

IN THE BEGINNING

For ages upon ages, people have told stories about how the world came to be as it is. Some of these tales describe how the universe was created. Others explain how social customs began and why people live and behave as they do. The following three stories, all from different cultures, describe how the world was "in the beginning" and how it came to be as it is today.

HOW THE WORLD BEGAN

Few stories of creation are as fascinating — or as violent — as the one concocted by the ancient Greeks.

Adapted by Betty Bonham Lies

Before anything existed, there was only Chaos, shapeless and empty. Then Chaos gave birth to two children: the goddess named Night and the place of darkness in the Underworld, named Erebus. The wind fell in love with Night and wooed her, and she laid a silver egg deep in the darkness. Before long, the egg hatched, and Love was born. At once, Love began to create order and beauty. First it made the light and the day, then the earth and the sky.

Mother Earth, named Gaea, and Father Sky, named Uranus, had many children. They were all enormous creatures, as powerful as volcanoes, earthquakes, and hurricanes. The first three to be born were

giants with 100 hands and 50 heads, called the Hecatonchires. The next three were the enormous Cyclopes. Each Cyclops had only one eye, huge as a wheel, set right in the middle of his forehead. The last of the children of Gaea and Uranus were the 12 Titans, six male and six female children. They were as large and powerful as their brothers, but not as violent or destructive.

THE PROPHECY

Uranus hated the Hecatonchires and the Cyclopes. As soon as they were born, he shut them up in caverns deep underground. Naturally, Gaea was furious about this act. She begged her youngest children, the Titans, to do something about it.

Cronus, the youngest Titan, was the only one who had enough courage to help his mother. He fought Uranus, wounding him horribly. As Uranus died from the wound, he made a prediction. "Beware of your children," Uranus said to Cronus. "One of them will do to you as you have done to me."

After defeating Uranus, Cronus ruled as king of Heaven and Earth. He made another Titan, Rhea, his queen. When Rhea was about to give birth to the couple's first child, Cronus became very nervous. He remembered his father's prophecy. Would he really be killed by one of his own children?

Rather than risk it, Cronus decided to destroy his offspring. When Rhea gave him their firstborn child to hold, Cronus swallowed it. Later, when Rhea gave birth to other children, Cronus swallowed these as well. He gulped down three daughters, the goddesses Hestia, Demeter, and Hera, and two sons, the gods Hades and Poseidon.

Rhea mourned the loss of her five children and was furious with her husband. When her next and final child, the god Zeus, was about to be born, she swore that she would save him from his father. Before Cronus had a chance to see the new baby, Rhea gave Zeus to his grandmother, Gaea. Then she wrapped baby blankets around a stone and presented the stone to Cronus. Without looking closely at the blanketed stone, Cronus swallowed the bundle.

Zeus swore that someday he would rescue his brothers and sisters. When he grew up, he returned home secretly with a plan. He told

his mother the plan, and she agreed to help him.

One night she gave Cronus a drink that made him sick. Cronus began to throw up. First the stone came up, then each of Zeus' brothers and sisters. Amazingly, they were all unharmed! They all thanked Zeus and begged him to help them get rid of Cronus and the other Titans.

THE WAR OF THE GODS

A long war followed, a war over who would rule Heaven and Earth. Both the Titans and the gods fought fiercely. At first, Cronus and the Titans seemed likely to win. Then Zeus asked his uncles, the Cyclopes, for help.

The Cyclopes were blacksmiths. They could work wonders with metal and had created some amazing weapons. The Cyclopes said they would be happy to help their nephews by giving each of them a weapon. First, they gave Zeus a mighty thunderbolt. His brother Hades got a helmet that would make the wearer invisible. To Poseidon, they gave a sharp three-pointed weapon called a trident. With such tools, the gods could not lose.

One night, Hades put on his helmet of invisibility and entered his father's room. Quietly, he opened the door for his brothers. Then Poseidon held Cronus off with the trident while Zeus hurled his thunderbolt. Cronus, the leader of the Titans, was struck dead.

The war had been long, but at last the gods were victorious. They banished the defeated Titans to the underworld. Zeus, Poseidon, and