

Almond latte

Distant thunder rumbled as the cup made its way to his table for the second time. It might seem petty, but getting his coffee order wrong was the final insult. Wars have been started over far less. What's the point of being ruler, protector, and father of all gods and humans if no one respected you anymore?

Stroking his long white beard, he reminisces about those burnished, shimmering days of antiquity. The temples built in his name, imposing, remote, designed to elicit awe. He could still feel the cool marble, tracing the carved ridges in his mind's eye. And the offerings! The smell of charred lamb and carcasses of unknown origin. Rivers of wine. Honeycakes. Incense. Cities even stopped warring every few years to hold games in his honour. In those days, no one would have dared forget his preference for almond milk.

But now? Nothing. A few crumbling ruins here and there, scattered like broken teeth across the forgotten islands, visited by the occasional sweaty tourist. Confined to a minor chapter in a history textbook. Portrayed by some terrible actor in a wig and robe. Frankly, it's just embarrassing.

He blames Prometheus for this debacle. Idiot. Stealing fire and sneaking it off to the humans was always going to end in tears. Everyone knows they can't handle that kind of technology responsibly. Well, old P got his just deserts, didn't he. How's the liver, by the way? And Pandora, well, unleashing disease and toil just didn't have the desired effect. Just ended up with a bunch of humans stupid enough to think they could outsmart it all.

Nowadays they think they're so unbelievably clever. Locked into an eternal embrace with their hand-machines, they're worse than Narcissus, mesmerised by their own reflections. Dumber than ever before but even worse, unaware of just how disconnected they are. Ugh. How he longed to hurl a few bolts in their direction. That'd shake them up a bit. Interfere with the hand machines. Deus ex machina and all that. But no. They'd just turn it into some ridiculous meme or childish Toktik, TokSik or whatever that pestilent scourge was called.

Was it time to throw some shapeshifting back into the mix? Bulls, swans, owls were part of the standard repertoire. Used to terrorise the locals to see him in flight, feathers sprouting out of his skin, hands twisting to form powerful hooves. He worries whether these powers would have the desired effect now. Would they even react? Sadly, probably not violent or savage enough for today's tastes. No, it's all oversized mutants - giant lizards and dragons seem to be the only creatures striking fear into their puny hearts. Maybe it was time to let the Minotaur off the leash?

How he longed to punish them. Maybe he should check in with Sisyphus, to see if there was any availability. Release a horde of stinging bugs. Tie that careless barista to an eternally burning wheel. He wasn't proud of it, but his capacity for vengeance ran a little too hot at times. He felt himself spiralling into a frenzy of rage, thinking of increasingly nasty retributions.

But then, *flash!*

He takes in, as if for the first time, the couple at the neighbouring table, heads dropped over their matching hand machines, not speaking, each a god in their own universe.

He realises with a start that he doesn't actually need to do a thing. The best punishment was already in train without anyone even realising! Prometheus had unwittingly done him a huge favour. No, at the rate humans were unconsciously dismantling their world, extinguishing life and squandering everything they could lay their hands on, it won't be long until the days of antiquity return. They'll need us then. To keep things in check. To restore order. They certainly can't be trusted to do it themselves.

Gently rubbing his aquiline nose, he welcomes the return of calm which had eluded him all day. Serene is Supreme, as his daughter Athena kept reminding him. He just has to be patient. All will return to the good old days. He has all the time in the world. After all, he is Zeus. He smiles to himself, sips his almond latte and waits.