

Minisode 1: The Furies

[intro music]

Welcome, demigods, to a special minisode of *Myths and Muses*! I'm your host, Cass, daughter of Clio, the Muse of History.

While I am still on the research trip my mother and aunts decided to send me on, they *also* thought it was important, with *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* now airing on Disney+, that I send in a few mini-episodes to help viewers of the series get to know some of the characters and creatures they're seeing on-screen. (So, be warned! These episodes *will* have some spoilers for the most recently aired episodes of the show!)

I gotta say, I did not know it was possible to get streaming video service on Themiscyra, but... they actually have really fast wifi.

So – a *lot* happened in those first two episodes, huh? I have so many characters and creatures to choose from – but I think I'd like to talk about one whose presence hints at something much larger in the plot. Don't worry, no spoilers! But maybe a few hints to get you thinking about how things are going to unfold...

Let's talk about the target of Percy's first sword-slashing victory: The Kindly One.

The Kindly Ones are also known as... And I'm going to hope that, being here on Themiscyra *and* under the Muses' protection *and* it totally being for scholarly purposes, I ... won't get in trouble for saying their names...

They're also known as the Erinyes, the Eumenides, or the Furies.

[long pause; crickets]

Okay! No imminent portents of doom falling on me, guess the scholar loophole is working. I'm going to call them the Furies for the rest of this podcast, that name being, well, easier to say than Erinyes or Eumenides.

The Furies are goddesses of vengeance in Greek and Roman mythology. They are often considered the children of Nyx, goddess of the night, sometimes on her own and sometimes with Pluto (only in Roman versions, hence the Roman version of his name). In other stories, they were born when Kronos defeated his father Ouranos. Famously, Ouranos's blood fell into the sea and created Aphrodite, born from the sea-foam – but the blood that fell on *land* is said to have given birth to the Furies.

They often appear in threes, but their total number is never given. Virgil names three of them in the Aeneid, and their names... kind of give you an indication about their nature: Alecto which means "endless anger", Megaera which means "jealous rage", and Tisiphone which means "vengeful destruction".

Hey, at least you... know what you're getting!

They appear as women clothed in black, usually crones with white hair, and they often have wings. Serpents twine around their arms and hair, and in the act of pursuing vengeance, they will shake the serpents loose. In fact, in some Greek art you can see them... throwing the snakes at whoever it is they're pursuing. Which, ah... yeah, I'd find that pretty unnerving.

The Furies punished mortals who committed crimes against the natural order. Exactly what that means is... sort of up to interpretation. Some are pretty obvious: children who kill their parents, parents who kill their children, offenses against the gods, swearing false oaths... but the Furies might also punish a nation which harbored a fugitive criminal, bringing plagues and famine down upon the people. Which... seems a little harsh. It's not like most of the citizens would have anything to do with hiding the criminal.

[Melpomene text]

Ah! That's Aunt Mel – Melpomene, muse of tragedy – reminding me to tell *her* favorite story involving the Furies. It's also probably their most famous story: their persecution of Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, as told by the Greek playwright Aeschylus, in a series of famous tragic plays.

[Orestes music]

To understand how Orestes landed himself in such trouble, we have to back up a bit, to before the Trojan War.

Orestes's father, Agamemnon, led the Greek forces in the Trojan War. Before they left, however, he sacrificed his own daughter, Iphigenia, to secure favorable winds for their thousand ships. This understandably enraged his wife and Iphigenia's mother, Clytemnestra.

For ten years, she waited – and then, when Agamemnon returned home after the war, she murdered him. Worst homecoming ever – *but* he kind'a deserved it, if you ask me.

Several years later, the god Apollo orders Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's son, Orestes, to avenge his father by killing his mother. And you have to do what gods tell you to do, right? With the help of his cousin Pylades and sister Elektra, Orestes comes up with a plan to kill Clytemnestra. Even so, he hesitates at the crucial moment – until Pylades reminds him that, y'know, *Apollo* had ordered it!

So, Orestes kills his mother – but with her dying breath, Clytemnestra curses him. That curse is what brings the Furies down upon him.

The Furies pursue Orestes, driving him to madness, forcing him to see his mother's ghost. They chase him across mountains and through forests, never letting him rest.

...Until, the Furies apparently decide to take a little nap-nap themselves. I guess even primordial forces need a rest now and again? Apollo (who, after all, is the one who got Orestes into this mess) and Hermes helps Orestes get to Athens, where he pleads to Athena for help.

Athena decided, hey! This is a great opportunity to try out this new thing I've come up with: a courtroom trial. She rounds up twelve Athenian citizens and has them hear the first murder case. The Furies put forward the evidence that they're just doing their job, y'know? They were called upon to avenge a matricide, so that's what they're doing. Orestes admits that, yes, he did kill his mother – but it was on a god's orders! To defy a god would *also* be a crime against nature, so, really, what was he supposed to do?

The vote comes down to a tie, which is broken by Athena. She acquits Orestes of guilt and purifies him of his crime.

Not wanting the Furies to be annoyed with her, however, Athena also comes up with something new for them: rather than only persecuting wrongdoers, they will now also be responsible for protecting the city of Athens and worshiped as venerable goddesses. This placates them, and they let Orestes get on with his life.

[music out]

The Furies didn't end up working for Athena full-time, though. Throughout Greek mythology, we see them pursuing other characters who have done some terrible deed, like Medea and Oedipus. They also have a side hustle in the Underworld! After the shades of the dead are judged, they get handed over to the Furies, who purify the good of their sins but drag the wicked off to Tartarus.

So... If someone has sent a Kindly One after Percy Jackson... *why*? What crime do they think he's committed? And who, exactly, would have summoned them?

If you've read the book, then you know the answer – but will it play out the same way on-screen? I guess we'll all have to keep watching to find out! If you'd like to know more about the Furies, I'll drop some links in the show notes.

[fade in outro music]

Until next time, demigods, stay brave out there! And thanks for listening to this special episode of *Myths & Muses*, brought to you by Mythik Camps, a division of Plato Learning. To learn more about our summer camps – Camp Half-Blood, Camp Jupiter, Daring Girls, and Camp Mythik – mythikcamps.com, that's mythik with a k, m-y-t-h-i-k-c-a-m-p-s .com, or find us on Facebook and Instagram.