

Mythikas Island
The Companion

Diana Hurwitz

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The Challenge

The story is, in essence, a Golden Fleece tale. It is not so much the end destination as the internal and interpersonal lessons that are learned that matter. The challenge was a synthesis of several ideas. I researched ancient Sparta and learned they trained both girls and boys. Then they were tested to determine whether they would become part of the elite fighting community or live as middle class merchants and trades-people. During the same time frame, I read about the tests our armed forces put soldiers through to become a member of the Special Forces. Mixing those elements together, I decided the Titans would send their children on a survival challenge to earn a seat on the ruling council. The inductees had to be alone with no outside interference and placing them on a deserted island set the stage for calamity. It also forced them to rely on one another even if they did not like or understand one another.

The Setting

The model for Mythikas was the Greek island Rhodes. I picked September when storms often rage in the Mediterranean. I took liberties with descriptions of the terrain since the events occur over 5,000 years ago. I read about Santorini and wondered what happened when an entire island was destroyed. Where did the survivors go? That is where I came up with the problems between the Titans and Heliots. The Titans are a fair-haired race who survived the destruction of their own island. Because their seers warned them of its demise, they set off in boats and made it to Helios. Having superior technology, i.e. weapons, husbandry, farming, they easily took over the Heliots' hunter-gatherer way of life and put the natives to work re-creating their palaces. It is amid this turmoil that the girls are forced to become leaders. The two preceding generations have made a mess and they will have to deal with the fall-out. It is not so different from the world our children live in today. The natural world is unstable with storms and natural disasters. Governments are in flux. The world feels scary and unpredictable. I injected ancient concepts such as belief in runes, auras and natural healing to add dimension to the characters. It is possible they knew more about natural medicine than we know now and they would have had superstitions of some kind. The concept of the Greek gods was not yet a reality, so they were in the beginning stages of developing a belief system.

The Characters

I have always been fascinated by Greek myths and female deities. The idea of writing stories surrounding goddesses and feminine power resonated with me. Not many stories in fiction's cannon show girls being groomed as future leaders. Thus the idea of putting teen girls into a survival situation to prove themselves capable of leadership was born. The characters chose me. The number four felt right. Their personalities emerged as I chose the perils they would face. Diana came to me first. I chose the Roman "Diana" instead of the Greek "Artemis" because the latter had male connotations for me and I already had two characters beginning with "A." I pictured Diana as the untested, striving protagonist. I next selected Athena as the older sister and Diana's nemesis. Athena is the warrior. She represents leadership, justice, and wisdom. The other two took a little longer to develop. I made Persephone the healer because her mythological character represented the birth-death cycle of the seasons. It was after writing about Persephone's grandmother's necklace that I read about Obouros, the symbol of the snake swallowing its tail. The snake is used on the caduceus, the medical symbol, and that is why I chose to use a snake. Finding out about the actual Obouros was synchronicity. I decided to make Aphrodite the emotional one and gave her talents of a more mystical nature. The conflicts between Persephone and Aphrodite were those of fact over fiction and reason versus emotion.

Diana, The Archer

Age: 16 ☐ Nationality: Titan ☐ Parents: Zeus & Leto

Skills: Archery, gymnastics, knowledge of animal behavior.

Leadership Style: Perceptive, innovative, secretive and detached, curious, provocative and eccentric. Dislikes intrusions on her time and space, attracted to depth and learning. She is a tireless student and experimenter, especially in specialized or technical matters. She likes to understand in detail and spends time on research. She follows her curiosity wherever it leads. She is highly analytical and preoccupied, not paying attention to time constraints or relationships. She can deteriorate into arrogance and noncommunication, intellectual bickering and one-upmanship. At her best, she is a visionary and pioneer, bolding going where no one has gone before.

Persephone, The Healer

Age: 18 ☐ Nationality: Heliot ☐ Parents: Demeter & Theos (son of Gaia)

Skills: Natural Medicine, knowledge of plants and poisons.

Leadership Style: Committed, responsible, anxious and suspicious, engaging, loyal and likeable. She dislikes unpredictability and rapid change. She is attracted to clear structure and foresight. She is a diligent and reliable worker. She builds alliances and partnerships that help others and scans the environment for potential problems. She dislikes taking risks and wants consensus and predictability. She can be indecisive and have difficulty taking responsibility or action without group authority and can deteriorate into evasiveness and blaming others. At her best, she is self-reliant, independent and courageous, often calling a group back to its root values.

Aphrodite, The Seer

Age: 17 ☐ Nationality: Titan ☐ Parents: Poseidon & Dione

Skills: Divination through runes, omens, intuition, auras.

Leadership Style: Spontaneous, versatile, talkative and scattered, accomplished, upbeat and impulsive. She dislikes limitations and routines and is attracted to new possibilities and excitement. She thrives on change, variety and innovation. Articulate and humorous, she is able to get others to support her ideas. She is in touch with the latest trends and is constantly looking for new options. She is a natural multi-tasker but can also get overextended and lacks follow-through. She can deteriorate into endless talk and distractions, scattering her energy and talents and leaving many projects unfinished. At her best, she is focused on worthwhile goals and can become highly productive and accomplished.

Athena, The Warrior

Age: 17 ☐ Nationality: Titan ☐ Parents: Zeus & Metis

Skills: Chariot driving, hand to hand combat, animal trainer.

Leadership Style: Self confident, decisive, willful and confrontational, powerful, commanding and hard driving. Dislikes indecisiveness and indirectness. Attracted to strength and strategic action. Has a clear vision of what she wants and sees serious problems as challenges to be met, obstacles to be overcome. Wants to be in control and finds it difficult to delegate tasks or share leadership. Champions people, wants to protect and empower them but can deteriorate into intimidation to get her way. She makes unnecessary enemies both within and outside of her group. At her best she is magnanimous and generous and uses her strength to improve other's lives.

The Myths

There are many fascinating stories about the Titans and the Greek & Roman gods. The interest in them has transcended generations. It was a rich source of material for my very human characters.

I was told that there was no point in writing about mythological characters if I was not going to give them god-like powers or write about the actual mythical events portrayed by Homer, but that did not interest me. I imagined a race of humans who might have inspired the stories. That is where the fun and richness resided for me. Repeating what had already been said about them felt redundant. I wanted to add a different dimension. Where possible, I incorporated some details from actual myths.

Diana/Artemis, daughter of Zeus and Leto and twin to Apollo, was revered as goddess of forests, hills, virginity and the hunt. She was often depicted as carrying a bow and arrows accompanied by her hunting hounds. The deer and cypress trees were sacred to her.

In one tale, three-year-old Artemis asked her father to grant her lop-eared hounds among other wishes.

Diana was also known for turning a guy named Acteon, who dared to spy on her while bathing, into a stag. She then hunted him down.

Although Diana was identified as a goddess of fertility and one who helped women conceive, she is never paired with other gods in terms of a mate. She is eternally chaste, which is why I chose to make her stance on marriage one of distaste.

Her mother, Leto, in one tale, was reportedly sent snakes by Hera. In another myth, Leto was prevented from reaching land to deliver her twins, Diana and Apollo, because a large snake was following her. Hera reportedly hated this mistress of Zeus and was not happy about the birth of the twins.

Apollo is the day and Diana, the night. He is the son Zeus is most proud of and is expected to eventually take Zeus's place as head of the council. In my version, Diana lives in her magnificent brother's shadow and resents how much everyone adores him, though, she loves her twin and he is the only one she really trusts.

Ares is the god of war. I chose to make him the evil half-brother. The one no one can trust, skulking in the shadows cast by his brilliant siblings. He is Hera's son and she has big ambitions for him.

Dionysus was the god of wine. I used that reference to have him struggle with the fallout

from the challenge with Ares, Apollo and Pan. The actual back-story of what happened when the four boys went to Mythikas is never fully revealed, though I had it figured out in my mind. I have been asked if I will explore their story in a “prequel.” I won’t answer a definite “No,” though that wasn’t my original plan.

Pan was the god of the fields, groves and wooded glens. He was often depicted as playing a pipe. In some stories he has the hind quarters of a goat. I chose to play with that idea and gave him the affliction of never walking without aid due to injuries he received during the challenge. He was master of the lute and I used that as well. He is said to have given Artemis lop-eared hounds and to have taught Apollo the art of prophecy.

Zeus was the youngest son of Cronus and Rhea. Other siblings included: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon. Supposedly, Cronus swallowed them all as soon as they were born, since he had learned from Gaia and Uranus that he was destined to be overcome by his own son as he had overthrown his own father. Zeus was born and did indeed overthrow his father and free his siblings.

In most tales, he was married to Hera and they are attributed with three children: Ares, Hebe and Hephaestus. Hera was a vengeful, jealous wife, for ample reasons.

Zeus was a womanizer and had many children with other women including: Aphrodite (with Dione), Athena (with Metis), Apollo and Artemis (with Leto), Hermes (with Maia), Persephone (by Demeter), Dionysus (with Semele) and several others.

I chose to do something slightly different with Persephone in terms of parentage and made her the daughter of Zeus's sister Demeter and Theos, son of Gaia. In my story, Gaia was wisewoman to the Heliots. When the Titans came, they mistakenly believed that her son, Theos, was the leader of the Heliots. Zeus forced Demeter to marry him to strengthen their hold over the island. It didn't work. Gaia was the leader, not her son, and Persephone is destined to become the next wisewoman and take her grandmother's place.

The Persephone/Proserpina/Kore and Demeter myths spawned entire cults that ranged from the innocent to the macabre. They were the basis for many ceremonies that celebrated fertility and death, the cycle of life and the cycle of the seasons.

The most well known story revolves around Persephone's abduction by Hades. In one version of the story Persephone is out gathering flowers. Hades sees her and desires her and he takes her to the underworld in his chariot to be his bride. Persephone is tricked into eating a pomegranate

seed and so she must reside with her husband for part of the year. Demeter scorches the earth when her daughter is kidnapped and refuses to let things grow while her daughter is forced to live in the underworld with Hades. Thus one explanation for why we have the seasons.

Though I chose to play with the idea of Persephone's abduction, I did not choose to focus on the more brutal aspects of her tale. It was an artistic choice and I took into consideration the age of some of my readers.

I chose to make Hades, god of the underworld, a "body-bearer". In some cultures, those who were responsible for transporting the dead to their final resting place were considered unclean and lived apart from the rest of the community. When Hera wanted someone to get rid of little Persephone, she ordered Hades to do it. But Hades couldn't bring himself to kill her.

As in the myths surrounding death and life, it is the healers of the world who help women bring forth life and heal the sick. There are those who help people with their passage from this life. It is a very compassionate duty and, in my opinion, one of the most sacred services a person can perform in this world.

Although Persephone does not herself profess to perform magic, she uses natural healing. To many, that is practical magic. From the healers of

old who practiced the laying on of hands to those who master the art of Reiki, many believe we can manipulate the energy that runs through our bodies. That was my inspiration for the final scene where Persephone revives Diana. It was fitting that the Persephone character, whose myths involve death and resurrection, should be given this role.

I chose to alter Aphrodite's parentage as well. In most stories, Aphrodite/Venus supposedly rises from the sea fully formed. However, in Roman mythology she was the daughter of Jupiter and Dione. Homer wrote that she was the daughter of Zeus and Dione. It worked better for my story to make her the daughter of Poseidon and Dione rather than sister to Diana and Athena. Poseidon is the god of the sea and that inspired me to make him the one who, supposedly, explores the River Ocean and oversees the fishermen.

Aphrodite was the goddess of love, forced by Zeus to marry the ugly Hephaestus/Vulcan, god of blacksmiths, metallurgy and volcanoes. Unhappy with her marriage, she reportedly sought comfort with various lovers including Adonis and Ares. I drew from that her impending arranged marriage to Hephaestus and her love for the Heliot, Adonis.

In one version of the tale, Persephone agreed to hide Adonis from Aphrodite's jealous husband. She fell in love with Adonis too and refused to release him from the underworld to be with

Aphrodite. Zeus intervened and mandated that Adonis had to spend a third of the year with Persephone, a third with Aphrodite and would be left on his own for the remainder of the year.

It was Adonis's love of hunting that caused his death. Aphrodite warned him the woods were dangerous, but he went hunting anyway. He was gored by a wild boar and died in Aphrodite's arms. This was my inspiration for the tragic events at the end of Book Three on Mythikas Island.

I struggled most with Aphrodite's story. How do you make a character who is struggling with delusions a compelling narrator? I was happy with the results. Even though Aphrodite had to endure tragedy, she overcame it and ended up stronger than when she went into the story. She proved she has something to offer to very dissimilar cousins.

In some versions of the myths, Athena/Minerva sprang fully formed from Jupiter's head. In others, her mother was Metis and her father was Zeus. In fact, she was known as Zeus's favorite child.

Athena was said to be jealous of a young woman named Arachne, who proclaimed herself a better weaver than Athena. In return, Arachne was turned into a spider. So, Athena could be quite arrogant and vengeful, but if she were on your side, you were certain to win.

Athena also remained single and considered herself to be as good a warrior as any man.

Athena was known as the goddess of justice and wisdom. She was fearless and is often depicted wearing armor and carrying a spear. She had an affinity for the owl and the olive tree.

At times, she is called Pallas Athena. In one tale, Pallas was Athena's best friend. During a sparring incident, Athena accidentally delivered a fatal blow and, blaming herself for her friend's death, added Pallas to her name so Pallas would never be forgotten. That was my inspiration for Athena's "ghost" encounter on Mythikas. What is scarier than seeing someone you thought you killed walk right up to you?

As islands grew and became submerged, it was inevitable that isolated civilizations would learn of one another and meet. In the time of the River Ocean, the ancient Greeks were not aware of the greater world. They had knowledge of only two other bands of humans: The Aethiopeans to the south and the Hyperboreans to the North. It is suggested that the Hyperboreans' lands lay within the Arctic Circle. Some scholars suggest they were Celtic and their home was Ireland or England. Though another description said their home was inaccessible by land or sea. Their caverns were supposed to send forth the piercing blasts of the

north wind. Apollo was rumored to spend his winters among them.

They were known to have an affinity for feasting and a love of gold. Some scholars suggest Hyperborea was Scandinavia since the peninsula is crossed by the Arctic Circle, north of which they experience the “white nights” of summer and deep, dark winters. This was my inspiration for the strangers who come ashore on Mythikas after a brief stop on Helios to gather supplies and converts.

In my version the Hyperboreans left their land to settle where there was no fighting. Along the way, they lost all but two brothers. When they arrived at Helios they found people willing to help them but also realized Helios was on the verge of civil war. Having no desire to stay in such a place, they decide to move on, taking Helios and Titans with them.

The tsunami wrecks them on Mythikas Island and that set up the conflicts that plague Book Four: Athena.

Choosing to explore the idea that actual humans might have inspired the myths supplied fertile ground for my imagination. So many “stories” sprout from seeds of truth. Many will disagree with my premise, but I say, “Why not? It’s possible.”

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After all, every myth had to begin somewhere!

I have been asked by my critique group if I will tell the tale of what happens after Mythikas. My answer, for now is, we'll have to wait and see...

Suggested Reading List

1) The Iliad By Homer, Robert Fagles, Bernard MacGregor, Walker Knox - Penguin

2) The Odyssey By Homer, Frederic Will - Pocket Books

3) Bulfinch's Mythology The Age of Fable or Stories of Gods and Heroes by Thomas Bulfinch

4) The Greek Gods by Bernard Evslin, Bernard Evslin, Dorothy Evslin, Hoopes And Evslin, Evslin Evslin, Ned Hoopes - Scholastic Paperbacks

5) MacMillan Book of Greek Gods and Heroes by Alice Lowe, Illustrated by Arvis Stewart - MacMillan

6) The Library of Greek Mythology by Apollodorus, with Robin Hard (Translator) - Oxford University Press.

7) The Spartans by Paul Cartledge – Overlook Hardcover

8) Plutarch on Sparta by Plutarch (Author), Richard J. A. Talbert (Editor, Introduction, Translator - Penguin Classics

9) The Minoans by Don Nardo - Lucent Books

10) The Minoan World By Arthur Cotterell - Scribner

11) The Volcanic Eruption on Santorini, 1650 BCE By Jim Whiting - Mitchell Lane Publishers, Incorporated

12) The Oracle: Ancient Delphi And the Science Behind Its Lost Secrets by William J. Broad - Penguin Books

13) Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths by Bernard Evslin and William Hofmann (Illustrator) - Bantam Books, Inc.

14) The Universe, the Gods, and Men: Ancient Greek Myths by Jean Pierre Vernant - Harper Collins Publishers

15) Greek Myths by Olivia E. Collidge and Edouard Sandoz (Illustrator) - Houghton Mifflin Company

16) Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Histories by Jared M. Diamond - Norton

* Note: There are many books written on the above topics. This lists only a few and is not intended to be comprehensive.

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Reading Group Questions

Book One: Diana

1. Given the circumstances do you feel Diana was compelled to go on the challenge by external pressures because she was given no choice, or because some part of her truly wanted to prove she was worthy?
2. How does Diana's view of herself correspond to that of the people around her?
3. Does she view the adults in her life objectively or does she have prejudices about them that keep her from seeing them clearly?
4. Have their different personalities kept Diana and Athena from being friends? Would they have become closer if they had been more alike?
5. How does growing up without a mother affect Diana's choices?
6. If Apollo had been a sister instead of a brother, would that have made Diana's childhood a different experience?
7. How does Diana blaming herself for her mother's death affect her choices?
8. Do you feel that Diana has proven she could be a leader or that she still has more work to do before she would be a good one?
9. Do you think Athena views Diana in a more positive light once she proves that she can shoot when required?
10. How do the characters remind you of friendships you've had?
11. How do the relationships with family members affect their lives, in a good way? In a bad way?

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12. Does living in a time where the world was believed to be small and finite affect the types of options the girls have for their lives? How were the options different then? How are the options the same today?
13. Does putting the girls in a dangerous situation truly prepare them to be leaders or was it wrong to place them in that position?
14. How does being in the challenge force them to overcome their differences?
15. Do you consider Athena to be a good leader?
16. How do you think the challenge will affect the rest of Diana's life?
17. If you could invite this author to your classroom or book club, what else would you like to know about the characters?
18. Did the having the characters portrayed as humans rather than gods make them more or less relatable?
19. What would like to see in Diana's future?
20. Did Diana resolve her personal problems or create new ones?

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Reading Group Questions
Book Two: Persephone

1. Given the circumstances, do you feel Persephone was compelled to go on the challenge by external pressures? Did she exercise free will?
2. How does Persephone's view of the Titans affect the way she interacts with her cousins? If they had all been Heliots would she have behaved differently?
3. Did Persephone's upbringing by her grandmother unfairly bias her toward her cousins?
4. If her cousins had not been Titans, would their personality types have kept them from being friends anyway?
5. How does growing up without her mother and father affect Persephone's choices?
6. If Persephone had grown up on Mt. Olympus, how might that have changed her? Would she have resented the Titans more because she was different?
7. Do you feel Persephone has proven she could lead? What would her strengths be? What would her weaknesses be?
8. How does being a healer influence her outlook on their situation?
9. How does being a healer affect the way the others view her?
10. How do Persephone's unresolved issues with her mother affect her choices?
11. How does her relationship with her grandmother alter her life? In a good way? In a negative way?

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12. How does living in a place governed by people with a different belief system affect Persephone's life choices?
13. Did placing Persephone in a dangerous situation ultimately benefit or further damage her?
14. How did the challenge force her to overcome her prejudices? Or did it?
15. What do you think Persephone would chose to do when she returned home? Fight or work toward peace?
16. How will the events in this book affect the rest of their lives?
17. If you could invite the author to your book club, what else would you like to know about the characters?
18. Did having the characters portrayed as humans from different cultures make them more or less relatable?
19. What would you like to see in Persephone's future?
20. Did the challenge resolve Persephone's personal problems or create new ones?

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Reading Group Questions
Book Three: Aphrodite

1. Given the circumstances, why do you feel Aphrodite submitted to the challenge?
2. How does Aphrodite's relationship with Adonis color her view of Persephone?
3. How does Aphrodite's being raised as a seer affect her relationships with her cousins?
4. Her personality type is very different from the others. Does it prevent her from bonding with them?
5. How does growing up with what she believed were a loving mother and father effect her choices?
6. How does her father's betrayal affect her outlook on life and love?
7. What would Aphrodite's strengths as a leader be? What would her weaknesses be?
8. How is being overly sensitive a weakness; how is it a strength?
9. In what ways do her gifts change the way she influences others?
10. Aphrodite believed very strongly in trying to divine the future, is this a good thing or a bad thing?
11. Aphrodite is the only one of the four that has experienced "true love". In what ways does that add to her maturity level?
12. Aphrodite starts out with a very optimistic view of the life she wants. How does the challenge change her view of life?

13. Did placing Aphrodite in a dangerous situation ultimately benefit or further damage her?
14. How did the challenge force her to overcome her prejudices? Or did it?
15. What do you think Aphrodite would choose to do when she returned home, fight or work toward peace?
16. How will the scars she had earned, both physical and emotional, effect the rest of her life?
17. If you could invite the author to your book club, what else would you like to know about Aphrodite?
18. Did portraying Aphrodite as someone who indulges in “magical thinking” make her more or less relatable?
19. What would you like to see in Aphrodite’s future?
20. Will the challenge ruin Aphrodite’s chance for future happiness or will she emerge stronger and wiser because of it?

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Reading Group Questions

Book Three: Athena

1. Athena accepted the challenge to prove something to her father. Did she succeed?
2. Athena started out a bully. How did the challenge change her tactics?
3. What were Athena's strengths as a leader? Her weaknesses?
4. How did growing up without her mother affect Athena's choices?
5. How did being Zeus's favorite child color her childhood?
6. Do you feel Athena will make a good leader given all she has experienced?
7. Pallas's "death" affected the way Athena dealt with everyone else. If Pallas had gone with Athena instead of Diana, how would their story have been different? Would the challenge have strained their friendship?
8. Athena is forced to use persuasion instead of brawn. If she had not broken her arm, how do you think the situation would have been different?
9. How do you think losing Pallas on Mythikas will color Athena's future?
10. Given all they learned, do you think their parents placed them on Mythikas to test them or protect them?
11. The Hyperboreans left their home to find a new one. Do you think they were bad men?
12. How did the stories about Hyperboreans affect the way they were received and viewed?

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13. How did the challenge force Athena to overcome her prejudices?
14. How did finding out about the other tribes and lands affect them?
15. What will it mean for their future?
16. Pallas and Athena always wanted to explore. Do you think Athena will explore without her?
17. The relationship between Athena and Diana has changed over the course of the challenge. In what ways?
18. If you could invite the author to your book club, what else would you like to know about the characters?
19. What do you think the future holds for the characters?
20. What would you like to see in Athena's future?