

## The Fisherman and the Hourglass of the Gods

by James Wong

The sun was just cresting the Attican hills as Nikos pulled in the nets, his muscular arms straining against the weight of the catch. Last night's storm had churned the sea beds, battering the reefs, so the fish were particularly frenzied as they fed in food-rich waters. He prayed to Poseidon under his breath, already promising to pay homage at the Temple of Sounion in gratitude for such a bountiful catch.

It took all his strength to haul the net onto the caïque. As he sorted through his catch, he noticed a barnacled object. Upon closer inspection, he made out the shape of an hourglass. This was indeed a find! He had heard of the craftsmen among the Mycenaean Greeks who made such things, and once cleaned up, it was sure to fetch a tidy sum at the market.

There were just a few hawkers at the market now, haggling unconvincingly with some townspeople as the once-thrumming agora wound down. Nikos was leaving with a prize bass he had kept back from his catch, two amphorae full of grain, four bushels of dried lavender, enough dried figs to last until the month of Hekatombaion, and he still had the barnacled hourglass.

Exhausted but intrigued, he carefully cleaned the hourglass. Darkness flooded the room as the candle flickered in a puff of smoke. The moonlight caught the hourglass, igniting the contents, which gleamed a blue phosphorescence, seemingly defying gravity.

Nikos decided to visit a merchant the next morning to find out more about it. That he dreamt of the Horae, goddesses who guarded the gates of Olympus and rallied the stars. In his dream, they eyed him with foreboding, pointing to the hourglass. A great lament filled the air.

"There's a great devil in the universe, and we call it Time," cried the goddesses as they levitated upwards and away from the trembling Earth. As its crust broke open a titan burst forth with a roar; rocks, dust, and lava consuming everything around it. Nikos woke, gasping for breath.

Understanding the dream to be a sign, Nikos realised the titan must have been Chronos, son of Mother Earth and Father Sky, Ruler of the Golden Age, and the Father of Time. Could this be the hourglass of the gods? Then he must at once return it, for surely no good would come of keeping it.

Nikos wrapped the hourglass in a linen cloth and began to make his way to the Hill of Cronus on the island of Gadir. It was a four-week journey by boat, weather permitting.

This was a nuisance really, but Nikos was comforted in the belief his efforts would be viewed favourably by Chronos.

Nikos had some time before his ship sailed, and he got to wondering. It was really quite inconvenient to take over two months to make this pilgrimage to Gadir.

"Hermes, oh illustrious messenger and benevolent protector of travellers, may you grace me with a safe and speedy passage," he uttered solemnly, "and if you just happen to be in the neighbourhood and heading my way, then a winged ride wouldn't go amiss," he added flippantly.

No sound of beating wings or the heavens opening was to be heard.

'Oh, to have the powers of a god,' he mused. 'Not something for mere mortal men like me,' he thought. 'Unless...' He felt the contours of the hourglass through the linen cloth, and an idea came to him.

"Surely, Chronos would rather have his hourglass back sooner than later. I mean, who could argue with that?"

So Nikos made his way to a back alley by the docks and unwrapped the hourglass. Its blue effervescence undulated within. He ran his hands over the silver framework, feeling the intricacy of the patterns and symbols. Staring deep into it he wished himself already at the foot of the Hill of Cronus.

Blue-black shadows thickened around him, and as they parted, he felt the hair on his arms and legs stand on end as cold air enveloped him. He looked around. He was somewhere different. The sun was setting rather than rising, and he was no longer at the docks but stood at a crossroads. A notched wooden post with boards fixed horizontally at different angles stood before him; on each were written words with strange letters in a language unknown to him. He heard people approaching and made to lay low behind some thick undergrowth nearby.

He heard them pass, speaking in a tongue unknown to him, and as they passed, he braved a look. The evening was interrupted by a shrill metallic sound unlike he had heard before.

"Dada da da, dada da da, dada da da daaa."