In Greek mythology, twelve gods and goddesses ruled the universe from atop Greece's Mount Olympus. These Olympians had come to power after their leader, Zeus, overthrew his father, Kronos, leader of the Titans. All the Olympians are related to one another. The Romans adopted most of these Greek gods and goddesses, but with new names.

**Zeus**

The most powerful of all, Zeus was god of the sky and the king of Mount Olympus. His temper affected the weather, and he threw thunderbolts when he was unhappy. He made the sun and moon come and go.  He made the seasons change. He would cause a storm with one shake of his shield. He was married to Hera.  
  
**Roman name:** Jupiter  
**Symbols:** Oak, Thunderbolt  
**God of:**  King of gods  
**Parents:**  Kronos and Rhea  
**Appearance:** Usually represented as an older, vigorous bearded man. But representations of Zeus as a powerful young man also exist.  
**Strengths:** Highly powerful, strong, charming, persuasive.  **Weaknesses:** Gets in trouble over love, can be moody.   
**Birthplace:** His mother is Rhea and his father is Kronos; things got off to a rocky start as Kronos, fearful of being usurped, kept eating Rhea's children. Finally, she got wise after giving birth to Zeus and subsituted a swaddled rock for her husband's snack. Zeus conquered his father and freed his siblings, who were still living in Kronos' stomach.   
**Spouses:** Hera, Europa, Leto, and Dione  
**Children:** Lots and lots of them. Hercules is one famous child.

**Hera**   
Hera was goddess of marriage and the queen of Olympus. She was Zeus' wife and sister; many myths tell of how she sought revenge when Zeus betrayed her. She spent much of her time in a jealous rage, plotting to destroy Zeus or punish his lady friends.  She was often seen with her pet peacock.  She was worshiped by women as the protector of marriage.  
  
**Roman name:** Juno  
**Symbols:** Peacock, Cow  
**Goddess of:**  Queen of gods  
**Parents:**  Kronos and Rhea  
**Appearance**: A young beautiful woman, maybe even beating out Aphrodite in some opinions.  
**Strengths:** Determined defender of the sanctity of marriage.   
**Weaknesses:** Determined defender of marriage.   
**Birthplace:** Said to be born on the island of Samos or at Argos.  **Spouse:** Zeus.   
**Children:** With Zeus, Ares. Hephaestus-by Zeus.  Her daughters were Hebe, goddess of health, and Eileithyia, the Cretan goddess of childbirth.

**Poseidon**

Poseidon was god of the sea. He was the 2nd most powerful god. He lived in a beautiful palace under the sea and caused earthquakes when he was in a temper. He was restless, he plotted to seize lands, cities, and countries of humans. He dried up lakes and rivers of people he did not trust.  He sent great tidal waves against those that made him angry.  When he rode over the seas in his golden chariot , the seas would become calm.  He invented the horse and gave it to man.  
  
**Roman name:** Neptune  
**Symbols:** Trident (a three-pronged pitchfork), Horse, Bull  
**God of:**  Seas  
**Parents:**  Kronos and Rhea  
**Birthplace**: Poseidon was born in Manteinia and was hidden by his mother among a flock of lambs and Rhea pretended that she gave birth to a horse which she presented to her husband.  
**Appearance**: Poseidon is a bearded, older man usually pictured with with seashells and other sealife.

**Strengths**: A creative god, designing all the creatures of the sea.   
**Weaknesses**: Warlike, though not so much as [Ares](http://gogreece.about.com/library/blmythares.htm); moody and unpredictable.   
**Spouse:** Amphitrite, a sea goddess.   
**Parents:** Kronos, god of time, and Rhea, goddess of the earth. Brother to the gods Zeus and Hades.   
**Children:** Many - he fathered a half-fish son, Triton, Pegasus, the flying horse, and a horse, Arion.

**Hades**

Hades ruled over the world of the dead. He lived in the underworld, a realm of wailing ghosts, howling furies, shrieking bats, lost and evil souls. No one that ever entered the Lower World was ever allowed to leave. Hades rarely visited the land of the living. He wore a helmet that made him invisible and owned everything that lay on the ground--every piece of gold, silver, diamonds, ruby, and gems. He was the brother of Zeus.  
  
**Roman name:** Pluto  
**Symbols:** Helmet, Metals, Jewels  
**God of:**  Lower World, Wealth  
**Strengths**:  He was the ruler of the dead and all of the underworld.  
**Weaknesses**: He loved Persephone, the daughter of Demeter. He was impulsive, favoring sudden, decisive actions.  
**Appearance**: Hades wore a helmet that made him invisible.   
**Parents:**  Kronos and Rhea  
**Birthplace**:   Hades was born on Mt. Olympus.

**Aphrodite**

Aphrodite was the goddess of love and beauty, and the protector of sailors. She may have been the daughter of Zeus and the Titan Dione, or she may have risen from the sea on a shell.  Aphrodite put on her magic belt that made men fall in love with her.  Aphrodite's power to love was so great that even wild lions and tigers were tamed in her presence.  
  
**Roman name:** Venus  
**Symbols:** Dove, Sparrow, Swan, Myrtle  
**Goddess of:**  Love, Beauty, Wisdom  
**Parents:**  Zeus and Dione  
**Appearance:** Gorgeous, perfect, eternally young woman with great beauty.  
**Strengths:** Attractiveness and dazzling beauty.   
**Weaknesses:** A bit stuck on herself, but with a perfect face, who can blame her?   
**Birthplace:** The island of Cyprus or Kythira.   
**Husband:** Hephaestus  
**Children:** Eros

**Apollo**

Apollo was the most loved of all gods. He was handsome, talented, charming, and honest. Apollo was the god of music and healing. He was also an archer, and hunted with a silver bow. He taught people how to comfort and cure the sick and ailing. He shot arrows into every monster that threatened anyone he loved. Apollo was the son of Zeus and the Titan Leto, and the twin of Artemis.   
  
**Roman name:** Apollo  
**Symbols:** Crow, Dolphin, Laurel, Lyre  
**God of:**  Light and Truth, Healing, Archery, Music  
**Parents:**  Zeus and Leto  
**Appearance**: A young man with curly golden hair.  
**Strengths:** Creative, handsome, supportive of all the arts of civilization.  **Weaknesses:** Like his father Zeus, Apollo gets in trouble over love.  
**Birthplace:** On the sunny Greek island of Delos, where he was born along with his twin sister, Artemis. Another tradition gives the islands of Lato, now called Paximadia, off the southern coast of Crete.   
**Spouse:** Apollo was never married.    
**Apollo's Children:** The enchanting semi-divine singer Orpheus and Asklepios, god of healing, are the most famous of Apollo's offspring.

**Ares**

Ares was the god of war. He was a fiery and bloody character that was both cruel and a coward. Ares was the son of Zeus and Hera, even his parents did not like him.  The Earth would even growl and groan beneath him as he moved. His symbols include the vulture and the dog, and he often carried a bloody spear.  
  
**Roman name:** Mars  
**Symbols:** Vulture, Dog  
**God of:** War  
**Parents:**  Zeus and Hera  
**Birthplace**:  Ares was born in Thrace, a region in what is now North Eastern Greece near the Black Sea.  
**Appearance**: A bearded, good-looking man in the prime of life.  
**Strengths:** In mythology he appears as an instigator of violence. Ares could be bloody, merciless, fearful, and cowardly.  
**Weaknesses:** Impulsive, bloodthirsty, raring for a fight regardless of the consequences.   
**Relationships:** No spouse, and his main love is war.    
**Children:** Diomedes, by the nymph Cyrene; Cycnus by Pyrene; Oenomaus by Sterope;  Eros by Aphrodite.

**Artemis**

Artemis was the goddess of the hunt and the protector of women in childbirth. She hunted with silver arrows and loved all wild animals. She would bring diseases to whole cities and then cure them. Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo.   
  
**Roman name:** Diana  
**Symbols:** Deer, Moon, Cypress Tree  
**Goddess of:**  Hunt, Moon, Children  
**Parents:**  Zeus and Leto  
**Appearance:** An eternally young woman, beautiful and vigorous.  
**Strengths/Talents:** Physically strong, able to defend herself, defender and guardian of women in childbirth and of wildlife in general.   
**Weaknesses:** Dislikes men, whom she sometimes orders torn apart. Opposes the institution of marriage and the subsequent loss of freedom it entails for women.   
**Parents:** Zeus and Leto   
**Birthplace:** The island of Delos, where she was born under a palm tree along with her twin brother Apollo.   
**Spouse:** None. She runs with her maidens in the forests.   
**Children:** None

**Athena**

Athena was the goddess of wisdom. She was born fully grown from the head of Zeus, dressed in armor. She became his favorite child. She was also skilled in the art of war, and helped heroes such as Odysseus and Hercules. She never lost a battle.  Athena invented the ship, plow, trumpet, and bridle. She knew secrets of math and taught women everywhere how to cook, sew, and weave.  
  
**Roman name:** Minerva  
**Symbols:** Owl, Shield, Olive Branch  
**Goddess of:**  Wisdom, War, Arts and Crafts, City  
**Parents:**  Zeus and Metis  
**Appearance**: A young woman wearing a helmet and holding a shield.  
**Strengths:** Rational, intelligent, a powerful defender in war but also a potent peacemaker.  **Weaknesses:** Reason rules her; she is not usually emotional or compassionate but she does have her favorites, such as the beleaguered hero Odysseus.   
**Birthplace:** From the forehead of her father Zeus.   
**Spouse:** None.   
**Children:** None.

**Hephaestus**

Hephaestus was the least good looking of all of the gods. His own mother hated him for his lack of looks. Although he made armor and weapons for the gods, he loved peace. He was unhappily married to Aphrodite.   
  
**Roman name:** Vulcan  
**Symbols:** Fire, Blacksmith's hammer  
**God of:**  Fire, Forge (a furnace in which metal is heated)  
**Parents:**  Zeus and Hera  
**Appearance**: A dark haired man who has difficulty walking due to misformed feet. Some accounts make him small in stature.  
**Strengths:** Creative, cunning, an able metal worker   
**Weaknesses:** Drink too much  liquor; can be crafty and vindictive.   
**Parents:** Usually said to be Zeus and Hera.   Hera is also said to have thrown him into the sea, where he was rescued by Thetis and her sisters.  
**Birthplace**:  Hephaestus was born from Hera's head.  The fact that he was born crippled emphasizes the superiority of males in Greek culture.  
**Spouse:** Aphrodite.   
**Children:** He created Pandora of the famous box.

**Hestia**

Hestia was the goddess of the hearth (a fireplace at the center of the home). She was the most gentle of the gods, and does not play a role in many myths. Hestia was the sister of Zeus and the oldest of the Olympians.  
  
**Roman name:** Vesta  
**Symbol:** Fire  
**Goddess of:**  Hearth  
**Parents:**  Kronos and Rhea  
**Appearance**: A sweet, modestly dressed young woman. She often is shown wearing a veil.  
**Strengths:** Constant, calm, gentle, and supportive of the family and home.   
**Weaknesses:** Cool emotionally.   
**Spouse:** Courted by Poseidon and Apollo but remained alone.  
**Children:** Hestia had no children.  
**Birthplace**: According to the common tradition, she was the first-born daughter of Rhea, and was therefore the first of the children that was swallowed by Cronus.Nothing tells of her birthplace, but the site above does mention places where she had temples and sanctuaries.

**Hermes**

Hermes was Zeus' messenger, a trickster, and a friend to thieves. He was said to have invented fire, boxing and gymnastics. The speediest of all, he wore winged sandals and a winged hat and carried a magic wand. One of his jobs was to lead the dead to Hades' Lower World.   
  
**Roman name:** Mercury  
**Symbols:** Wand, Winged Sandals, Winged Helmet  
**God of:**  Motion, Sleep and Dreams, Commerce, Travelers  
**Parents:**  Zeus and Maia  
**Appearance:** A handsome young man with a winged hat, winged sandals, and a golden staff twined with serpents.  
**Strengths:** Clever, bold, determined, athletic, a powerful magician. Can charm monsters with his flute or lyre music.   
**Weaknesses:** No major weakness unless you count seldom staying still for long. Hermes has it together.   
**Birthplace:** Born in a cave on Mount Cylene in Arcadia to Maia   
**Spouse:** Hasn't settled down yet.   
**Children:** By his affair with Dryope, Pan, lusty god of the wild; by the Goddess of Love [Aphrodite](http://gogreece.about.com/library/blmythap.htm), Hermaphroditus, a half-man, half-woman deity; Abderus (mother unknown).

**Demeter**

The word “cereal” comes from her Roman name. She was the sister of Zeus. Her daughter, Persephone, was forced to live with Hades each winter; at this time Demeter let no crops grow.  
  
**Roman name:** Ceres  
**Symbol:** Wheat  
**Goddess of:**  Harvest  
**Parents:**  Kronos and Rhea  
**Demeter's Appearance:** Pleasant-looking mature woman, generally with a veil over her head though her face is visible. Often carrying wheat or her Horn.  
**Strengths:** Demeter controls the fertility of the earth as goddess of Agriculture; also gives life after death to those who learn her Mysteries.   
**Weaknesses:** Not one to cross lightly. After the kidnapping of her daughter Persephone, Demeter blights the earth and won't let the plants grow. But who can blame her? Zeus gave Hades permission to "marry" Persephone but whoops! didn't mention it to her or her Mom.   
**Birthplace:** Not known   
**Spouse:** Not married.   
**Children:** Persephone-  Zeus is generally said to be her father.