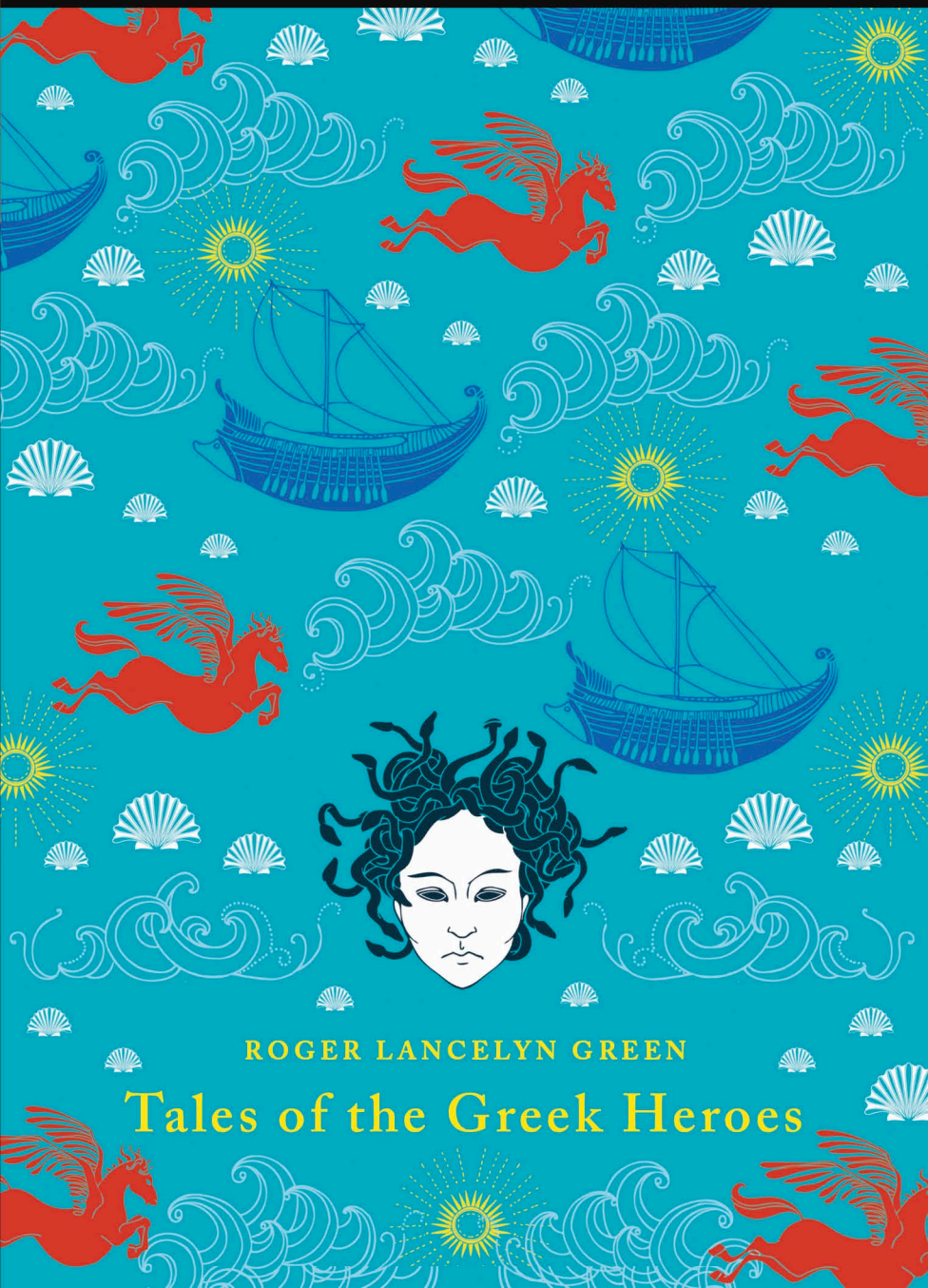


Penguin



Readers



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Tales of the Greek Heroes

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CHAPTER ONE

The Greek gods

If you are lucky enough to visit the beautiful land of Greece, you will find a country full of more than 3,000 years of history and wonderful stories. At the bottom of the tall mountains are the bluest of blue seas, and between the mountains are valleys full of **olive** trees with silvery leaves and fields of yellow corn. As you walk through Greece in late spring, you can leave the towns behind and feel like you are back in the days of old – days where you might expect to meet a god on top of a mountain or deep in an empty valley.

You can find the ruins of **ancient temples** hidden in the olive trees. Each temple has a story to tell. Some of the stories are real, and some are not, but each one is wonderful to hear.

Over the blue sea are the islands of Greece, and each island has a story to tell, too. Today, nobody lives on the island of Delos, but it is full of the ruins of cities, temples and theatres, and it was on a hilltop on Delos that Apollo and his sister Artemis were born. The island of Ithaca is dry and rocky, and it was from here that Odysseus sailed out to attack the city of Troy.

With the beauty of Greece all around them, it is easy to see why the people of ancient Greece felt that there were gods and fairies everywhere – in the mountains and valleys, the forests and rivers, and even in the ocean. They believed that Poseidon lived under the water and he was the king of the sea. On land, Apollo was the king of music and poetry, and he shined like the

sun. Artemis the Huntress looked after all the wild animals. Ares was the king of war, Hades the king of death, and the mother **goddess** Demeter helped the corn to grow and the baby lambs to be born. Aphrodite was the goddess of beauty and love, and Eros was her son.

All of these and many more, were the gods. They were **immortal**, and they had great **powers**. But even they had a ruler, and this ruler was Zeus, the king of Heaven and of Earth. Zeus was the father of the gods and his queen was Hera.

The Greek people loved their gods, and told many stories about them. They thought the gods looked like humans, but they were more beautiful and had much more power. But like humans, they thought the gods could behave selfishly and jealously, and could even be terrible at times.

In the very early times, before Zeus came, there were other, terrible gods. They were not like humans at all, but like horrible animals. They were called giants and Titans, and were awful **creatures** with many hands or tails like snakes. The most terrible Titan was Cronos and he was the father of the gods Zeus, Poseidon and Hades, and of the goddesses Hera, Hestia and Demeter.

Cronos was a fierce and horrible ruler, and one day his father – the sky – said to him, “You may be our ruler now, but your children will put you in prison, and one of them will become the ruler instead of you!”

“That will not happen!” Cronos shouted angrily, and as each of his children was born, he ate it. First, he ate Hestia, and then Demeter and Hera, and after that he ate Hades and Poseidon.

Cronos's wife, Rhea, was very upset and when her youngest son Zeus was born, she hid him in a cave on the island of Crete.

"Where is the child?" Cronos shouted in a terrible voice, so Rhea gave him a big stone wrapped in baby clothes. Cronos thought that the stone was Zeus so he quickly ate it. But Zeus was safely hidden in Crete being guarded by the mountain fairies, the children of Mother Earth.

Many years later, when Zeus was an adult, he returned and put a magic plant in Cronos's wine, which made him sick. As Cronos was being sick, his children all came out of his mouth – alive and very angry! The big stone came out, too, and you can still see this stone in Greece today – at Delphi, the place where it fell.

For ten years, Zeus and his brothers and sisters fought against Cronos and the Titans. At last they beat them with the help of the Cyclopes – giants that had just one eye. Zeus locked the Titans in a prison of fire under the earth called Tartarus.

Then there was peace, and Zeus built the palaces of the gods. Many believe the golden home of the gods was Heaven on top of Mount Olympus in the north of Greece, but others think it was on a cloud mountain high up in the sky.

One of the Titans locked in the prison in Tartarus was Iapetus, and he had three sons. Two of these sons were good and they helped Zeus in many ways. The third son was Atlas. He fought against Zeus, so Zeus made him stand on top of Mount Atlas in the north of Africa and hold up the sky on his shoulders for ever. The two good sons of Iapetus were Prometheus and Epimetheus, and the first of these is very important in many of the stories of the Greek gods.

CHAPTER TWO

Hermes and Apollo

Before the great war with the Titans, humans had lived on Earth. This was the Golden Age, when the corn grew easily, and the animals ate fruit or grass.

The Golden Age came and went because no children were born, and the men and women did nothing but eat and drink, and walk around the lovely garden of the world.

Then came the Silver Age. Because of Cronos and the Titans, the humans of the Silver Age became terrible and bad, and they, too, were put in prison in Tartarus.

But when the great war was over, and Zeus was king, he called for the good Titan Prometheus.

“Go and make humans out of clay,” he said to Prometheus. “Make them look like the gods, and then bring them to me. I will breathe life into them, and make them live for a time like you and me. Then you will teach them how to build temples for us, and how to pray to us, the gods. You can teach them all they need to know, but you must not give them fire because that only belongs to the gods. After some time, these humans will die and go down to the place of my brother, Hades, the god of death.”

So this is what Prometheus did. Zeus gave the clay humans life, and then left Prometheus to teach them the things they needed to know.

Zeus then went to the south of Greece with the lovely Maia, and they lived for some time in a cave on the beautiful Mount

Cyllene. There, Maia gave birth to a wonderful child called Hermes. Zeus did not tell the other gods where he had gone, but Apollo found out in a strange way.

Apollo owned a large number of strong and handsome cows. Helios, the god of the sun, looked after these cows because he could see everything that happened on Earth during the day. One morning, Helios sent a message to Apollo – all the cows had disappeared! The night before, they had been happily eating grass in the green valley, but now they were gone.

Apollo was **furious**, and went off across Greece to find them. In Arcadia, Apollo met a group of **satyrs** – wild people who lived in the forest. The satyrs were often stupid and liked to have fun, and their leader Silenus was fat and not clever at all. “We’ll find your cows!” he said to Apollo. “We’re always ready to help.”

Apollo was happy and went on his way, and the satyrs started to look for his cows. After some time, they found some marks on the ground. “Look, marks from the cows!” Silenus cried. “And look at these marks here. A terrible creature has left these marks – the terrible creature that took the cows!”

Silenus and the other satyrs started to feel afraid, but suddenly they heard some wonderful music coming out of a cave in the side of the hill. The marks from the cows stopped outside this cave, too.

“The cows must be inside,” the satyrs shouted angrily. “The cow thief will come out when he hears us, and he’ll be so frightened, he’ll fall down as soon as he sees us!”

Just then the door of the cave opened, but the terrible creature that they were expecting to see did not come out – a beautiful mountain **faury** came out instead.

“Wild creatures,” she said in a sweet and gentle voice. “Why are you making such a loud and angry noise outside my cave?”

“Don’t be angry, beautiful fairy!” Silenus said, gently. “We’re not here to hurt you, but what is that strange and wonderful music we can hear? Will you tell us what it is, and who is making it?”

“That is better!” the mountain fairy said. “My name is Cyllene and I am the nurse to a son of Zeus and Maia. His name is Hermes and he is a wonderful and clever child. It is Hermes who is playing the beautiful music you can hear. He made a **harp**, and now he can make the most magical music!”

“And did he steal Apollo’s cows and use their skin to make this harp?” Silenus asked the fairy.

“No, of course not! A baby that is less than a week old does not steal cows!” Cyllene replied.

Meanwhile, Apollo was still out on the hills looking for his cows. He, too, came to some marks on the ground, and there he met an old man called Battus. Battus told Apollo that the night before he had seen something very strange. He had seen a small child taking a group of cows across the hills.

Apollo thanked old Battus and followed the marks that the child and the cows had made on the ground. Very soon he found the cows in a big cave on the side of a hill. At first Apollo was delighted to see his cows, but then he noticed that two of them were not there. Apollo left the cows in the cave, and followed more marks across the hill. After a short time, he came to the satyrs who were talking to Hermes outside his cave.