

WHAT THE WORLD WAS LIKE

The victorious gods divided the world amongst themselves. Here is what the Ancient Greeks believed their world was like.

Mount Olympus

Earth

Earth was where humans lived. In mythical times many weird and dangerous creatures were supposed to live there, too. Greek heroes often had to fight these monsters, as you will read later in this book.

The gods frequently visited the Earth. They sometimes made friends with humans or came in disguise, rewarding or punishing people according to how they treated the gods.

Sometimes they even fell in love with humans and had children with them. Many of the heroes of the Greek myths were born in this way and were half-human and half-god.

The Underworld

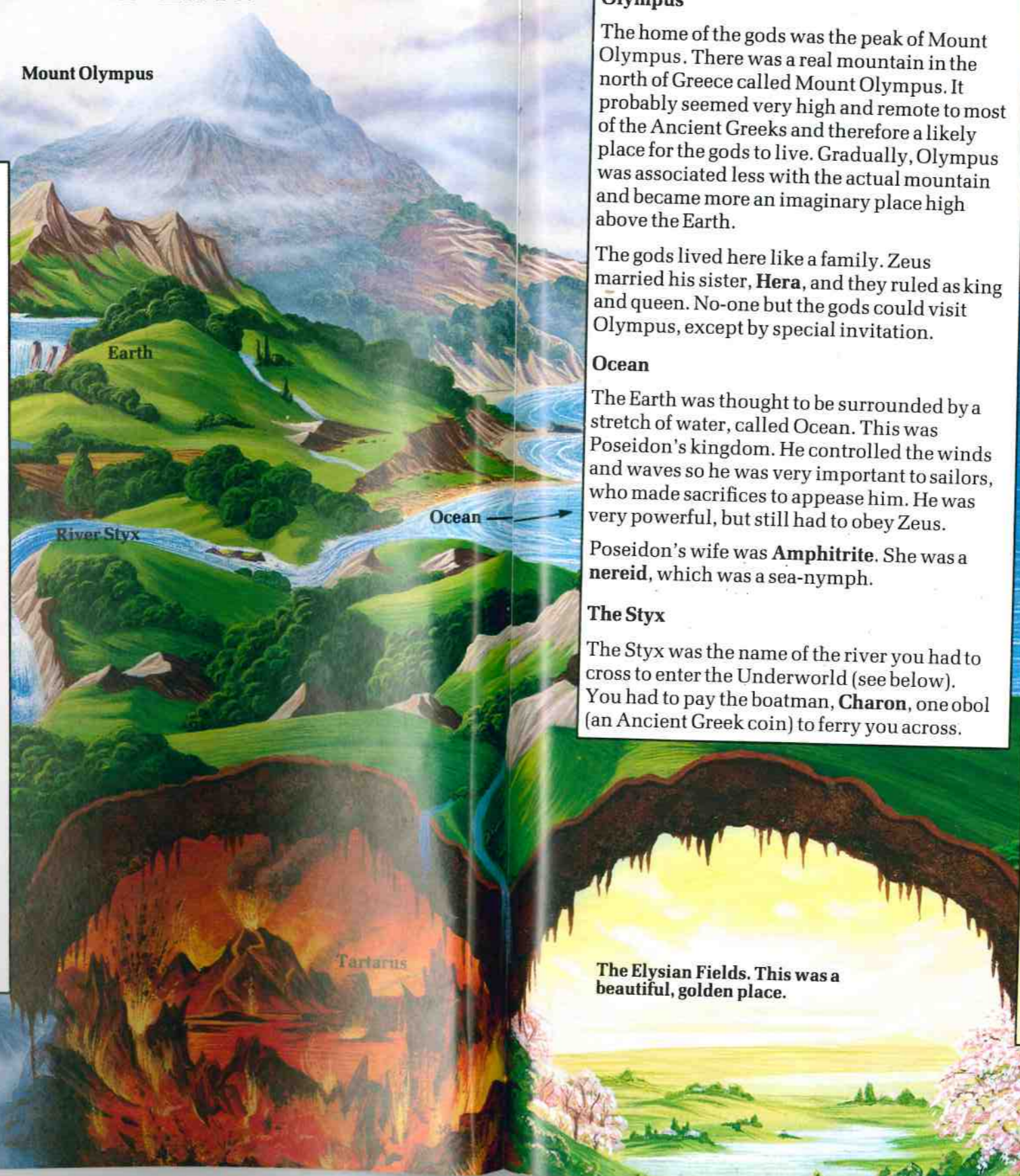
Zeus's brother, **Pluto**, ruled the Underworld, or Hades. Everyone went there when they died. There were three parts:

Most ordinary people wandered around the Asphodel Fields as "shades", which were shadowy versions of their earthly selves.

Tartarus was the place of punishment for really evil people. You can read about some of the tortures they suffered on pages 26-27.

Exceptionally good or heroic people were reserved a place in the Elysian Fields. This was a golden, blissful place of rest.

You could be sent back to Earth to live another life, but if you earned a place in the Elysian Fields three times you were allowed to go to the Isles of the Blessed, and never had to leave.



Olympus

The home of the gods was the peak of Mount Olympus. There was a real mountain in the north of Greece called Mount Olympus. It probably seemed very high and remote to most of the Ancient Greeks and therefore a likely place for the gods to live. Gradually, Olympus was associated less with the actual mountain and became more an imaginary place high above the Earth.

The gods lived here like a family. Zeus married his sister, **Hera**, and they ruled as king and queen. No-one but the gods could visit Olympus, except by special invitation.

Ocean

The Earth was thought to be surrounded by a stretch of water, called Ocean. This was Poseidon's kingdom. He controlled the winds and waves so he was very important to sailors, who made sacrifices to appease him. He was very powerful, but still had to obey Zeus.

Poseidon's wife was **Amphitrite**. She was a **neriid**, which was a sea-nymph.

The Styx

The Styx was the name of the river you had to cross to enter the Underworld (see below). You had to pay the boatman, **Charon**, one obol (an Ancient Greek coin) to ferry you across.

Demeter, Persephone and Pluto

This is the story of how **Persephone** became Pluto's wife and Queen of the Underworld.

Demeter was goddess of plants and harvests. She made everything grow and ripen. Her daughter, Persephone, was her companion and helper.

Pluto admired Persephone and decided he wanted her as his wife. He asked Zeus's permission but did not receive a firm answer as Zeus knew that Demeter would never agree, but did not wish to offend his brother by a refusal. One day, Pluto found Persephone alone and, saying to himself that Zeus had not forbidden him to marry her, seized her and carried her down to Hades.

When Demeter found her daughter had gone, she neglected the plants and trees to search for her. Without her care, the harvests failed and everything withered and died.

After a long search, she discovered that Persephone was Pluto's prisoner and pleaded with Zeus to make him release her. The gods agreed that Zeus should do something as humans were in danger of starving since no crops would grow.

Zeus said Persephone should be freed, as long as she had not tasted any of the food of the dead. In her misery she had not eaten at all, but just before her release Pluto tempted her to try a few pomegranate seeds from his garden.

"Since you have eaten from Pluto's garden," said Zeus to Persephone, "you must spend part of each year in Hades with him. The rest you may spend on Earth with your mother."

So every year, when Persephone was with Pluto, Demeter would mourn, plants died and it was winter. When Persephone returned, Demeter was happy again, things began to blossom and it was spring.