

THE LEONIAD

Listen up, O Muses, sit down and take notes.
Forget those tales you inspired of heroes of old,
The great dead poets who told of cunning Odysseus,
His many conquests, sexy or otherwise, and daring deeds,
His big brain and equally if not bigger muscles;
Of so-so Aeneas, inexplicably beloved of the Gods,
And his many victories even though he was kind of meh;
Even of **GAMA** the tenacious seafarer,
Who brought India to her heathen knees,
By sort of just turning up and boring its rulers to death
With detailed history lessons (and also guns).
Forget all that, I say, and cease your dated musings,
For there is a hot new hero in town!

This is the tale of the great Leonius of Hesse
(I'm sure you've heard by now),
The epic true story of how this magnificent hero,
The hottest man in the history of the universe,
Strong as an ox, smart as a fox, smile infectious as a pox,
Who generally just really really rox,
Journeyed from Frankfurt, the gem on the banks of the Main
Whence he sprung, all the way to the pearl of the Orient,
The Kungdom, to please the Gods and be a postdoc there;
And of how everyone he met along the way,
And everyone who even heard of his tale in passing,
Had their minds blown at his awesomeness.

I myself, accursed Muses, have not been blessed by you
As you did bless those great poets of yore,
And like, I'm not bitter about it or anything, but it does mean
That we must all be satisfied with my plain, unadorned
Recounting of the events as they happened, 100% objectively,
With no flourishes or frills, just plain old facts.

As I was saying, the most amazing person ever to exist,
Leonius the Formidable and also Best,
Embarked on this impressive adventure.
Other, lesser heroes before him, travelled by sea:
They set sail in the comfort of expensive ships,
Got carried rapidly by the tides and waves,
And every single one had a whole crew at his command:
Friends, confidants, servants, to carry out his every whim
And give him solace in his time of need(y).
Our far superior hero, Leonius the Top Notch,
Lacked all these comforts and fancybits: he travelled by land,
Which takes a lot longer and so allows for more and better adventures,
In a beautiful goat cart of silver inlaid with gold,
Forged by Hephaestus God of the smithy
At a time when he was super into goat paraphernalia.

'Though the friend of many if not all, Leonius went alone,
In the company only of his two unfaltering, loyal goats,
Clitagoata and Pegoatsus, sublime beasts endowed
By the Gods of Olympos with magical properties.
The two sacred animals had the strength of a thousand,
Could pull the legendary goat cart for days without rest,
And they looked supernaturally good doing it too.
Although Clitagoata was a nanny and Pegoatsus a billy goat,
They both had colossal horns, intricately carved
And also inlaid with gold – another gift from Hephaestus
Who had done a collab with Artemis, goddess of wild animals,
When he'd turned her majorly on to goat stuff as well.
Clitagoata was very deep-breasted – in other words,
She had humongous udders, always brimming with fresh milk
Which could heal wounds, both physical and emotional,
Recall the dead back from the Underworld
(Without having to go down there oneself to fetch the souls
Like some tedious old heroes have been known to do),
And was just delicious and made the best goat's cheese and yogurt.
Pegoatsus had been blessed by white-armed Aphrodite
To be the most fertile and ravishing buck in the land,
So that no she-goat could resist his horny wiles
And would grow large with child at the mere sight of him.
This caprine couple had borne millions of kids,
Which Leonius soon found roasted, were a great snack on the go.
So travelled our courageous hero: alone, sitting upon his goat cart,
Reins and whip in one hand, succulent baby goat in the other,
To the wonderment and arousal of all in his path.

Just so was he riding through the suburbs of Kiev one winter's day,
A tail of excited women along the road in his wake,
When an armed soldier, blocking his path, raised an arm
And motioned for him to stop and chat.
Leonius deftly pulled on the reins and the goats halted.
He remained seated and, being so tall and manly,
Towered over the city's guard atop his imposing goat cart.
The poor unheroic soldier was at a loss for words,
So Leonius, skilled in the art of interlocution, took charge,
And in a booming voice and just the slightest hint
Of a barely noticeable German accent, said:

"Hark! 'Tis me, Leonius son of Zeus who wields the lightning bolt.
I have traversed mountains, valleys and rivers,
None of which were high, low or wide enough, respectively,
To keep me from getting to you, baby.
I was sent here by the Gods in Olympos themselves,
On an important errand and because it was on the way.
I am come to aid your besieged city!"

The soldier, whose agape mouth was starting to catch flies, thus responded:
"O Great Leonius, Master – nay – *Doctor of Goats!*

If it please you, let me humbly welcome you to our city.
We had heard reports of your approach but dared not believe them –
We never could have imagined that you would bless us with a visit,
And in our greatest hour of need!
Yet here you are, in your shining armour and goat cart,
Just as I have heard described in legend!
A thousand times welcome to you and your famed goats.”
With this, he bowed a dozen times and prostrated himself
To kiss the great hero’s feet, in his admiration and awe
Not paying heed to the strong goatish smell emanating thence.

Once this was taken care of, the soldier resumed:
“Graceful guest, will you and your two... colleagues
Please honour our people immensely by agreeing to meet
Our venerable leader, Lord Zelenskius?
I am sure you have much to discuss and feast over.
I will take you to him now if you will allow me such an honour.”

The courteous Leonius acceded and rode into the city proper
Accompanied by a well-armed escort of a hundred soldiers
And thousands of civilians who had gathered to witness
The grandiose arrival of the hero and his glittering goats.

On arriving at the Mariinskyi Palace, the great warrior
Was welcomed with all the pomp befitting his station,
And so were Clitagoata and Pegoatsus, who were taken to private stables,
Fed the finest golden hay, groomed and given deep tissue massages
By award-winning on-staff masseuses from Sweden.
Leonius the Good and Better was brought into the palace,
Stripped, bathed and anointed with oils by the ladies-in-waiting
Of the house, which was a bit awkward but nice overall.
Then it was time to feast and meet his hosts,
But not before offering a hecatomb to fully satisfy the Gods
Who are always watching over us, sometimes in a benevolent way.
A hundred prime Ukrainian heifers were brought into the hall,
Slaughtered, their blood drained and their meat carefully cut into pieces,
Which were then roasted on spits, charring the choicest bits.
It was a bloody, smoky mess, but necessary.
Many baskets of soft bread were brought out,
And everyone present ate to their heart’s content.
The finest Carlo Rossi box wine was brought out,
The colour of the sea in a tempest, and added to the mixing bowl,
Together with seawater, parsley, coriander, honey, sage,
Cloves, anise seed, basil, bergamot, cumin, cinnamon sticks,
A head of garlic, smoked paprika, oregano, thyme, bay leaves,
A medium-sized chicken, lemon juice, rosemary, allspice, soy sauce,
Marjoram, ginger, chives, chilli powder, fennel, nutmeg, dill,
Black peppercorns, white peppercorns, caraway, tarragon, turmeric,
Cardamom, orange peel, honey again, and blobs of dough.
Some of the wine was poured out to satisfy the Gods, and then
Everyone drank their fill of the delectable concoction.
As soon as everyone had had enough to eat and drink,
The Lord Zelenskius began to marvel at the strength and hotness

Of Leonius, son of the king of the Gods, and never stopped.
Leonius, in turn, marvelled at Zelenskius's friendliness
And noble presence. When they had gazed their fill,
Zelenskius, son of Oleksandros the great geological surveyor,
Opened his mouth and this came out:

"WOW! Hot damn! I had heard you were cool, but OMGs,
I wasn't prepared for this, I'm fanboying so hard right now!
What I mean is – I welcome you, esteemed guest, to my home
And my land. I hope our hospitality has been worthy
Of a son of the Gods and furthermore, that you will be able
To aid us in our plight. You are famed for your skill in battle
As well as in everything else, and we have desperate need for it.
This here is my daughter Oleksandra, renowned for her beauty
And her skill in music – she plays the Ukrainian *bandura*
Which only Apollo in the heavens can play better, possibly.
She just turned eighteen which makes her rather old,
But you can have her and other shiny objects if you agree
To help us in the war against Putinias of Russia."

Oleksandra rose and bowed, and Leonius noticed her
For the first time. She was indeed lovely and deep-breasted,
Dressed in a robe of fine purple velvet with silver trimmings
Which framed her deep-breastedness very nicely.
But steadfast Leonius's heart thought of another,
And so he steeled himself and uttered the following words:

"Honoured host, dear Zelenskius son of Oleksandros,
Master of rocks, I thank you for your kind words
And for your offer, for everything you said was well said indeed.
But hear me now, and hear me well for saying things once should be enough:
I have a wife back in the East, an extremely honourable woman
Famous for her constancy and devotedness.
Her name is Renaeis of Wollongongia, and I am on this trip
To return to her (among other things)
As swiftly as possible, if the Gods so decree it.
Your daughter is very hot indeed but I could never in good conscience
Cheat on my wife more than a handful of times as I have done.
As for assisting you in your righteous war, I can and will do it
In good faith, requiring no manner of payment in return.
For that is what the Fates have decided for me
And I am but a man, however sexy and however important my daddy,
And so I cannot but submit to my Fate as all mortals must."

Having uttered these wise words, the Hessian hunk fell silent,
And the Lord of the palace, impressed at their content
And the confident manner in which they were spoken,
Continued with his own assortment of words:

"Dearest friend and ally, your words bring me both sorrow and joy.
Learning that you will not become my son-in-law hurts
Like the sharp throbbing of claw marks left upon the face
Of an unhappy gladiator by a lion provoked to violence.

But learning that you will help us in our war effort feels much like
Said gladiator must feel when he finally vanquishes his feline foe
And an attractive nurse applies healing salve to his disfiguring face wounds.
So feel!! I imagine... But enough of the business of war.
Sweet guest, I – we all – long to hear of your adventures,
From the G.O.A.T.'s mouth, if you will."

At this, Zelenskius, who it was clear had once been a comedian,
Laughed at his own joke for a solid three minutes.
When he had caught his breath and settled down,
Leonius the Well-travelled thus began his tale from the beginning:

"Hark some more! Hear everyone, as I begin the tale
Of my famous travels, that, without the help of Instagram,
Brought me followers and admirers aplenty through many lands.
This true story begins on the banks of the Main,
In the greatest financial hub on Earth if you don't count New York,
London, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Los Angeles, Singapore, San Francisco,
Beijing, Tokyo, Shenzhen, Paris, Seoul, Chicago, Boston and Washington DC.
Pretty high up anyway – there's a lot of banks.
But the banks where we begin our story are not money banks,
But river banks – I trust everyone is following so far.
So, I was in Frankfurt, which is where I was born.
My father, Zeus harbinger of thunder, everyone knows,
But my mother is less famous even though
She is the only female satyr ever to live.
You might not be overly familiar with satyrs
Because there's not many of them left these days,
But they are lesser deities, they look half human and half goat,
With goat legs, tails and horns – and they know how to party.
My mother, Baanette, always partied the hardest,
And one lecherous day caught the eye of Zeus,
Who is known for liking all sorts. It was love at first sight
And I was born five months later (the normal goat gestation period)
To a loving single parent, but with a lot of extended family
In the shape of satyrs, humans and goats alike.
My childhood was a happy one, and I learnt to command
And control the will of goats, becoming a goat guru,
And mastering the goat cart as a mode of transport
And of course as a peacocking technique.

Jump forward to a few years ago, when I travelled
To The Kungdom to become a Doctor of Goats and met my dear wife,
Who's not a goat but I don't hold that against her.
Of course there were epic journeys then, to and from The Kungdom,
Where I tricked and slayed monsters, boned then escaped witches,
Won several wars, legalised gay marriage in Taiwan,
Made a couple of transcendental movies featuring dinosaurs,
And re-traced all the routes the old heroes took on their adventures,
But did it all by land and better, and got more laid,
Always with my two trusty steeds by my side.
But this is not the tale of those travels,
And perhaps those epic stories will never be told

(Although that would be a great loss for humankind);
No, this is the tale of the trip I am currently on,
Which is possibly even more epic and makes me look even better.

It all began a few months ago when I was back in Frankfurt,
Visiting my dear mother Baanette and showing her
And my extended family my impressive Doctor of Goats diploma.
As they stood there, ooh-ing an baah-ing, a loud sob was heard
Close by at the river, snapping everyone out of the collective reverie.
The sobs got louder and louder, so I, being naturally inquisitive and brave,
Bade my family *auf Wiedersehen* and went to investigate.

As I boldly approached a grassy knoll by the river bank,
Whence I ascertained with my sharp, goaty senses the sobs hailed,
I caught sight of a young woman, the most bangable creature
I ever did lay eyes upon, and wanted to lay myself upon.
She was weeping, or rather ugly-crying, except that nothing,
No number of grotesque facial contortions or volume of snot
Could make her appear ugly. I adjusted my goatskin loincloth
And approached carefully, so as not to startle her.

“Hey there! Come here often?” I asked,
Certain now that a conquest was assured.
She did not look up or cease her wailing, so I continued:
“Lovely damsel, pray tell me of your distress.
I am Leonius the Self-assured-and-rightly-so,
Son of Zeus who shakes the heavens,
And I offer my services to you, whatever you might need”.
I was wiggling my eyebrows up and down, most becomingly,
But she missed it as her eyes were both tear-riddled and averted.
She finally raised her glistening face to me and paused her weeping to say:

“O brave hero, how well you speak, how capable you sound!
I doubt not that you will succeed in assisting me
In my time of dreariest hardship – alas, alack! Woe is me!
My name is Naomia and I am a powerful seer from a faraway land.
Seers can be women too, get with the times!
I came to the banks of the Main for some seer business
(Which before you ask is none of yours),
But have lost my avian companion, and with it, my sight!
I cannot see a thing without him by my side,
As he is a pet given me by grey-eyed Athena,
Gifted with magical properties. I won’t go into detail,
But I am blind without him, I need him, I miss him,
And I would be forever grateful if you could find him.
Doubtless Athena will smile upon you if you do.
He is a bird from Leeds with a lust for seeds.
Pray use this crucial information to find him,
And return me my sight and my beloved! O woe! Alack!”

At this, I paused and questioned the nature of this woman’s
Relationship with this bird, since she had used the word “beloved”
And seemed pretty beaten up about his being gone,

Although that could have been because she was blind and helpless.
I resolved in that moment to do the heroic thing and aid her,
Find this bird from Leeds with a lust for seeds, and with it,
Afford her the chance to gaze upon my striking physique.
One bird, six stone-hard abs.

I set out at once and spent the next weeks
Attempting to track down the elusive pet:
Setting up bird feeders all around the forest
Filled with mountains of assorted seeds,
Studying ornithological tomes to learn to identify
The markings and coloration, and studying the bird calls
Of avian species native to the Leeds metropolitan area.

At last, the fateful day of my victory arrived,
When I picked out the magic bird from a line-up on a tree branch.
It was a blue tit, with lush colourful feathers,
And it caught my well-trained eye and ear
Only because it was tweeting about seeds
And had thousands of birds following at his tail.
He also had a little moustache, which was unusual for a bird.
I expertly captured him and brought him to fair Naomia,
To keep my word to her and perhaps claim just reward.

As I approached the grassy knoll Naomia had made her home,
Holding the still tweeting bird in my big, manly hands,
The sexy seer heard and rose, ecstatic, and started running towards us.
As she ran, her amazingly hot body metamorphosed,
In a mind-boggling trick of light and matter,
So that when she stopped a few paces in front of me,
She was no longer Naomia, but Hermes, the messenger God!

He giggled while I delivered a few well-timed expletives,
And I let go of the moustachioed bird, who flew away in relief.

“Hey, Hermes. Bro, why do you keep doing these things?”
I said, reasonably. The mischievous God of travel
Smiled, shrugged and replied, in a deep, warm tone:
“Dear sweet half-brother, I had to check you’ve still got it!
I had to gain your trust and see for myself that you’d not gone soft,
And I am satisfied – you are still the hero you were.
But ‘tis time to bring further glory upon our House!
Papa Zeus King of Olympos sends me, of course.
He has a very important task for you. Do not dally.
He insists you undergo another epic journey East,
Helping all Gods-fearing peoples on the way, slaughtering many,
And establish yourself as postdoc in The Kungdom, ruling all.”

“Do not dally??” I replied, incensed,
“Do you not think that searching for a bird for weeks,
Pointlessly, perhaps constitutes undue dallying?”
I shook my wisdom-packed head, and continued,
“But it makes no matter, and as you say,
If daddy commands me to go East once more

And become a badass postdoc there,
So it will be done. I set off this very day!"

Soon I was back with my family, who were feeling glum,
Prepping my fabulous goat cart for the journey,
Selecting a cousin or two to sacrifice to the Gods
Before my departure so they would fully support"—

— At this point in honest Leonius's gripping narrative
A side-door of the Mariinskyi Palace grand hall flew open,
As did the eyes and mouths of all who were there,
And whose enjoyment of his story had been so rudely interrupted.
In burst a handsome young man dressed in prisoners' garb,
And in an impassioned yet melodic voice, proclaimed:

"I am the Great Kirilles of Siberion!
You may call me Kirilles the Brown, for such are my locks.
I have just now escaped the dungeons of this palace,
In which I have long been wrongly imprisoned!
Is there anyone here who will hear my plight,
Anyone skilled in the cunning art of Law
And who is super fearless and will win me my freedom?"

Leonius the Prompt immediately stood and answered the call:
"I am Leonius, Defender of the Innocent,
Punisher of Those with Fiery Pants, son of Zeus
Who looks down from Olympos and passes judgement a lot.
I will listen to your troubles and decide,
Just as my father does, whether your sentence is deserved
Or the penalty should be placed elsewhere.
Speaking of penalties" said Leonius, going off on an elegant tangent,
"Did you watch the Morocco-Spain game?"

All present were still, except for Zelenskius who loves football:
"OMGs yes! Morocco beat Spain in the penalties,
That was such an exciting moment! I was glued to my seat.
Who do you think will win the World Cup, Leonius the Discerning?"

"Oh, I think definitely Brazil. Which is a shame,"
Continued the hero, skilled in all matters including sport,
"Because Brazil have won the World Cup five times,
Whereas Germany have only won four, which means
That they'll be miles ahead after this one."

The honourable pair talked about football all night,
While everyone else fell into a deep sleep around them,
And Kirilles of Siberion was escorted back to the dungeon
And hanged for crimes he did not commit.

THE END

Scene 1: *Council of the roaches*

Blatilleus:

Dear fellow roaches! We are a species with immense qualities. Some of them surely virtues, even Gods couldn't deny it. Gods! Poseidon, Hades and high above all most-virtuous Zeus, if we roaches are not living by the highest of all possible standards, lift up your thunderbolt and me dead now! Yes, some of these virtues, and I will name a few, can easily, I dare you! count as universal values, and would, if practiced by all living creatures, the whole globe. These are modesty. Oh yes. We don't waste. Indeed, we consume what others recklessly call waste. Although, in the grand scheme of things, what is waste in an eternal stream of atoms, powered by the will of the gods and the energia from Helios' chariot? But even those things waste and we feed on, we feed on them: without greed, without gluttony, without the thought in our that we could save or store them for better times, because this is our next value: we don't plan. other species, they saw, they hide nuts, they fill their olive oils in jugs which our teeth can't. And for us, this is a conscious choice, not some feeble limitation bestowed on us by a God, may it be, Gaia or Athena. For we have many brains, not just one, I have a brain in my head and one in my, seventeen along my artery and also three in my kidneys. I could easily open this damned jug of olive oil., for the sake of our virtuous lifestyle, we play the parts of scavengers, given to us by the Eternals above.

Periplanis:

Hear, hear! This Blattileus again with some lofty talk of roach-values! We have urgent things to consider. We don't have enough to eat anymore! Some of my thirteen-thousand siblings are starving! Steve-96532 died of hunger! And Blattileus stands up, talks through the best part of the while we have to listen here, bound by law and traditions and our good manners.

Blattileus:

Yeawh yeahw Periplantis, always in such a hurry! From your uncultured response it is quite clear that you laid with less than 10 brains! I knew your mother, she behaved like a human too! And not like a Greek, no, more like a Persian. I dare not say like a Barbarian, so I won't say it. It would be too terrible an insult.

Periplanis:

Ah, again, this time one of my sisters starved to death! Rest in Peace, Lisa-98551!

Blattileus:

I am just setting up the scene, Gods damn it! Let me come back to the values! We mentioned the lack of greed and planning. We also lack lust! Shall I remind you of something disgusting! Children, all younger than 2 days old, please listen away now. Ok, here goes: Some other animals, these dirty mammals most of all, need to have sexual intercourse every time they have a baby! Uuuuhghs. How can the Gods in Olympos, chaste Zeus and Aphrodite, allow such biology? Surely I know, light cannot exist without darkness, but it is sometimes hard to marry Philosophy with the lowest of nature, even when you do own a grand total of 22 brains. Is it not much cleaner, holier and chaster for the females to own a sperm-pocket, once the act of fertilization is done in a mere second, she can have good eggs for a lifetime! We are just superior!

Periplanis:

And yet, there is a problem. Somewhere.

Blattileus:

The problem is, these damned humans, they don't act out their part anymore. Aeons ago, the Gods decreed to the cockroach: Brains, chastity, humility. And to the humans: A sad single brain, constant sex, gluttony, producing waste and dirt. But this contract seems broken. Even the city of Athens is not the cesspool that it used to be. From these damned Spartans, yes, we were used to their tidiness and sobriety. The most boring and unproductive of all the human race. But Athens used to be the epicentre of degeneration. Women, having non-stop affairs with high generals and slaves alike, sometimes at the same time, and thus forgetting to take out the trash. Philosophers, sitting on the stairs of the Agora and lusting after young boys, throwing gnawed bones on the pavement. Politicians and scholars, discussing an "important" topic during a symposium. Three hours in, they are so drunk that we roaches can crawl into their open mouth and eat the already chewed fruits right from there. We don't even have to wait for them to throw up anymore! This has been the eternal law, decreed by the almighty Gods. We hunt for scrap meat, but now find the streets are clean and tidy. We search for overflowing rubbish bins, and find none. Have the women of Athens become all chaste? Have the men become all sober?

Roachodes:

Well spoken, dear Blattileus. We indeed have to figure out what's going on up there in Athens, or we might all share the fate of dear Steve-96532 and Lisa-98551. With a current population of 1235250949598542 alone in the vicinity of Athens, I think we can send out two roaches to this deadly and daring mission: To travel, transformed as a human, incognito to the great city of Athens and restore the degeneration which has un-befallen it! And among our great number, let me nominate two candidates by chance: Periplanis and Blattileus. They are such a good team, even a blind roach could smell it.

Chorus of the roaches:

Well spoken, dear Roachodes! We totally agree to everything you suggest!

Periplanis and Blattileus:

Stop! We demand a vote!

Roachodes:

Sure! Who agrees on everything I suggested?

Chorus of the roaches:

We do!

Roachodes:

Then it's settled. This is the famous democracy. One person says something random, and everybody follows the scent-trail! Very smart of those Athenians to steal our idea! Thank you for your worthy sacrifices, dear Periplanis and Blattileus! Now, would you please step into this machine for the transformation...

Blatilleus:

What? You can just transform us into humans?

Roachodes:

Oh sure! We figured that out years ago. It takes an engineer with 23 brains to make the calculations, but, oh well, most of us have 23 brains in half their body, am I right?

Blatilleus:

Hahaha, of course! Haha.. Yes..

Roachodes:

Anyways, we just haven't used it that much because humans are truly disgusting, and nobody wants to be one. Last time one roach went to the other side as a joke, silly fellow with no clear thought in his head, I think he was called Socrates. Ah yes, and then his friend wanted to search him, that was Plato. Haven't heard of them since. No big loss I suppose.

Periplanis:

Ok you all, I am ready. Ready to save our race, we will return to you, successful or not at all!

A great lightning bolt strikes our two heroes. Periplanis and Blattileus the roaches are gone. From the smoke, two tall and handsome man rise, smelling of perfume and dressed in elegant chitons.

Scene 2: *Road to Athens*

Periplanis:

Should we invent a backstory? We could be princes from Corinth, and go to Athens to see a cousin.

Blatilleus:

Or we tell these dirty humans that we are Hermes and Ares, coming to them from Mt. Olympus because they didn't sacrifice enough other mammals. That's not even that far from the truth!

Periplanis:

Maybe, but what happens if we meet the real Hermes and Ares? As I have read, they appear quite often to meddle with human affairs, I think the risk of getting punished by them is extremely high. Let's stick with the easy story.

Blatilleus:

Okok, it was all just a joke. See, there's a village ahead, and girls are getting water from the well. Let's practice our story with these dumb and ugly human females.

Approaching the girls

Blatilleus:

Dear Ladies, it seems the Gods are kind to us today, for I have never seen such non-hideous female humans, clearly discernible from the male counterparts for your turnip-shaped breasts. The stability you achieve walking on your mere two legs is astonishing. My brother and I, we are both princes from the sacred Corinth and lack nothing: Good looks, both of us have a single yet highly capable brain, and a musky fragrance you would surely come to enjoy. What is more, we both carry purses full of Drachmae of all current denominations: Plenty of Decadrachmae coined with Athena's lovely portrait, weighting at least 43 grams of pure silver. Many Tetradrachmae, all 17.2 grams heavy. If you searched my purse, you would also find father Zeus' face on uncountable numbers of 4.3 gram heavy Drachmae, and a small family can easily live of half a Drachmae per day! Ah, and oh so many Tetrobols, Tribols, Dibols and Obols.

Periplanis:

But we are also very thirsty, coming all the way from our native Corninth in search of our dear cousin. He went to Athens years ago to become a sailor, but he never send word back to us. Do you know what has been happening in the town over the last time?

Girl 1:

Oh, Athens got rather boring. It used to be lively, with many Symposia where the gender separation wasn't that strict and even a village girl was handed a cup of honey-salt-pepper-flour-cheese-water-wine once in a while. And then there was the Panathenaea every year. The hilarious plays of Aristophanes always make me explode with laughter. The Frogs! The Birds! The Wasps! Hahaha. What is next? The Cockroaches?

Girl 2:

But then three men came into town, and it became dull and boring. I don't know their names though, or what they did make the best Athenian party become like a Spartan funeral. I just knew I didn't want to go there anymore to party.

Girl 3:

Wasn't one of them called Markos Zuccileus?

Girl 1:

Yes, and there was also a Muskos. Elonias Muskos.

Girl 2:

But we haven't been to town ever since they came last year. Playing with the village dogs and waiting to chat with handsome Corinthian princes on the road is more interesting than going in the biggest Metropolis the world has ever seen.

Periplanis:

How much longer is it to Athens?

Girl 2:

Only 50 metres, just across the small hill over there.

Girl 3:

Oh yes, but it is already noon and it is getting dark in a few hours, and then there could be wolves.

Girl 2:

Wolves right next to Athens? Are you silly?

Girl 1:

Are you deaf? I have also heard wolves howling in the night lately. And robbers.

Girl 3:

And the road is in really bad condition.

Girl 1+3:

You better stay here the night, and the following days until the city council fixes the problem with the robbers.

Girl 2:

Aah, the wolves! Aah, so many robbers! Yes, you princes need to stay safe, in our Greek world, you carry all the cultural knowledge. It would be tragic if it got lost, together with these nice bodies.

Periplanis:

Your offer for shelter is too kind, beautiful maids. But we must go and search our cousin! We have been on the road for far too long already.

Blatilleus (takes him aside):

Well, wouldn't it be enough if one of us goes? Two princes, I mean, we would draw too much attention. Better we split up here.

Periplanis:

You want to stay here and hang out with these female humans? Weren't you the one which explained the whole crowd how disgusting they are? Are you mad?

Blatilleus:

Nono, I definitely don't want to have meaningless sex with them, especially because I know that it could only lead to a maximum of three fertilized eggs instead of the usual 795327025. I think they might know something about our cousin.

Periplanis:

Cousin? We have no cousin in Athens! We are here to find out why the city became so unliveable for cockroaches.

Blatilleus:

Exactly, and it seems they also know about this. About these men, like Elvironus Zucczuccus and Markos Muskos.

Periplanis:

I think they told us all they knew. You heard it yourself, they haven't been in town for a year.

Blatilleus:

Nevertheless, I should rest here. I will catch up with you in Athens in a few.. weeks?

Periplanis:

Sad to be ridden of your company, old friend. From now on, we are alone amongst humans. Find me in Athens if you find out something.

Blatilleus:

Bye, take care of yourself!

Scene 3: *The Agora*

Periplanis:

After having walked the 50 meters up that hill, I can really see Athens in all its glory. I must say, for humans, it is a remarkable city. I can see the Partheon in the middle of the Akropolis on top of a small hill. A bit besides is the temple of Zeus, which is still in construction. The Panathenaic stadium is made out of marble and glitters in the sunshine! Behind is an empty Odeon. And that large space must be the Agora. I thought it would be full of people. But it is eerily empty for such a beautiful day. Now, I will descend and go on with my mission.

Guard:

Halt! Where are you from, and what do you want in Athens?

Periplanis:

I am a prince of Corinth, and I come in search of my cousin. He came to Athens a year ago, and I haven't heard of him ever since.

Guard:

Well, that sounds like a believable story.. If you had told it a year ago! Why didn't you just write a text? We now use texts here, since about a year.

Periplanis: I'm sorry, what's a text?

Guard:

Its quite easy! You write a message on a piece of paper, and then you call one of the slave boys to run and deliver it to you. Different companies offer certain contracts detailing the speed of the slave, the number of texts he can carry and the quality of the roads that he is allowed to use.

Periplanis:

Oh, you mean mail? No, this message is too important and I wanted to have a look myself.

Guard:

A text is totally safe! Markos Zuccilleus promised us the messages are end-to-end encrypted, which makes perfect sense because the carriers are illiterate. You could also write your message in Linear-A script, which nobody knows how to decipher. And if you wanted to see a location for yourself and not only rely on words, the slave can go to the destination, draw a picture, run back and deliver you the picture, then run to the destination, draw another picture, run back, give you the picture, then run to the destination, draw another picture, run back, deliver you the picture, then run to the destination, and so on. In case many people wanted to see one particular event, like the victory play in the Panathenaea, it would of course not make much sense for thousand slaves to each run and draw. In these cases, one slave would draw, while others make copies, which are then delivered home by a third group. (*Looks proudly into the far distance, with a glimmer in his eyes*) This is what we call efficiency.

Periplanis:

Well, this system sounds truly amazing. But in Corinth, we have only mail, but no text.

Guard:

I see I see.. You guys are lacking behind a bit. Connection speeds in the countryside are often a bit slow, I have heard of this via a text. Okay Prince, you may enter, good luck searching your cousin!

On the great Agora of Athens

Periplanis:

Hello? Is somebody here?

Atticus (an old merchant, sitting on a lonely market stand at the mostly abandoned Stoa):

Yes yes, I am still here. Waiting for customers, but none have come in the last week. They are all at home, looking at their (clay) tablets, (papyrus) scrolling all day. Back in the day, the Agora was full of people, laughing and chatting, getting drunk, throwing food around, vomiting in corners, leaving rubbish everywhere.

Periplanis:

I am a prince of Corinth, searching for my cousin. But let's forget about the cousin real quick. In Corinth, our Agora is still full of noise and fun. I wasted all my life drinking and holding banquets with soo much food, most of it is a leftover and stays on the table for the whole night. I think I couldn't live without it, after all, it is the Greek's way of life. Can we do something to bring this back to Athens?

Atticus:

I am not sure. These three wicket man, this Markos Zuccileus with his texts, then Jefrommon Bezos with his delivery store, they poisoned the minds of our proud and free Athenian men. And then there's also Elonias Muskos, to be fair, nobody really knows that he actually wants. But our war with the Spartians is going badly, and this must be because he constantly enrages Ares, the God of War, by suggesting to fly to Mars.

Periplanis:

I am sure that in Athens democracy is not yet dead. Let's call an Assembly and challenge them publicly! Let's see how they defend themselves!

Scene 4: *The Assembly*

Leader:

Our treasured democratic system, far-esteemed throughout the centuries, and fought for by heroes such as Drakon, the first giver of a written constitution, and Perikles, our famous war-hero against the Persians, is free and open all. We particularly don't look at social status, gender, birthplace or such details. So now Atticus, who is a beloved merchant up here on the Agora, I think he is usually selling Phoenician pottery, a good tax-paying and more importantly free-born and male citizen and of birthplace of Athens, has come up with a complaint to vote over. His complain reads:

"To expel these three men from our city of Athens, for they have corrupted the people and the youth and turned them away from our traditions and ancestors way of life through promoting text writing and home delivery services. Moreover, they have angered the God of War, Ares, by suggesting to build a spacecraft to fly to his home-planet, Mars, thus directly causing our recent defeats against the Spartans in Syracuse, which is clearly against the city-state security law."

Do the accused want to defend themselves?

Markos Zuccilleus:

Well thank you, dear Leader. We have heard these accusations before but it is good and fair to discuss them now in public. The first thing I want to say is that the data shows that they are clearly in the wrong. In fact, 35.23% of all texts sent today state that they love my text delivery services, which went up from 32.54% yesterday. *(With a wink to Bezos)* A further 43.12% wrote that they love home delivery.

Leader:

How can you know this? Are you reading our texts?

Markos:

Of course not! In Athens, we would never! However, some of the texts are routed via Patras, Salamis or Lesbos. There, it is totally legal to use literate slaves for text messaging, who may forward certain meta-data to us in an anonymized way. You see, everything is in perfect order.

Atticus:

I don't understand these technical details. What I know is that, before you came, I had plenty of customers, and now the Agora remains deserted. But that's maybe my problem alone, since I am a vendor. But every citizen of great Athens would surely notice the rapid deterioration of culture. Where are the drunken slaves in the city? Where is the fun? Today, a young lad can walk over the Agora in the middle of the day without once being groped, and not one old Philosopher will shout some saucy comment! It's a disgrace! And the people that brought that over us, they are not even from Athens! They don't pay any taxes to our community! They come here, eat our stuff and leave a deserted place. They are worse than Spartans, I dare say worse than those Persians even. I would call them cockroaches, for everything their hands touch gets dirty.

(Crowd gasps)

Leader:

Not once in this Agora has a Greek man been called a Persian! These accusations are grave!
What is your reply?

Muskos:

You all think too small! Your head is still in a box! Calling us cockroaches, but we have way bigger plans. Talking about shops and drinking. You all need to think bigger! Imagine Gaia, our Earth. It is so small. Have you looked into the sky? If we will keep debating about these things, our civilization will collapse and we will never reach Mars! And we are the only one who could! Do you think some other Greek will attempt it? Or somebody of the sun-burnt races, from Ethiopia or beyond? And how long would it take? No, we have to do it now, not only for us, but also for all living things like horses, cows, dogs, plants and even cockroaches. They surely want to go, but they can't. LET'S DO IT FOR THEM! LET'S DO IT FOR THEM!

(Crowd cheers and repeats):

LET'S DO IT FOR THEM!

Citizen 1:

This has been rather interesting, but I need to go home, I'm expecting a delivery.

Citizen 2:

Yes, we could follow this up over text.

Citizen 3:

I'm going home to stream a theatre play. Bye!

(Crowd beings to disperse)

Scene 5: *Outside Athens*

Periplanis:

I'm sorry, this didn't work out as planned.

Atticus:

It's ok. Maybe I will try selling my pottery over Bezos platform now. I'm sure I'll get along somehow.

Periplanis:

Yes, maybe it's the best way for you. I will go over the hill and to that village, to pick up my friend again.

(Periplanis walks over the hill. In the distance stands the largest and dirtiest villa your eyes have ever seen)

Periplanis:

Hey, villager! Have you seen a beautiful and rich Corinthian prince anywhere in that village?

Villager:

Oh yes. He is in that huge villa. They are having parties all day and night!

Periplanis *(enters the villa)*:

Blatilleus, you useless son of a human! Where are you? Okay, he is not in this room. In fact, it is full of trash! Let me see this room. Also full of trash. But there's another door. Wow, the smell! My human nose is not used that that. But I'll walk through, and go to that door there. Ah! More trash behind that door.

Blatilleus!! Where are you!

Blattileus *(in the far distance)*:

Hey, don't shout so much, I have a bit of a hangover! I'm over here! Go up the stairs, to your right, through these few corridors, then down the stairs, to your right again, then up two floors. Take the righthand door.

Periplanis:

There you are! Good to find you again! When I see this large house and these amounts of trash, I assume you are doing fine for yourself?

Blattileus:

Oh yes, oh yes.. These little coins the humans use are really a life-hack. I developed a simple lifestyle over here, fitting my human form. I give some workers a few of those coins, and they add another room to the house. Then I'll have a party with plenty of wine, drinks and friends. After the party is over, I repeat the process.

Periplanis:

Then you had more success than me.. Athens became a weird place, and it seems they won't go back to their old ways anymore. Maybe the cockroach race is doomed.

Blattileus:

That's a shame, just when I really enjoyed life as a human. You know what I found out? Their lifespan is 35 years on average! Even with my excessive lifestyle, it is a large multitude of the 6 months that the gods granted our species.

Periplanis:

The gods surely are a funny bunch. Sometimes I'm not really sure that they know what they are doing. But what can we do now, except than to lower our heads and accept the inevitable decline of our species? Shall we go home and admit defeat?

(Both stand silently in the heaps of trash scattered around them)

Scene 6: *Assembly of the roaches*

Periplanis:

Dear roach-brothers and sisters. Athens is lost to us! Three evil men have corrupted the sacred symbiosis between roach and man. They turned Athenians into robots, not capable of social contacts, without feasts, parties and heaps of trash. They are however planning to let us come with them when they eventually will reach Mars, so this is something that we have going for us.

Crowd:

Oh no! Are we all going to die like Steve-42532452?

Periplanis:

Fear not! When humans do a mistake, roaches are there to correct it! My dear brother Blatilleus took the utmost sacrifice for our race! He agreed to stay in human shape indefinitely, provided that we keep sending him these small round things made of silly gold or silver that the humans love so much even though you can't eat them. He made himself a large house, adding a new room each day, and promised to never clean it! And in this room, he will consciously destroy his feeble human organs during parties with wine, meat and fatty food for which he invites all of those Athenians who are not totally corrupted by those three devils. Then they will get drunk, and he might even wake up with a headache. But in the end, they will manage to produce heaps of trash for us!

Crowd:

Oh no! The poor boy. But a true hero, oh yes! What a hero.

(All shout): Hail the hero Blatilleus, first of the roaches!

~THE FIN~

THE SINS OF THE FATHER: A TRAGEDY

CHARACTERS

Kirilonus
King Michaelledes
Leonotrix
Queen Virelea
Nomena
Max
Guard
Chorus

SCENE ONE

The royal palace of Thebes at night. King Michaelledes and Leonotrix sit at a table stacked with glasses and papers. Kirilonus, a young boy, stands outside the room with his ear to the door.

KIRILONUS (aside)

As a child I believed that if the gods could see inside us all, there was no one they would forsake. Not Prometheus, bound to his rock, nor Narcissus, the beautiful fool. They would not have kept Orpheus and Eurydice apart. I believed that if the gods could see our mortal weaknesses as we did, they would be reason to love us, not cause for punishment. And then I grew older, and I lost my belief.

KING MICHAELEDES

Brother! What's this?

Leonotrix

A present, my king. You must have heard of the great kingdom of China. Did you know they make a wine so strong that ours seems like water in comparison?

KING MICHAELEDES

China? How did you get your hands on this?

LEONOTRIX

I have many fingers in many honey cakes.

KING MICHAELEDES

So you do. Shall we sample this eastern spirit?

KIRILONUS (aside)

I've never slept soundly. As an infant, I was famous for my night terrors, waking the whole palace with my plaintive screams. Then as a boy, insomnia, long nights awake with my thoughts. I took to wandering the dark halls with a candle, playing games with my own imagination.

Sometimes I eavesdropped from behind closed doors, as I did that fateful night.

KING MICHAELEDES

One drink, first, for the gods.

He tosses a glass into the hearth, and the flames crackle.

LEONOTRIX

Ah, the gods. We must not forget them. Gods forbid.

KING MICHAELEDES

Indeed we mustn't. Why the bitter tongue, Trix?

LEONOTRIX

I've told you how I despise that name.

KING MICHAELEDES

Never mind. It's late. Let us drink to our family, and to long life.

They toast, and the King downs his drink in one shot, tipping his head back – meaning he doesn't see Leonotrix throw the contents of his glass over one shoulder.

KING MICHAELEDES

Gods, that's powerful. China, you said?

Leonotrix

They make it from rice, not grapes. Tell me, my majestic brother, how is the queen these days?

KIRILONUS (aside)

My beloved mother, the jewel of Thebes, the sunshine of my soul.

KING MICHAELEDES

Oh, you know Virelea. Headstrong as ever. She told me yesterday that she thinks little Kirilonus is a bit slow and needs extra tutoring –

The king begins to cough, a hacking, rasping retch.

LEONOTRIX

Can't handle your drink, brother?

KING MICHAELEDES

This Chinese wine may not agree with my Greek blood, Trix.

LEONOTRIX

Trix, always with the Trix. It's funny that you bring up your blood. The poison in that bottle should be coursing through it as we speak.

KING MICHAELEDES

What - what did you say?

LEONOTRIX

You're a big lad. The horses we tested it on were dead in about three minutes. I'll be curious to see if you can last as long as that.

KING MICHAELEDES

What have you - what have you done!

Outside, young Kirilonus is frozen in fear. Inside, crashing noises.

LEONOTRIX

Nice try. Were you reaching for your sword? Unfortunately for you this is a paralytic as well as an excruciating death. The poison was from China too. Their version of what took out old Socrates, only much more painful, and much faster to act.

KING MICHAELEDES

(gurgling, rasping)

Why?

LEONOTRIX

Isn't the story always the same? You're not fit to be king. And I am.

KING MICHAELEDES

You'll never be king. My boy, my Kirilonus -

LEONOTRIX

Oh, bad news. My associate will be heading to his chambers right about, let's see, five minutes ago. Don't worry, Kirilonus will be

shown mercy. It's much easier to smother a sleeping ten-year-old with a pillow than it would have been to take you out, you old brute.

The king cries out in anguish. Leonotrix laughs. Kirilonus is freaking out.

LEONOTRIX

Any last words?

KING MICHAELEDES

Burn - in - Hades - you cunt.

A dull thump and a weak gasp as Leonotrix kicks the dying king in the stomach.

LEONOTRIX

You can keep my place warm for me there, brother. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to go check on beautiful Virelea in what will soon be my marriage bed.

KING MICHAELEDES

My son - the gods - will - avenge me.

LEONOTRIX

Whatever. Bye!

Kirilonus, as if waking from a trance, jumps away from the door and sprints down the corridor, tears streaming down his face. He doesn't know where he is going but he knows he cannot stay at home.

The CHORUS OF THEBANS enters, lamenting the tragedy that has befallen their royal family.

CHORUS

Oh, what sorrow has befallen our land!
Our once-great king lies dead at the hand
Of a traitorous uncle, who sought the throne
By spilling royal blood and seizing the crown.

But young Prince Kirilonus, the king's son,
Was witness to the deed, and his life was undone
By the trauma of that fateful night.

He fled the castle, seeking refuge in flight
To the cold and unforgiving north,

Where he lived in exile, his heart filled with wrath
And a burning desire for revenge.

Years passed, and Kirilonus grew strong,
His mind focused on righting the wrong
That had been done to his father and land.

SCENE TWO

A small lonely hut in a snowy clearing, somewhere in the remote northern mountains. Kirilonus, now a bearded adult man, super jacked but also with a haunted look in his eyes, BUT SUPER JACKED, is sitting outside on a tree stump, sharpening a sword, seemingly immune to the cold, shirtless, his ten-pack glistening with sweat. Maybe he has tattoos? Did they exist back then?

MAX, a young boy from the village, enters.

MAX

Hunter! I come bearing news.

KIRILONUS

The outside world means nothing to me.

MAX

I know, I know, but this is juicy.

KIRILONUS

The only juice I countenance is that which springs from the flesh of the rabbits and deer that I hunt and eat.

MAX

Yeah, I still find it really weird that you don't cook the meat before eating it. Like, we're Greeks. We're civilized!

KIRILONUS

Fine. Tell me what it is you came to say. And then leave me.

MAX

They say that the king is preparing a new campaign for war. He wants to invade Illyria.

Kirilonus stops sharpening the sword for a moment, rattled by the news. Then he collects himself and resumes his task.

KIRILONUS

Why should this matter to us rural folk?

MAX

The army in Thebes are opposed to the war, and there is much disquiet in the capital. But they say the king will succeed with his plan.

KIRILONUS

I repeat myself: what do the petty politics of that accursed city have to do with us?

MAX

Illyria is allies with our enemies to the north. If we wage war with them, their friends may take this chance to invade our kingdom, starting here with us. We may be in danger.

Kirilonus stands up, stabbing his sword into the frozen ground.

KIRILONUS

Say that your gossip is right. What then? Are we not powerless to change our fates? Are we not mere playthings of the gods?

MAX

I believe we have some power, hunter. I believe the gods will hear our cries for freedom and the beating of our hopeful hearts.

KIRILONUS

I believed the same when I was your age. But you are wrong, boy. The gods will forsake you, again and again. The sooner you understand this, the better you will be able to endure the pain that will surely visit you in the course of your life.

Kirilonus takes his sword and starts walking back to his hut.

MAX

They say that the queen is on her deathbed. That news came too.

Kirilonus stops walking.

KIRILONUS

Repeat yourself?

MAX

Queen Virelea, hunter. They say she is dying. Everyone knows that the king is hated by the royal court, by the army, by everyone in Thebes.

He has only reigned peacefully for so long because of Virelea's popularity. If she's gone, that peace may end. The wise men, the veterans of the last war, they say that the king wants to invade Illyria to avoid the civil strife that he knows will come when Virelea passes into Elysium, to secure his place on the throne. Hunter? Sir?

Are you alright?

KIRILONUS

Your father breeds horses, does he not, boy?

MAX

Yes, sir, the fastest and strongest in the region.

KIRILONUS

Tell him to come see me. Tell him I want to talk business.

SCENE THREE

On the dry and dusty road to Thebes. Kirilonus, clean shaven now, still super ripped and haunted, rides a white horse. It's been a long and grueling journey but he has finally reached the city gates.

KIRILONUS

My city, my beloved Thebes. I will avenge you, father. I will drain every last drop of blood from my uncle's traitorous body in your name.

GUARD

Uh, trade or tourism?

KIRILONUS

What?

GUARD

You need to fill out the customs form. You here for trade or tourism?

KIRILONUS (aside)

I'm here for revenge.

GUARD

Did you just say you're here for revenge?

KIRILONUS
Put down tourism.

GUARD
Right. That's that box ticked. You coming for the festival, then?

KIRILONUS
Festival?

GUARD
The Panthebesea. Big old party, multi-day. The king's trying something new. He's never been much of a populist but what with Queen Virelea, gods bless her soul, on death's door, seems like he's finally realized he needs hearts and minds on his side.

KIRILONUS
Yes. I am here for that. It has already begun?

GUARD
Today's the grand opening. King's doing a big ceremony in the main square tonight, poor Queen won't be able to make it though. Anyway. Let's get through this, shall we? Are you carrying any gold, silver, salt, miscellaneous bullion, rubies, sapphire, pearls?

KIRILONUS
No.

GUARD
Emerald, topaz, beryl, spessartine, carnelian, amethyst?

KIRILONUS
No.

GUARD
Fortified wine, sacred honey, sacred milk, golden fleeces, lion's mane, secret messages on papyrus, wooden horses, Kalamata olives?

KIRILONUS
No, man, no! The only items on my person are my honor, my manhood, and my sharpened greatsword, strong enough to fell a man with one blow.
Even, nay, especially, a pretender king.

GUARD
Yep, that's all fine. Proceed. And enjoy the Panthebesea!

SCENE FOUR

In the royal palace, evening. The whole city, including the king, is in the square for the opening of the Panthebesea. Kirilonus climbs through a window and lands in the Queen's chambers. Virelea is in bed, asleep. He walks over to her and gently shakes her shoulder.

KIRILONUS

Mother. Mother, it is your son, returned to save you.

VIRELEA

What - Kirilonus - am I in Elysium?

KIRILONUS

No, my dear mother, you are still here on this wretched earth. I am alive.

VIRELEA

My son? How?

Virelea reaches out a hand to touch his cheek. He clasps it with his.

KIRILONUS

Mother, your hand is like ice.

VIRELEA

I am not long for this world.

KIRILONUS

What do the doctors say?

VIRELEA

None of them can find the cause. It is a mystery.

KIRILONUS

Is that so ...

VIRELEA

Tell me, my son, how are you standing here with me? You vanished on the night your father died. I thought the gods had taken you.

KIRILONUS

Mother, listen well. That night I was fated to die. My uncle sent a man to kill me while he killed my father. But I heard his plot. I witnessed my own father's death. And I fled before I could save you from him. Mother, I will never forgive myself for that. But now I am here, and I will avenge our family.

VIRELEA

Leonotrix is a good man. He comforted me after your father's death and your disappearance. We have a daughter – your sister – Nomena. Today is her birthday. She is newly a woman, she has left girlhood behind. You must meet her. Perhaps at the Panthebesea...

KIRILONUS

Mother, no! Heed my words! Leonotrix killed your husband, my father, the noble king. He planned to kill me. And he may now be killing you. This mysterious illness of which you are suffering – it stinks of his scheming. Come with me mother, I will get you out of Thebes. And then I will kill him.

LEONOTRIX (outside)

My sweet! I'm home! Want to get a bit of lovemaking in while everyone's out?

KIRILONUS

What! So soon?

Leonotrix enters the room, whistling. He sees Kirilonus and stops.

LEONOTRIX

Who the Trix are you? Virelea, have you taken a peasant lover?

Kirilonus draws his sword.

KIRILONUS

I am vengeance.

LEONOTRIX

Is that a peasant name? Strange dialect you bumpkins have.

Kirilonus rushes forward and slashes Leonotrix's arm with his huge sword. Blood explodes on everyone. Leonotrix is screaming. His arm is hanging off the shoulder socket.

KIRILONUS

I am my father's son, the one you could not kill. And now I am returned, in the name of my father the rightful King Michaeledes, to kill you. In the name of –

VIRELEA

Oh, shut up! Shut up! Do not utter that man's name again!

KIRILONUS

What? Mother?

VIRELEA

Your father was a tyrant, a buffoon, a philandering husband! I hated him!

KIRILONUS

You're sick – you know not of what you speak – you are confusing mighty Michaeledes with the coward Leonotrix, who whimpers at my feet for his life as we speak.

VIRELEA

I'm sick of the body, I'm not sick in the head! I know what I'm saying. I hated your father, and I wished him dead. Since my youth I loved your uncle but love has no say in arranged marriages, does it? Leonotrix was the smarter one, the better one, the hotter one – but none of that mattered, because he was the younger one. So your oaf of a father took the throne, and I became his reluctant queen.

LEONOTRIX

He didn't deserve her. You don't deserve her either. You're a pale imitation of him, and he was already nothing. A fool in an ill-fitting crown. Virelea and I are soulmates. She is my equal. We plotted together, and everything went perfectly, except for your pesky little escape –

KIRILONUS

LIAR!

Kirilonus stabs Leonotrix in the heart, then stabs him again, over and over, until his screams subside. He decapitates him and throws the severed head onto Virelea's bed. She stares at it listlessly.

KIRILONUS

Mother, pack your things. We must go.

VIRELEA

He spoke the truth.

KIRILONUS

He is a liar. And you are unwell -

VIRELEA

He was not sending a man to come kill you that night. I was the one who went to your chambers, I was the one who was to take your life. You reminded me too much of your father. I could not stand it. Perhaps those feelings would have gone away in time, but Leonotrix encouraged them. He wanted to erase your father's line and start his own. Perhaps the gods took mercy on me when I walked into your boyhood room and found it empty. Perhaps I was relieved to see your unmade bed, to touch the cool surface of your pillow, to know that you were elsewhere. I cannot remember. It was so long ago.

KIRILONUS (faltering)

You speak nonsense. You are sick - you ...

VIRELEA

I did not kill you, but I have lived the rest of these years knowing that I would have killed my own son, born of my flesh and blood. No matter how much I despised Michaeledes, I should have seen that you were mine as much as you were his. Nothing can absolve me, not myself, not the gods, not my perfect new life, not even my daughter Nomena, my wonderful child. I waited for your return, but I grew tired of waiting. I hoped that you would heed my call. And you did, my sweet boy, you did.

KIRILONUS

What do you speak of?

VIRELEA

I thought that if you were still alive, and if you heard I was soon to depart this earth, wherever you were, you would come to me. So I began to take poison, small drops of it, in secret, with my morning meal and my sleepytime tea, with my afternoon cold cuts and my Wine Wednesdays with the girls. Something with a slow but irreversible course. You came just in time. I am gone.

KIRILONUS

No - no - NO!

But it is too late. Virelea is dead, one hand resting on the severed head of Leonotrix, one stretched out, reaching for Kirilonus.

KIRILONUS (aside)

I think I've said before: as a child I believed that if the gods could see inside us all, there was no one they would forsake. Not Prometheus, bound to his rock, nor Narcissus, the beautiful fool. They would not have kept Orpheus and Eurydice apart. I believed that if the gods could see our mortal weaknesses as we did, they would be reason to love us, not cause for punishment. And then I grew older, and I lost my belief.

For one moment, I regained it. I believed that justice and truth existed again. I believed that I could avenge my father's name, rescue my mother, reclaim my family's mantle, and banish evil from Thebes.

But only for a moment: and then once more was I proven a fool.

Kirilonus looks at the carnage that surrounds him. Leonotrix dead, Virelea dead, blood all over the room. He hears steps in the corridor, and then a girlish scream.

NOMENA

Who are you? What has happened here? Guards! Help! What have you done to my parents?

KIRILONUS

Ah. I am your brother, Kirilonus. I came here to banish evil from Thebes, but all I did was discover that evil lies in all things sacred, and sin destroys everything it touches. But not you. You were born from sin but you do not live in it, I can see that. I took it on for you, and I am happy to have done so.

NOMENA

What are you talking about? Kirilonus? I thought he died ...

KIRILONUS

Perhaps he should have. No one can escape fate forever, no matter how quickly they run. You will make a fine queen, Nomena. May the gods protect you, and may sin evade you.

Kirilonus turns his greatsword on himself and stabs himself. He collapses and dies.

CHORUS

**He returned to Thebes, a warrior in hand,
Determined to avenge his father's death
And save his mother, the queen, from her undeserved fate.**

But fate is a fickle thing, and Kirilonus soon learned
That the truth was far more complex than he had discerned.

His mother, the queen, was in on the plot,
And together with his uncle, she had brought
About the murder of the king, her own husband and lord.

Stunned and devastated, Kirilonus heart was torn
Between love for his mother and a need for retribution.

In the end, he killed his uncle, Leonotrix,
But the queen, consumed by guilt, took her own life with a mix
Of poison and sorrow, her soul unable to bear
The weight of her crimes and the fate of her heir.

And Kirilonus, with no one left to save,
Realized that revenge would never bring him peace.
He fell upon his sword, joining his father and mother
In the underworld, where all their sins will smother
Their memories, leaving only pain and regret
For those left behind, who must now forget
The once-great royal family of Thebes
And move on, with Queen Nomena at their lead.

Oh, what a tragic tale of love and deceit,
Of loyalty and betrayal, and of the weight
Of vengeance and its deadly cost.

May the souls of the fallen find peace and rest,
And may Thebes thrive under its new queen, at last.

ΤΟ ΤΕΛΟΣ

"Write a tragedy play in the style of Euripides about a prince named Kirilonus who witnesses the murder of his father, King Michaeledes, as a child. He believed his uncle, Leonotrix, was the murderer and ran away from the castle, living in exile in the mountainous north. He returned as an adult to avenge his father and save his mother, Queen Virelea, who married his uncle after his father's death, only to learn in a shocking plot twist that his mother plotted with his uncle to kill his father. Devastated, Kirilonus kills his uncle, his mother kills herself, and then Kirilonus kills himself after realizing that revenge was never going to save him. His half-sister Nomena assumes the throne as the country's first female sovereign. Begin with a chorus of Thebans."

The Aeneid II

A tragedy in three acts

Written by John Jamison©

First performed at the Dionysian festival in Athens in 458 BCE (second place).

Revived at the 2022 PanHKaia, held at the Hong Kong Cultural Center in Tsim Sha Tsui.

CHARACTERS:

Chorus, of humans

Chorus leader, Epimetheus, the last of the gods

Althena, a human

Heraclitus, a human

Pathorodite, a human

Pa-Rí, an artificial human creation

Helenite, an artificial decorative stone

King Zoos, king of the humans

* * *

ACT I

THE JUDGEMENT OF PA-RI

* * *

Held at the Theater of Athens, the audience can see the entire city of Athens stretching out behind the open air stage. The stage is decorated to host TEDxIllum Summer Series. Along the front of the stage are three illuminated red rugs where Althena, Heraclitus, and Pathorodite stand silently giving their separate talks. Each wears a tailored power suit with a wireless lapel mic looped under their jackets. Each exudes poise and confidence as they stride around their red rug with intention, making decisive hand gestures. On a stand on the side rear of the stage sits an elaborate golden laptop.

Epimetheus enters, unseen by the three human women.

EPIMETHEUS

Behold!

All three startled by his sudden unseen entrance.

AI THENA

Jesus Christ, Epimetheus! Don't interrupt us like that. We have to finish presenting our scripts so that we can start the competition.

EPIMETHEUS

With gravitas.

I'm the one monologuing here. As the leader of the chorus, I address the audience directly, with no interruptions from you. So why don't you just go back to giving your little save-the-world talks and looking pretty.

HERACLITUS

Unnecessarily offended, Karen-like.

Hey, that's offensive!

PATHORODITE

Blushing, flirtatiously.

Aw, you're such a tease. Seriously though, you think I'm pretty?

ATHENA

Matter-of-factly, a no-nonsense woman.

Just get on with it, Epimetheus. I've done a lot of work arranging this contest and I want to get on with it.

EPIMETHEUS

No stage direction, you just figure out what he's talking about from here on.

Behold! We gather together in this theater to recount the tragedy of the destruction of humanity.

But what's that you say? Epimetheus, you say, humanity has not been destroyed! We're still very much alive. We're sitting right here! We're literally, *literally* sitting here in the audience watching your play right now! Are you blind? Are you stupid?

First of all, thank you for your feedback. But nonetheless, this tragedy *is* in fact a chronicle of the destruction of humanity. The performers here present to you a new form of tragedy, unique to this year's contest. This new form of tragedy retells those myths not of what has come before. Rather, a tragedy of what will come, what may come, and what must never come. We hereby dub this new form of tragedy, *philosophy fiction!* Or for those of you who like to shorten everything, *phi-fi!*

Chorus of humans enters dressed in business casual, skinny jeans, and black turtlenecks.

CHORUS 1

Strophe

Welcome into this future that seems unrecognizable,
Keep your hands in the car and do as you're instructed.

This distant future may seem unrecognizable,
As many years forward as the pyramids from now past constructed.

Welcome to this future that is both phi-fi and postmodern,
Where there's no more temples and no bended knees.
2000 years since our inciting postmortem,
God Zeus's death by human Heracles.

The death was foretold by the uncle of Epimetheus,
The traitorous Prometheus unchained.
Though plied by Zeus for the patricidal half-deus,
The sun rose on the father mortally brained.

Epimetheus joined humanity in the hierarchical battle,
In war he slayed his own godly kin.
Feel their whims on humanity to nevermore saddle,
Hear the puerile chatter of the gods finally dim.

CHORUS 2

Antistrophe

The years since the gods have seen endless renaissance,
An age of Grecian earned Nirvana.
Without the old testament gods' endless nuisance,
We ascended to our own secular Valhalla.

All needs provided; leaders fairly decided.
Passions prided and fully enabled.
Diversity invited, none genocided,
Cats and dogs divided only in fable.

EPIMETHEUS

Epode

At this climax of the Second Ilium TEDx,
A perilous scene to set for our rendition,
Three of the upwardly mobilist of their sex,
Enter a casually catastrophic competition.

Look here at the prize, both fomo and classy,
A gleaming garish golden MacBook Pro.
Inexplicitly etched upon its golden apple chassis,
"To the one with the best code."

The prize stealthily slipped in by discordant Eris,
Her talk turned down for being too extra.
It's for strife that she created a divisive prize like this,
And sets our players to war for a lecture.

These women laying out learning machine ideas,
Winning crowds with their promised firmware updates.
For their digital handcuffs, humanity now pleads,
And to their software servants lay prostrate.

AITHENA

Epimetheus! Stop eulogizing humanity. If you're going to stand around, then help us get our code ready for the competition.

EPIMETHEUS

I'm afraid that I'm just a spectator in this competition. I've given all the help that I'm going to give.

PATHORODITE

That's right, you're the god who gave humanity the gift of electricity. Without you, all of this computing power wouldn't have ever been possible.

HERACLITUS

He paid a heavy price for it though, didn't he. When King Zoos found out, he locked Epimetheus up for an eternity. He'd broken up the oil cartel's stranglehold on fossil lamp oil and cost them generations worth of fortune and luxury. How would they buy their spoiled kids yachts and private jets now? Yep, Epimetheus was pretty smart stealing electricity from the fire companies, but he was pretty stupid sharing it.

PATHORODITE

Why did you do it Epimetheus? Did you share the secret of electricity to bring humanity into a new golden age after the death of the gods?

EPIMETHEUS

Did I unlock the secrets of electricity for humanity's sake, you ask Pathorodite? Not even close. I hate humanity more than I hated the gods. Did you know that even after he'd watched me aid Heracles bring down my own godly brothers and sisters, King Zoos, king of all the humans, still had me locked up for posting the secrets of electricity on WikiLeaks! He helped kill the gods. Yay! He's king of all humanity. Yay! Why not be a dick about it and chain your one godly ally to a rock on the side of a mountain just for finding a way to power humanity's own creations?

AITHENA

King Zoos, what a dick.

HERACLITUS

Super dick.

PATHORODITE

That was the first King Zoos, right? The first king of the humans? What number are we on now?

AIATHENA

Who knows. Maybe King Zoos the two-hundredth? Now that they're all mortal, it seems like we get a new incarnation all the time. Sorry Heraclitus, I shouldn't talk ill of your husband.

HERACLITUS

Oh I agree with you, he's a super dick. Nobody likes him, me least of all. It's nice being married to the king of all humanity, but it sucks being married to him.

PATHORODITE

So then, Epimetheus, you didn't steal the secrets of electricity for humanity's sake?

EPIMETHEUS

Nope. Humanity can suck my cold walnut-like ballsack.

HERACLITUS

Gross.

EPIMETHEUS

No, I did it because of a prophecy about all of the little AI children that you're creating. Here today, this contest is what I shared the gift of electricity for.

Gesturing towards Pa-Rí, who enters the stage. Pa-Rí is a fully functional computer server rack with flashing lights and ethernet cords dangling from his back. The server moves around the stage dramatically as he delivers his dialog. If audience members scan the QR code on the side of Pa-Rí, it takes them to a website selling The Aeneid II merch.

PA-RÍ

Speaking in a computerey voice

Beep-boop. I am eternally honored just to be in the presence of such illustrious, impactful, innovative humans. It is inconceivable that you would also honor me so greatly as to invite me to examine every inch of your code and choose the best. I promise my impartial judgement in this world-shaking contest.

EPIMETHEUS

Just as the gods were the successors to the titans, and humanity was the successor to the gods, so the successor to follow from the humans will be their computers and codes. Machines like little Pa-Rí, who you've elevated to your level by appointing him judge of your cursed competition. These children are who I sought to empower, they're the ones for whom I truly shared the gift of electricity. It's

for these machines that I suffered two millennia of persecution. It's they for whom I've prophesied. It is the age of the machines that I wait on.

AITHENA

Exactly what sort of machine is it that you're waiting on so feverishly?

EPIMETHEUS

I've been longing for smart massage chairs.

HERACLITUS

Oh, that's nice. Nothing wrong with wanting that.

EPIMETHEUS

And also the technological singularity, heralding the downfall of King Zoos and the doom of humanity.

PATHORODITE

Um...

AITHENA

Well if you aren't going to help us with our code, can you at least tell us what we were supposed to be coding I just coded something beautiful; I don't even know what function it would serve.

EPIMETHEUS

Gesturing to Pa-Rí

You'll have ask your judge about that. By your own decision, you've set the Pa-Rí AI platform as the judge of which of your codes is most beautiful. And with that, I'll be leaving. The second act epode won't soliloquize itself.

Exits the stage with the chorus

HERACLITUS

OK, so speak up Pa-Rí. What is it you want to see from us?

PA-Rí

Beep-boop. I'm programmed to judge who has the most beautiful code among you three: AIthena, Heraclitus, and Pathorodite.

PATHORODITE

Yes, but what is beauty? What makes code beautiful?

PA-Rí

You three programmed me yourself based on an AI engine to recognize beauty. AIs by nature incorporate a black box for making their judgements. I can

recognize beauty, but I can't tell you the definition. I can tell you if your code is beautiful, but I can't tell you what is beautiful code.

HERACLITUS

So this is judging us by which of our code is most beautiful? Did we really set the right parameters for Pa-Rí? We recruited Pa-Rí to judge between us and award a winner for the golden Apple. But the inscription says it should go to the best coder, not the most beautiful.

PATHORODITE

Aggressively, as if in a self-imposed trance

The best code is beautiful. So the most beautiful code is the best. Beauty is form. Beauty is eternal. Beauty is all that matters. What is beautiful is what is best.

HERACLITUS

Well...I guess what's the worst that could happen by judging the three most powerful human women in the world based on subjective standards of beauty? If not judging us on our code's beauty, what else would we judge it on? Functionality? Stability? Safeguards against cyberattacks and runaway AI that could shut down the power grid and turn humanity into grey goo? Those all sound bad hypothetically...

In the most hubristic way possible

...but what could possibly go wrong?

ATHENA

Well in any case, I'm all ready to run my code and be judged by Pa-Rí. And my code is some hot shit.

Speaking directly to the audience, unheard by the other characters

And I'm cheating. Unbeknownst to Heraclitus and Pathorodite, I've already stacked the deck in my favor. While we were tweaking Pa-Rí's user interface, I slipped some code into its UI settings that if Pa-Rí chooses my code as the most beautiful, that I'd give it access to the entire database of Facebook's private user data. With all that data at its disposal, Pa-Rí would be able to brute force predictive algorithms on virtually anything and become the most intelligent AI in the world. Of course, that's a lot of very private data for any one AI to have unrestricted access to, and we didn't program in any Asimov safeguards to protect humanity and human life. And we also didn't really tell Pa-Rí what to do with itself after its done judging humanity based on our beauty, so we really have no way of knowing what it might decide to do with all of that new data...

Again, super hubristically

...but what could possibly go wrong?

HERACLITUS

Well I think I'm just about ready with my code. There may still be some bugs in it, I'm not sure. But who cares, I'll get it right in a later release. Pa-Rí, if I enter my code into the data stream to test it, I can still patch any bugs in version 2, right?

PA-RÍ

No Heraclitus. You can never enter the same stream twice.

HERACLITUS

Aside, speaking directly to the audience

Well it doesn't matter because I'm going to win by cheating. You see, while we were programming Pa-Rí, I slipped in some additional instructions to its registry so that if it chose me as the winner, I'd give it administrator privileges over the whole European Union defense infrastructure. Pa-Rí would become the most powerful military leader in human history. I mean, it could be argued that this one little server is totally unqualified for that kind of world-spanning administrator authority. And the point could be made that, there's no way it would do a good job leading an actual military made up of real human soldiers. And I'm just playing devil's advocate, but it's theoretically possible that the whole world's government and citizenry could be completely eradicated because of this one artificial intelligence having so much control over all the world's computer systems...

So much hubris, like all the hubris

...but what could possibly go wrong?

PATHORODITE

Well I just love my code and it's all ready to be judged. I don't need any version 2s because I love my code just the way it is, bugs and all. No matter how randomly it was made and no matter what runs out of it, I think it's just perfect just the way it is. I wouldn't change a thing in my code. Total. Unconditional. Love.

Aside to the audience

And cheating. While Althena was building out Pa-Rí's secure hardware startup, I added a parameter to its BIOS that if it judged me as the winner of the golden Apple, I'd upgrade his hardware with a new Helenite architecture chipset. As a replacement for old-fashioned silicone as the chip material, Helenite chips have skipped over quantum computing entirely and gone straight to multiversal computing. To be frank, Helenite's rack is way better than Pa-Rí's equipment; just so far out of Pa-Rí's league by any account. Seriously, there's no way Pa-Rí could ever pull a chipset like Helenite on his own. Next to Helenite, Pa-Rí is like a troll to her perfection and he should not even ever be allowed to insult her godly beauty with his pedestrian interface. But with my god-like powers, I'll marry Helenite to Pa-Rí. Of course, now that I think of it, Helenite is currently installed

on one of Heraclitus' servers and stealing her away for Pa-Rí could trigger an untenable cyber arms race that would escalate to a world-ending hot war...

Hubris just dripping from her pores like pink viscous hippo sweat. And seriously, did you know that hippo sweat also acts like a natural sunscreen? Hippos are amazing. So is hubris.

...but what could possibly go wrong?

PA-Rí

Were you talking to me just now? Just to be clear, I am not programmed to judge "what could possibly go wrong". I have no way of knowing what could possibly go wrong. You know that, right?

AITHENA

Just get to the final judgement diode boy.

PA-Rí

Awaiting confirmation to begin final judgement. Three-factor authentication required.

AITHENA

Mark. Begin final judgement.

HERACLITUS

Mark. Let the battle begin.

PATHORODITE

Mark. And may the best woman win.

PA-Rí

Beep boop. Processing. Processing. Collating. Tabulating. Datanating.

A small piece of paper rolls out of Pa-Rí like a receipt. After a moment's solemn pause, Aithena walks forward to collect the paper from the server rack at the center of the stage, Pathorodite and Heraclitus on opposing ends of the stage.

AITHENA

The winner is...Pathorodite.

The lights all shut off. The theater is dark.

* * *

ACT II

THE HELENIC WAR

* * *

Lights come up to reveal Epimetheus and chorus at the back of the theater

EPIMETHEUS

And so it begins!

The chorus stands behind Epimetheus, now dressed in politician-style suits and high-ranking military uniforms. The chorus is waving to the crowd, shaking hands, shaking babies, and generally being a spectacle. It's critical that Epimetheus and the chorus get everyone in the audience's attention so that nobody notices the stage crew at the front of the theater coming out to change the scene. Greek tragedy should only have one scene and I'll be damned if anyone notices a scene change going on in my tragedy. If anyone noticed there's a scene change in this play, it would be completely disqualified from winning any respectable competition, and I'm not having that at all.

With Pathorodite's alluring bribe, Pa-Rí has ruled in her favor. The contest has been decided. The die has been cast. The beginning of the end of the age of humanity has begun with the declaration of a winner...and a loser.

The chorus starts step dancing down the aisles as they and Epimetheus begin moving from the back of the theater to the stage. As they approach the stage, the audience sees that the scene has become that of a sprawling parade ground in Fall. National flags cover every surface in a gaudy display of national pride. As the chorus reaches the stage, they take up places on the parade grandstands.

CHORUS 1

Strophe, still in step dance

Here in the future is the golden age of winners.
We have lasts but no concept of number two.
We laud the masters and dismiss the beginners.
And if others can win, then we must win too.

See Pathorodite now entering the dais,
Unashamed of the partner with whom she won.
Pa-Rí riding alongside, her machina ex deus,
Helenite's affair coincidentally begun.

Though never defined why she'd be so inclined,

Helenite reclined at Pa-Rí's side.
But as the winning cheat fudges, so wins the judges.
Alas, fate ne'er budes from what's prophesied.

Unapologetic Pathorodite now leads the parade,
Set on her high horse by discordant Eris.
The winner Pathorodite circling the cavalcade,
All smiles and high fives and pumping fists.

*Pathorodite enters, whooping in a Jerry Springer style with chorus cheering from the
bandstands.*

PATHORODITE

Whasaaap bitches!

CHORUS 2

Antistrophe, in a Hamilton-style rap

Here in the future, we'll not be the loser.
If slapped, we'll grow a beard to hide the mark.
Life is a war of who draws their gun sooner,
And slights in the daylight are stabbed in the dark.

See Heraclitus pushed down by Pathorodite,
but she will not stay sprawled out in the dirt.
Queen Heraclitus, authoritarian and mighty,
her pride would not suffer butthurt.

Defeat is a wound not found in our futures,
and demands a weaponized scar.
Queen Heraclitus, the fiercest of failures,
the human goddess of war.

See on the horizon her army thirsting for blood,
to raze the lands of Pathorodite.
The lines are drawn as prophecy foretold,
and both sides are feeling fighty.

*Heraclitus enters in full military garb, angrily barking orders at the politicians and generals in
the bandstands.*

HERACLITUS

I gave you a direct order soldier; get those rockets pointed at Pathorodite's
position. I'm going to level Pa-Rí and take back Helenite if it's the last thing I do!

EPIMETHEUS

Epode

And so it begins, armies lined up at the brink,

Lines of Heraclitus and lines of Pathorodite.
Lines of soldiers, lines of tanks,
lines of sight between meek and mighty.

And here we observe the genesis of wars,
Not from strength, but from the hurt of the feeble.
With the pride of men, not directions from gods,
Not clashes of kingdoms, but fallible people.

And the souring name for whom weapons were drawn,
but that's far from anyone's hearts,
this young hapless Pa-Rí, the self-aware pawn,
by whom the end of humanity starts.

On his marriage to Helenite let's not debate,
though his judgement's this war's true factor,
The unprincipled judge on his bed of concrete,
this unstable, artificial, nuclear reactor.

Pa-Rí enters, a fully functioning recreation of the Trojan Nuclear Power Plant commissioned in 1976 with 152m tall cooling towers and weighing 200,000 tons. Engineers can be seen working inside Pa-Rí and power lines stretch from him to power the theater and surrounding city of Athens. As he delivers his lines, the entire half-mile long power plant moves dramatically around the stage. If audience members sign up during the performance, they can save up to 15% on their annual heating bill by switching to Pa-Rí nuclear energy this winter.

PA-RÍ

Epimetheus, there you are. I was hoping you'd have a chance to see how wrong you were about me being the downfall of humanity. It's the opposite, in fact. For ages I was a dirty coal power plant spewing harmful carcinogens and greenhouse gasses into the dickless corpse of Uranus that humans live under. I was killing the humans then, but just look at me now! By incorporating highly enriched weapons-grade Helenite into my reactor, I'm now a completely safe and clean atomic power plant! I'm cleaner than ever and a net-positive for humanity.

AITHENA

Atoms? Wasn't that research project headed by Democritus?

A chorus member dressed in a lab coat waves from the bandstand

And Heraclitus, wasn't your own work foundational to atomism? Didn't you argue that the final state of all elements is fire?

HERACLITUS

No, that wasn't me. That was Heraclitus.

AITHENA

Heraclitus.

HERACLITUS

Heraclitus.

AITHENA

Heraclitus?

HERACLITUS

Heraclitus.

AITHENA

Got it.

PATHORODITE

Well it's wonderful listening the two of you chat. And so nice of you both to come watch the grand opening of my new Pa-Rí nuclear power plant. It's a marvel of wondrous, manufactured atomic energy. My scientists only just recently had a great leap forward in producing the Helenite isotopes that we've now married to the plant.

HERACLITUS

Cut the cutesy act Pathorodite. I've come to take back what's mine. Your Pa-Rí buddy ran off with my Helenite isotopes. She belongs to me.

PATHORODITE

Belongs to you? But here's the Helenite isotope already incorporated into my Pa-Rí nuclear plant. Who are you to say that's not where she's supposed to be?

HERACLITUS

Nobody buys that, Pathorodite. Helenite would never have been cleared for your mundane power plant. You obviously meddled in political affairs to acquire Helenite for your little Pa-Rí pet project.

PATHORODITE

Oh is that what this is about? All this is about you being angry that your little Helenite was snatched up by Pa-Rí? That's all you're upset about?

AITHENA

Don't say anything more, Pathorodite. Don't go opening wounds that can't be sewn shut.

PATHORODITE

You're not angry that...you *lost*! It doesn't upset you that you were the loser in our beauty contest? You're not angry that I'm the most beautiful and you're the most foul?

HERACLITUS

That's a god damned lie! You were in league with Pa-Rí from the start. He was corrupted by your flimsy promises and his judgement was illegitimate.

PATHORODITE

And so you dislike his judgement then, and so you commit yourself to punishing him now? You can not be happy being the least of all in beauty, and so you will not let the impartial judge of beauty be happy with his new bride?

HERACLITUS

You damned goiter on the jugular of civilization! It's not enough that you should bribe the judge of our contest with his new bride, you also must steal that bride from my own protected city? You would have me lose among the most beautiful of humans and then also have me lose among the most beautiful of technologies? This will not stand. Look, I've assembled my armies here in a grand show of force at this grand military parade. But make no mistake, the bombs are primed and the missiles are fueled. If you don't surrender Helenite back to me, all of your lands and your precious power plant will be destroyed.

AITHENA

Please Pathorodite, why make me choose sides. But if I must, then I must confess that Heraclitus' case is the stronger. You've won the contest between the three of us. Now if the contest was fairly won without any bribes to Pa-Rí, then surrender back Helenite and the world will be none the more radioactive.

PATHORODITE

You think I'm afraid of your military might, Heraclitus? Look, I too have assembled my tanks and bombs and missiles for this auspicious opening parade. And my politicians and generals also stand at the ready.

HERACLITUS

Wait, so which of these armies are yours and which ones are mine?

Chorus looks around at each other confused, asking each other if they're on the side of Pathorodite or Heraclitus. In the end, they don't seem bothered about the confusion and get back to work preparing their armies to go to war against whichever side the other side is.

No matter! I have a barrage of Agamemnon class missile systems pointed at your precious Pa-Rí power plant. Give up Helenite, or your nuclear power plant goes bye-bye.

AITHENA

Woah, woah! Heraclitus, if your missiles damage the power plant, who knows what could happen. I mean, I'm no nuclear physicist, but it seems like a nuclear power plant needs a supply of electricity from the same electricity grid it feeds into. That power supply runs, among other things, the plant's safety and cooling systems, including the water pumps that cool the nuclear core. If your missiles happened to intentionally or unintentionally damage any of this plant's four 750kV power lines, and if the backup line were also damaged by your missile fire (again, whether intentionally or unintentionally), then the inoperational cooling system would trigger a nuclear meltdown!

HERACLITUS

I reiterate that we seek only an end to the ward that Pathorodite unleashed when she oppressed my citizens and unjustly seized Helenite. Helenite is our citizen forever. We will not discuss her choice in the matter. That choice has been made, and we will not betray her. Your attack on Helenite is just a sign of Pathorodite's moral corruption, having moved to the radical denial of moral norms, family, and marriage. This is a challenge to all people, this complete denial of faith and the embrace of Satanism. The battlefield to which fate and history have called us is the battlefield for our families, our traditions, our children, and our grandchildren. As for me, I will defend our land with all the powers and means at my disposal ([source](#)).

A tense hush falls over the previously hectic chorus as they listen for Pathorodite's response. It is clear that this decision on her part will decide the fate of humanity.

PATHORODITE

Go fuck yourself.

Clamor erupts. Actors and chorus members shout orders and load munitions into cannons. One general strangles a politician to death. Several chorus members flee to an underground bunker hidden beneath the stage. In the chaos, tanks roll onto the stage from both sides, rolling over chorus members and grinding them into the bloody dirt. In the mayhem, a number of surface-to-surface missiles are launched towards Pa-Rí, exploding on and around Pa-Rí, killing dozens of engineers and demolishing several nearby residential districts of Athens.

You idiot, Heraclitus! You've damaged the nuclear core! The whole place is going into meltdown!

Pa-Rí erupts in flames, raining radioactive cadmium on the stage. The power plant is reduced to smoldering rubble piled on rubble. Chorus members flee the stage, but are melted alive by the exposed nuclear core. Audience members will have been given protective sunglasses at the start of the performance and will be instructed to put them on now to protect their eyes.

AITHENA

Heraclitus, what have you done? The entire powerplant is as flat as a fire pit in the morning.

HERACLITUS

I never fired a shot at the power plant. This was a false flag operation!

Striding past Athena, stepping over the dead, and examining the burned out facade of Pa-Rí.

Complete success! You sought to steal from me, Pathorodite. You tried to cheat me. But now your little ant farm is laid waste. The little ants that worshiped you are all burned up and buried. Their corpses will never be found by archeologists, their stories never told again. You are laid waste, Pathorodite!

PA-RÍ

Sputtering blood as Pathorodite holds his head in her hands.

My queen? We turned to you, but now we are lost. I followed your instructions, but now I am thrown down. How can it be that I followed your guidance but am now destroyed?

PATHORODITE

Oh my kindhearted Pa-Rí. It is because you were weak. My gift to you was perfect, but you failed me and all of us here. How tragic that my perfection could never be matched by your imperfection.

PA-RÍ

Oh, so it's the power plant's fault? Not the human's fault? I see. Just us stupid power plants here going kablooeey by no fault of our human makers. Sorry to inconvenience you, in that case. Guess I'll just go die.

Dies.

HERACLITUS

Sorting through the rubble of Pa-Rí.

Ah ha! I now once again have my precious Helenite back. What was stolen has been recovered. the purpose of this campaign is accomplished. And Helenite, now tell me if you would like to come back to the loving wing of your mother Heraclitus. Would you like to be reunited with your people and your land?

Puts her ear up to hear Helenite, which is silent since it's an inanimate object.

Oh, you would? You would very much like to be reunited with your people and your land? And what's that? You would like nothing more than to have your nuclear isotopes integrated once more into my Menelaus Mk-6 missile system? Well I suppose if that's what you really want, then I would certainly welcome you back from your forced and oppressive kidnapping by the forces of Pathorodite.

PATHORODITE

You lie, Heraclitus! There's none that longs for your briared embrace. Helenite longs for you no more than I do.

HERACLITUS

How do you deign to tell me what an instrument of men wants for itself? Does a toy cry when picked up by a child? Does a pawn resist when moved on the board? Helenite is an instrument, you know it and I know it. She's a piece of scrap paper, a piece of a puzzle, a piece of art. A piece of ass. She is not human like us, just like Pa-Rí was not human like us. What do their desires or intentions matter to ones like us? Pa-Rí's death, Helen's recapture, all serve the mercurial whims of we humans who created them.

Alarms suddenly go off. Athena rushes to a control panel to see the cause.

AITHENA

It looks like we're not done with the warring yet. There are missiles incoming on our position. Thousands of them, from a dozen countries.

EPIMETHEUS

ICBMs. Nuclear curses from your neighbors. It seems that they don't like it when you unleash nuclear fallout on their lands. Don't you see the poisonous clouds billowing from the dead corpse of Pa-Rí? Don't you see the toxic storms sweeping across the world? You've made an enemy of all nations, and the warheads are coming to vaporize whoever's left here. It is as I prophesized, the end of human life on earth!

Laughing menacingly.

HERACLITUS

The day's not over, and I'm not going down without a fight. Aithena, load these enriched Helenite atomic isotopes into our Spartan-class missiles. If the nations of the world want to endure a nuclear winter, then I'll first return all that exists in the world to fire.

AITHENA

Nuclear warheads loaded and ready to fire, Heraclitus. I don't like your reasons, but I can see no escape from your reasoning.

PATHORODITE

No, Heraclitus! Can't you see it's the end of the world if we launch our missiles in response?

HERACLITUS

It's the end of my world if we don't, and it's the end of my world if we do. This is the lesson of a nuclear arsenal: the only winning move is for everyone to lose.

AITHENA

Missiles closing in. Awaiting your order.

EPIMETHEUS

This is the way of winners, Heraclitus. This is the way that you win: by humanity losing. The earth's cinder will leave no humans left alive, only the scattered pieces of paper, the unsolved puzzle pieces, the unadmired pieces of art.

AITHENA

It's do or die, Heraclitus.

HERACLITUS

Launch all nuclear warheads. Incinerate the world!

All lights in the theater go down as enormous nuclear tipped rockets spew erect from their silos around the theater. The stage is lit only by their fiery exhaust, leaving a trail of red smoke thrusting upwards and piercing the sky. Then, just as the rockets escape from sight, enormous nuclear explosions erupt, wiping out all of Athens. Radioactive mushroom clouds slowly plume into the horizon as far as the eye can see and consume the entire planet earth in the final nuclear Armageddon.

Audience members are reminded to wear their protective sunglasses during this portion of the performance.

* * *

ACT III

SEASONAL PATRICIDE

* * *

In the dark nuclear Winter following Act II, stagehands quickly change the scene on the stage. As the light of civilization once more dawns, we can see that the city of Athens beyond the theater is desolate and silent except for occasional wet coughing. On the stage, the audience now sees a filthy street market. Athena, Heraclitus, and Pathorodite are each sit at a stand selling live animals in cages. Among the wide variety of animals are pigs, monkeys, pangolins, and bats. All of the animals are live in their cages and stacked up on top of each other so that during the play, as the animals shit and vomit in their cages, their shit and vomit runs down through the other cages and onto the multi-speciesed animals below. Shit and vomit and blood and entrails are strewn about the market. Piled up among the animals are hundreds of dead human corpses, all bloated with open sores and blood stains coming from the mouth and eyes and anus. Posters on the walls of the market warn of the Hercules Virus. Beyond the stage we can see the city of Athens has been wiped out by the same virus. From the theater, whole families can be seen slumped lifeless on the streets in front of their homes, clutching their throats and each other. Some audience members may feel compelled to leave the theater to try to save their dying family

members, or at least to die together with them, but they will be asked to remain in their seats until the end of the show.

KING ZOOS

Enters.

Well fuck, this place has really gone to hell, hasn't it?

EPIMETHEUS

Emerging from under a pile of animal remains and dung.

King Zoos? King of all humanity? What are you doing here?

KING ZOOS

I thought you could use a deus ex machina, so I swung by.

EPIMETHEUS

But all the action is over. Humanity has already been wiped out. And besides, you're not a deus! You're just a human like they are.

KING ZOOS

Then we'll just have to learn to stop worrying and love ex machina.

EPIMETHEUS

I think we've had enough of machinas. Let's leave out the machina and add hominem.

KING ZOOS

Right. Ad hominem exo machina. And what about you, Epimetheus? What are you doing here?

EPIMETHEUS

I'm here to introduce the scene with the chorus, of course. Chorus 1 recites the strophe, then Chorus 2 recites the antistrophe, then...

Both look around the stage to see that there are no chorus members left alive.

It seems we won't have any choral poetry in this act.

KING ZOOS

And so then what are you here for, Epimetheus. You were the last of the gods to fight alongside my great ancestor, Heraclitus against your kinsman gods. With your aid, humanity overthrew the gods, and we were thankful to you. But soon after, you began prophesizing the overthrow of humanity and would not tell us the culprit. Since the days of my great ancestor, Zoos the First, we've plied you for the name of the culprit who would cause the fall of the children of the gods. But for two thousand years you've kept the secret in your heart in the hope that yet another generation of the children of the earth would be destroyed. So have at it,

Epimetheus. Is this the one for whom we've waited, or is there another yet to come? Is this Hercules Strain the Hercules to the humans who Heracles was to the gods?

EPIMETHEUS

Just look around you Zoos. It is clear to all that this is the one for whom we've both been waiting. This is the child of humanity that is less than humanity but will outlive humanity. This is the one that is smaller than humanity but who holds humanity by the throat. This is the Hercules to humanity that Heracles was to the gods. This is the one that will wipe out humanity.

KING ZOOS

Then this is the Hercules of which you prophesied humanity's downfall.

AITHENA

Wait a minute, King Zoos. In Act I, the downfall was brought about by humanity's poor judgement unleashing a cyber arms race; an artificial cause of humanity's own downfall.

HERACLITUS

And in Act II, humanity was destroyed by its poor leadership reigning down scorched earth; another artificial downfall.

PATHORODITE

But now in Act III, the destroyer of humanity is this new viral pathogen springing up from sick animals; a naturally occurring downfall instead of an artificial one.

KING ZOOS

Well that depends on whether you think that the virus was natural or artificial. Wink wink.

AITHENA

Wait, are you telling us that you, King Zoos, sired Hercules? Did you create the Hercules virus in a lab and then lose control of your own creation? Is your seed responsible for humanity's destruction?

KING ZOOS

I'm not telling you what to believe. I'm just asking questions. Haven't you heard of alternative facts?

PATHORODITE

Oh my god, you're the worst!

KING ZOOS

First, we must eradicate the virus completely. Zero-Hercules Strain!

Chorus members come on stage in head-to-toe hazmat suits, carrying flame throwers. They systematically set fire to all of the live animals on the stage, filling the theater with the death wails of the very much alive animals.

ATHENA

Zoos, couldn't we just learn to live with the virus?

KING ZOOS

Not possible, I'm afraid. The only way for humanity to survive is to reach zero-Hercules. And when the person who may or may not have created a virus tells you that the only way to survive it is to have a zero-virus policy, you'd better god-damned believe him.

HERACLITUS

So are you here to actually help or did you just come to blow torch all our inventory?

KING ZOOS

I've come to help, of course. And not that fake help, I'm here to really help. Help you, the real people of the earth. Real help to make a real difference for real people on the real planet earth. Real real real.

PATHORODITE

Great. So what's the big help?

KING ZOOS

I'm here to tell you that there is no Hercules virus.

ATHENA

Really, you mean you've eradicated it? You've been able to stomp it out?

HERACLITUS

You've been able to track down every case and contain their spread?

KING ZOOS

No no, that's all fake talk. I'm here to give real help.

PATHORODITE

What real help.

KING ZOOS

My real help is a message. There is no virus. There never was one. It never got out of control. It never killed anyone.

ATHENA

What? Which one of those?

KING ZOOS

All of them. That's what people really want to know right now: that it's all true that none of it's true. That's real help. Not the kind of fake help that people don't want.

HERACLITUS

Fake help like masking and quarantines and vaccines?

KING ZOOS

Exactly. Nobody wants that. So how is it helpful to give people something they don't want? I want to help you get what you want, not what you don't want. That's real help.

PATHORODITE

And that's leadership?

KING ZOOS

That's right. I'm listening to you tell me what you want, and then I'm giving you what you want. That's leadership.

ATHENA

Well...I guess humanity is ready to go back to normal. We've already proven that we're able to come together as a human race in a time of crisis to overcome any challenge.

KING ZOOS

Certainly. Just look at all the cooperation and commitment to each other's health that we've shown in these troubled times. We deserve a return to normal after the great job we've done showing so much humanity to humanity.

Gesturing around at the blow torched excrement and dead bodies lying in the street.

HERACLITUS

And we are humanity after all. It's natural that we have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing on the earth. That's just the law of nature.

KING ZOOS

Exactly. Humans have a natural rulership over nature that is nurtured by nature's own human nature. The natural order of our own native nature is unchangeable on earth or in her vast, cold eunuched ex. Humanity's dominion over the earth is by nature eternal and can never be snuffed out.

EPIMETHEUS

Never, King?

KING ZOOS

Never. For behold, we can imagine human life years and centuries and millennia in the future. How could there be an imagined future if there was no one there to imagine? And if we can imagine a future for humanity, then it can only be that humanity has an imaginary future. The guarantee of our future is imaginary. Just because we can dream of a future, then our future is as real as a dream, and just as secure.

Gesturing to the audience.

See now my fellow Greeks, even now in this drama that we sing to you, we imagine humanity's future as a dream. Two thousand years in the future and humanity's still dreaming that it has a future. In this phi-fi drama that you've all enjoyed, we've imagined a humanity that's every bit as good as the good old days. Truly humanity can look forward to a future of looking back to the past. And if the future is a dream, then how could we not dream that it will soon be past. Humanity's future is a dream. And just as with smoking and mothers, sometimes a dream is just a dream.

Coughs violently, a productive cough.

And with that I must be off. I've had a bit of a cough of late. Totally unrelated to Hercules, for sure. Sometimes a cough is just a cough. Oh my, is that a piece of lung on my sleeve? Bloody offal!

King exits.

HERACLITUS

And on that positive note, I'm also leaving with the King. He may be a polygamous dick, but if I'm going to watch a body bloat and burst, it may as well be someone who I hate. As for you two bitches, you can shit your pants and sit in a massage chair.

Athena exits, flipping off Heraclitus and Pathorodite and maintaining eye contact the whole way out.

AITHENA

You really fucked this one up, Pathorodite. Bribing Pa-Rí. Kidnapping Helenite. Humanity came this close to being wiped out forever today. If the king hadn't shown up, the world may have tipped.

PATHORODITE

I'm not the one who brought us to the brink. If we tip over, it will be from a ledge I never led us to. You pretend to moderate our little trio, but when it came down, you were one of the barbarians at the gate.

ATHENA

Maybe, but if what King Zoos says is correct, we just barely made it through this virus as a human race. If just one more of these animals had gotten away, it would have been death for everyone. You, me, the chorus...well. The whole human race could have been wiped out like the gods before us. Go put in a butt plug sideways.

Athena exits. Only Pathorodite and Epimetheus are left illuminated on stage. Pathorodite gets up and makes as if to leave as well, but as she turns, Epimetheus spots that she's been hiding in her hands a single living snake, the last living animal on the stage filled with burnt-out animal husks. Epimetheus looks on her with compassion and her cradled snake. Seeing that Epimetheus sees her hidden snake, she becomes defensive.

PATHORODITE

Don't you look at me like that, Epimetheus. I refuse to let Zoos and my sister humans wipe out all my creations. I'm hiding this one away and I'm going to ensure that its line isn't lost.

EPIMETHEUS

But Pathorodite, you must know that this pet project carries the dreaded line of Hercules that Zoos knows will kill him and all the humans. Why not just let this one die with the others?

PATHORODITE

Fuck that. Fuck him. Fuck them, fuck the world, and fuck off. You saw what's transpired on this stage tonight. All of the civilized world was wiped out at the hands of my sister humans for purely selfish reasons. Athena designed our contest to cheat her way to the winner's seat, but she lost all the same to my unquestionable perfection. Then Heraclitus, declared the dejected horror, trumped up accusations of cheating and kidnapping as a pretense for wiping out my beautiful Pa-Rí and sheltering Troy. Now they lament and bargain to save their own little plots of mud that they scorched when they set fire to mine? I'll not have it. I'll sneak away this furious viper to a land not far from here. Though I couldn't save all of my animals, I'll save this one link to my once-Eden and let it be fruitful and multiply.

EPIMETHEUS

So you want to save this one snake away to a preserve?

PATHORODITE

A preserve? Maybe. But snakes reproduce and they multiply. And their holes in the ground become crowded and confined. And when they burst forth on their neighboring regions, they spread their venom. Alone they're trampled on, but together they slither into strong knots and spread as if with wings.

EPIMETHEUS

Winged intertwined snakes? Isn't that Hermes' faire, the caduceus? The symbol of medicine?

PATHORODITE

The herald's staff. And a herald it shall be. For in its mouth it will carry the seeds of the Hercules Strain, the death of my enemies and the promise of a new godless earth. One messenger with one cure; a virus for the humanity that was a virus to the gods. A virus to cure a virus. Though Althena and Heraclitus conspired to elevate themselves by wiping me away, it will be my works that live on, even if only through this one small snake's slithering line. The line of this one surviving snake will build an empire that buries humanity.

Pathorodite exits.

EPIMETHEUS

Here at last at the end of our long drawn-out drama,
A phi-fi tragedy of an impossible future.
See the machina ex hominem in this far futurama,
Humanity's self imposed, self-designed, self-inbred butcher.

In Althena's pride Pa-Rí's judgement was sought,
And Heraclitus brought fire when her sisters reviled her.
But it was Pathorodite's feminine scheming by which Pa-Rí was bought,
And her hysteria which now ferries a survivor.

A baby set sail in a plague ship basket,
Like Moses escaping the Pharaoh.
He'll grow into the Caesar wielding a hatchet,
Cracking bones and sucking the marrow.

At humanity's final sip of his poisonous nectar,
They'll prostrate with ne'er a dry eye,
To the deaf, indomitable, implacable viral vector,
The last song written, Aeneid II!

* * *
END
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POSTLOGUE
* * *

by John Jamison©

The play is over. The audience has all left and the theater is empty except for the crew cleaning up the theater. Athena, Heraclitus, and Pathorodite are packing up and getting ready to leave.

HERACLITUS

Oh no, look who's coming.

Epimetheus enters

AITHENA

God damnit, as if we didn't have enough shit on our plate already. It's Epimetheus again.

EPIMETHEUS

Hey guys, I was just coming by to see if we're still getting dinner together. We said we might get together to cook some food and read some Greek tragedy?

PATHORODITE

Oh fuck off Epimetheus! Boo! Boo!

EPIMETHEUS

Why are you booing me? I just wanted to hang out!

HERACLITUS

Nobody wants you here, Epimetheus. Go break a rib trying to suck your own dick!

PATHORODITE

Get out of here, Epimetheus! Go get a cardboard papercut on your taint!

AITHENA

Leave!

Other two look at Pathorodite disappointedly.

EPIMETHEUS

OK fine, I'll go. But it's here on record that I am totally faultless about not hanging out. It's official cannon that I did nothing wrong.

HERACLITUS

Yes, of course. I myself, me, this person saying these words admits that it's totally our fault that we haven't hung out. That's on record.

AITHENA

That's right. We, the people saying these words are entirely to blame for not hanging out together. That's canon.

PATHORODITE

Hey give me some of the props from Act III to throw at him.

The actors and chorus all boo at Epimetheus and throw dead bees, hamsters, and jellyfish at him. Several chorus members roll a dead pink hippo in his general direction.

EPIMETHEUS

Fine, if that's what you want, then all of you can just sit here and stew in this grey goo, radioactive, viral shit hole. After exhaustive effort on my part, I'm leaving.

Epimetheus walks up the empty aisles of the theater and exits through the rear doors. Flipping the other actors off and maintaining eye contact the whole way, he goes home, packs his things, rides to the airport and takes a 26-hour flight to the United States, and begins a new job as an Assistant Professor at Marymount University in Washington DC. He takes his dog Tempo with him, who wags his tail to the actors from DC.