

ZEUS ROAST

By Dean O'Carroll

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SYNOPSIS: A one-act comedy about the gods of Greek mythology. In it, Dionysus, in his capacity as god of theatre, is hosting a comedy roast and Zeus is the guest of honor. While all the gods take turns zinging the king with insult comedy in their own style—Artemis shoots one-liners like arrows, Apollo reads a goofy poem, Aphrodite insults everyone's outfits, Uncle Poseidon employs nautical puns, Hermes rattles off jokes at top speed, Hades uses deadpan humor—Athena smells a rat. Why would the notoriously thin-skinned Zeus tolerate these insults? While the jokes fly, Athena tries to solve the mystery of why Zeus is laughing along with everyone rather than smiting them all with lightning. It all builds to a climax that could leave the stage littered with flash-fried deities!

DURATION: 60 minutes.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A banquet hall on Mount Olympus.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(10-19 any gender)

Gender-blind casting is encouraged.

DIONYSUS.....	(52 lines)
ATHENA.....	(106 lines)
ARTEMIS.....	(17 lines)
THESPIS.....	(should be credited as ZEUS or THE GUEST OF HONOR in the program) (30 lines)
NIKE.....	(7 lines)
ARES.....	(15 lines)
HERA.....	(10 lines)
HEBE.....	(8 lines)
POSEIDON.....	(13 lines)
APHRODITE.....	(12 lines)
ARTEMIS.....	(14 lines)
APOLLO.....	(12 lines)

HEPHAESTUS	(12 lines)
DEMETER.....	(10 lines)
PERSEPHONE	(13 lines)
HERMES	(11 lines)
HADES	(9 lines)
HECATE.....	(6 lines)
ZEUS	(should be credited as AN UNEXPECTED GUEST, or not at all, in the program) (15 lines)

CASTING

Double-casting is possible. Having the actor who plays Thespis double as Zeus would be logical, with his Zeus costume resembling his Thespis-Disguised-as-Zeus costume, just looking more grand and imposing. Almost any actor, other than the ones playing Athena and Dionysus, could double as any other character, as long as they don't have to appear together onstage before the climax. While that climactic scene—from Athena unmasking Thespis to Zeus dismissing everyone—does, theoretically, require all the characters onstage, if some of the parts are double-cast, it could still work if some of the dialogue is adjusted and/or reassigned.

AT START: *The stage is set for a roast. A center dais with a podium and a spot for the guest of honor. Smaller tables for other guests are downstage and to the side, if desired.*

During the bulk of the play, the action will shift from the dais, where the performers will be delivering the roast, to some “backstage” space where ATHENA will be interrogating the performers after they speak. This can be accomplished through changes in lights or, if that is not possible, another method to pull focus while the roast performer freezes or switches to mime.

It is up to the individual production if you want to have the rest of the cast onstage the whole time as the audience of the roast, or to light or stage the play in such a way that only the actors at the dais are visible.

Lights up. DIONYSUS is there. He is very theatrical tonight.

DIONYSUS: Marvelous! This is going to be a triumph!

ATHENA enters, armored.

ATHENA: Hey, Dionysus! Party master!

DIONYSUS: Athena! Always the first to arrive... early.

ATHENA: It's just good tactics to get the drop on everybody.

DIONYSUS: Beloved sister, this is not a battle! This is an entertainment extravaganza!

ATHENA: Oh... Yeah, I was afraid of that.

DIONYSUS: Of what?

ATHENA: You're in god-of-theatre mode.

DIONYSUS: Indeed! Today I am not in my persona as god of wine, but rather, patron of the fine but humble art of theatre!

ATHENA: So tonight's party isn't going to be...

DIONYSUS: Isn't going to be what?

ARTEMIS enters. She is athletic and matter-of-fact. She carries a bow.

ARTEMIS: Fun. It isn't going to be fun. Or at least she's worried that it won't be as fun as your god-of-wine parties.

DIONYSUS: Artemis! Goddess of the hunt! Well, I assure you, if you are “hunting” for a grand evening, you have found it!

ATHENA: It's just that your god-of-wine parties are about... carousing and relaxing. Your god-of-theatre parties are about... karaoke and looking through old playbills.

DIONYSUS: True, it will not be a Bacchanal, a word taken from my Roman name, by the way—

ARTEMIS and ATHENA: We know.

DIONYSUS: No, tonight will be a marvelous evening of comedy!

ATHENA: Okay, that sounds promising. We could all use a good laugh. You going to perform some Aristophanes for us? A little Brekekekex koax koax?

DIONYSUS: Ah, yes! “Brekekekex koax koax.” As Gilbert and Sullivan called it, the “croaking chorus from *The Frogs* of Aristophanes!” Dear old Aristophanes, the master of Ancient Greek comedy! You know he wrote that play, *The Frogs*, for a festival in my honor and made me the main character.

ARTEMIS and ATHENA: We know.

DIONYSUS: What a tale! In it, I descend into the Underworld to try to rescue the great tragedian Euripides from death's grasp that he might help me to resuscitate the very artform of tragedy. One of the finest contributions to theatre since the great Thespis himself first stepped forth from the chorus and became the world's original and greatest actor.

ARTEMIS and ATHENA: We know!

DIONYSUS: But no! Tonight's frolic is something a bit more modern! This evening will be that most delicious of japeries—a roast!

ATHENA: A roast? The last roast I went to was at Tantalus's house. That didn't go well.

ARTEMIS: (*To the audience.*) If you don't get the reference, look it up. Fair warning, it's gross.

DIONYSUS: No, my sisters, tonight is a comedy roast! Yes, a charming mortal invention where the guest of honor sits at this dais and, one by one, we all come up and zing them with witticisms, insults, and put-downs.

ATHENA: Okay. I'm familiar. So who are we roasting? Someone with a sense of humor, I hope. Thalia the muse of comedy?

DIONYSUS: No, for our first roast we start at the top. I always say, if you want to do something right, go to the very beginning. So tonight's guest of honor is Zeus, the king of gods! Tonight is the Zeus Roast!

If desired there could be a reveal of some sort of sign reading "Zeus Roast."

ATHENA: Zeus? We're roasting Zeus? The Zeus? Our father, Zeus? Artemis, did you know this?

ARTEMIS: Yeah, we kind of all knew about this. We just didn't tell you because we thought you'd react... like this.

ATHENA: Yes, exactly! Have we thought about what a bad idea this is? Have we forgotten that our father is the pettiest, most vengeful being in the universe and he carries around a thunderbolt at all times?

DIONYSUS: This is excellent material! Save it for your time on stage.

ATHENA: You think I'm going on stage to insult Zeus to his face? Artemis, I always thought of you as one of the least stupid of my siblings. Why are you doing this?

ARTEMIS: Hey, if you're gonna hunt, go after the biggest game there is.

ATHENA: We're all going to be flash-fried by our father's lightning!

DIONYSUS: I assure you, that will not happen.

ATHENA: How can you be certain?

DIONYSUS: Ah! You must permit me my actor's secret.

Noises off.

DIONYSUS: Oh, the other guests are arriving! We are about to begin!

The other characters enter. As they take their place, miming chit chat with each other, ATHENA pulls ARTEMIS aside.

ATHENA: You don't seriously think this is a good idea, do you?

ARTEMIS: It wasn't a "good idea" when I went hunting polar bears armed only with a can opener. Did that stop me?

ATHENA: There's something going on here. Dionysus must have some reason for thinking Zeus will let us do this. He's hiding something.

ARTEMIS: Ugh! 'Theen! This is why we don't always tell you about the parties! You always have to question everything and logic everything. If I did that every time I went hunting I'd spend three hours worrying before I fired a shot. Just go with it!

ARTEMIS leaves to take her seat. ATHENA stews. Lights shift. Music.

DIONYSUS: *(Offstage, ideally by microphone.)* Ladies and Gentlemen, Gods and Goddesses! Welcome to the comedy event of the millennium! The Zeus Roast! And now, please give a warm round of applause for our guest of honor, the king of the gods, the master of the air, the lord of lightning—the Romans called him Jupiter, which rhymes with stupider! He's the man who makes you shout "By Jove!" But once we're done with him, he'll be begging for mercy! Please welcome my father—Zeus!

The guest of honor enters. However—spoiler alert—this isn't really Zeus. It's THESPIS, disguised as Zeus. But nobody can see through the disguise. (To preserve the surprise coming later, I would recommend you credit the actor playing Thespis as Zeus in the program and, when the real Zeus shows up later, that actor should be credited as "An Uninvited Guest".) THESPIS, as ZEUS, and later the real ZEUS, when he shows up, have expansive beards.

Applause. THESPIS waves to the crowd and takes his seat. Throughout the roast, THESPIS sits and plays the part of gracious recipient of a roasting. He nods and smiles, shrugs, offers "yeah, you got me facial expressions," occasionally a playful, mock-angry fist shake, etc.

Music fades.

DIONYSUS: *(Offstage, by microphone.)* And now, your roast master, the God of the Grape, the sage of the stage, Dionysus!

Applause as DIONYSUS enters and goes to the podium.

DIONYSUS: Oh thank you, thank you! You're too kind. *(Pulls a piece of paper from his pocket and reads from it.)* "I want to thank all the Tony voters! And, of course, thank you Lin-Manuel Miranda for giving me such beautiful words and music to sing..." Oh, sorry. That was my acceptance speech for next year's Tony Awards.

He crumples up the paper and throws it at THESPIs.

THESPIs: Hey!

DIONYSUS: Oh, father, it's going to get much worse than that! It is glorious to see you all here today. Today we honor the man, the myth—and in his case that's literally true!—Zeus!

You know, I have played so many roles in my theatrical career. But I have never played Oedipus. Of course, Oedipus only killed his father. I get to roast mine alive!

Oh, Father. Bringer of thunder and rain. Where would my grape vines be without them? And where would humans be without my wine to dull the pain you rain down upon them?

It's not that Zeus hates humans. There are plenty of things he loves about them—their agony, their wailing, the way they pray to him in a futile attempt to make him stop torturing them.

You know, Greek theatre was invented to honor me—you're welcome by the way. But you know, of all the great ancient Greek playwrights—Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes—none of them ever wrote a play called "Zeus." That doesn't seem fair. And I don't see why other great playwrights couldn't have done that. Think of all the great plays that could have been written about Zeus's temper tantrums!

Shakespeare could have written "Much Ado About Lightning"—about a feuding couple who fall in love only to get struck by lightning by Zeus because he's mad the waiter didn't put the dressing on the

side. Or maybe Tennessee Williams could have written "A Streetcar Named Zeus" about a woman and her brother-in-law in New Orleans and then Zeus transforms himself into a streetcar and runs them both over because he's mad his beignets didn't have enough powdered sugar. Or Neil Simon could have written "The Zeus Couple" about two divorced men sharing an apartment and then Zeus tortures them both for eternity because they ran out of corn flakes.

Oh, Father, we're going to have a lot of fun at your expense tonight.

THESPIIS: Uh oh! All right! Let me have it!

DIONYSUS: Oh, we will! Thank you for being here. Now, to kick things off with a pep talk, here comes the goddess who makes every show a really big shoe... Nike, the goddess of victory!

NIKE comes to the podium. She is extremely enthusiastic.

NIKE: Yes! Yes! We have got this! We are going out there as a team! We are going to roast this guy and we are going to win! Full hearts, clear eyes—can't lose! Listen up. Listen up, team. It's been a long journey getting here. And it's not going to be easy. Zeus is a tough competitor. We all know his record—he took down Chronos!

THESPIIS: I did!

NIKE: He took down Typhon!

ZEUS: I did!

NIKE: But he doesn't scare me. Because we have got the heart. We have got the talent. We have got the jokes. We have got the insults! And when the dust clears tonight, we are going to be bringing home that trophy! Okay... so there's no trophy but, still... go team!

NIKE charges offstage. DIONYSUS comes to the podium.

DIONYSUS: Thank you, Nike. I'm sure we're all very *pumped* now!

THESPIIS: What?

DIONYSUS: Remember those Nike sneakers that had the pumps? ...anyway... o, for a muse of fire to help me introduce our next warlike speaker. But, alas, the muses are all standing in line for tickets to see _____ [Insert name of performer or show it is hard to get tickets for] so I'll just bring him out—Ares, the god of war!

ARES comes to the podium. His aggressive, precise demeanor hides a thick vein of cowardice.

ARES: Listen up, you pukes. Tonight we are deploying a tactical, all-out offensive on my father Zeus. This is what you've trained for. So I don't want to hear any bellyaching that this job's too tough. You are the finest roasting force ever assembled and we are going to show my father just what it means to face the full insult-comedy onslaught of the gods and goddesses of Olympus.

THESPIIS: That's very intense, son.

ARES: And there will be no dissension in the ranks! When I say jump you ask "how high"? And when I say "My father Zeus is old" you say "how old is he?" Do you understand me, you dog-faced hummus-eaters?

The crowd responds.

ARES: Let's try this! My father Zeus is so old...

ALL: How old is he?

ARES: He is so old that, when he first went to the Olympics, their flag only had one ring! He is so old his high school history book was just one scroll. I just essentially told the same joke twice. Do you have a problem with that, you little grape leaves?

The crowd responds.

ARES: My father is so old the candles on his birthday cake started the great fire of Rome! Speaking of fire, my father is so old that Prometheus had to steal fire from him because he was the only one with the recipe.

THESPIIS: *(Chuckles.)* Recipe.

ARES: My father is bad at relationships.

ALL: How bad at relationships is he?

ARES: He is so bad at relationships that Taylor Swift's entire discography is actually about him. He is so bad at relationships he even cheats at solitaire. He is so bad at relationships his favorite comic strip is The Far Side, because more than one panel is too much of a commitment.

Lights shift to ATHENA talking to NIKE.

ATHENA: Nike! What was that?

NIKE: That was the best pep talk in five counties! Yeah!

ATHENA: Did you really believe what you were saying?

NIKE: Yes! Take it to the bank!

ATHENA: I have never known you to be enthusiastic about a fight unless you thought victory was likely, maybe even guaranteed. But you know and I know that taking on Zeus is suicide.

NIKE: I know! I know! (*Shifts to a more introspective tone.*) I just... have that feeling that we can take him this time.

ATHENA: Like... we can successfully roast him without him getting furious and killing us all, or are you saying that if he does attack we can defeat him?

NIKE: Um... I... don't know. I just look at him on that dais and I don't feel any threat. (*Back to full enthusiasm.*) Yes! We have got this! Full hearts, clear eyes—or, in the case of any cyclopes here tonight, just one eye—can't lose!

NIKE runs off. ATHENA looks exasperated. Lights shift back to the dais where ARES is finishing.

ARES: In conclusion, you have been the finest audience it has ever been my honor to serve with. Goodnight!

ARES salutes the crowd, turns to salute THESPIS and exits.

DIONYSUS: Thank you, thank you, my *good god* of war. And now I'm sure "y'all" are all asking "what was *that* good for?" Now, coming to the stage, please welcome the first lady of Olympus, the queen of the gods, Hera!

Applause HERA comes to the podium. She has the air of a society matron who looks down on everyone. She holds a wine glass.

HERA: Hello. Thank you, Dionysus. Pity you aren't in god of wine mode tonight. Maybe you would have chosen a vintage that aged better than those jokes.

We have a large crowd tonight. It's nice to see... some of you.

Very nice to follow Ares. Isn't he doing a wonderful job as god of war? Congratulations on that whole thing where humans are constantly killing each other everywhere.

And our son Hephaestus is here. Do you know, son, when you were born you were so ugly we threw you down a mountain? That's not a punchline. It's just a fact. But look at you now. The god of blacksmiths. There's an industry that's really taking off. Have you considered expanding into another exciting new field like alchemy or print media?

But we're here to talk about my husband, Zeus. You know, Zeus has many symbols including the eagle and the bull, and believe me, I've been married to him so long I have had to put up with a lot of bull.

As I look around this room I see so, so many of my husband's other children that he had with other goddesses and mortals. Yes, I guess you could say that Zeus has a roving eye. And if it was just the eye... well there wouldn't be so many of you would there?

Right, dear?

THESPIS: Well, I, uh...

HERA: You see, I am the goddess of marriage. So for me, marriage is a sacred institution. For my husband... it's an occasional hobby.

But, dear, we've been married for several thousand years now...

HERA takes THESPIS by the hand.

THESPIS: Indeed we have.

HERA releases his hand.

HERA: ...and some of those years have been very happy. And we do have some wonderful children together. So now I want to bring out our daughter Hebe, the goddess of youth.

HEBE reluctantly comes on stage. A petulant adolescent. She stands at the dais, sighs and rolls her eyes, then looks at her phone.

THESPIS: Hello, dear.

HEBE: What? Whatever.

HERA goes to her and "whispers" loudly...

HERA: Dear? You can start roasting now.

HEBE: Oh. A roast. "Awesome." You guys are so dangerous right? Roasting the king of the gods. "Edgy."

HERA: Dear, you're supposed to be telling jokes.

HEBE: Mother! Just because I am the goddess of youth you think that you can treat me like a child! Okay, fine. Jokes about my dad. *(Looks at her phone again.)* I can't believe she thought she could pull off that outfit.

HERA: Dear! Please stop looking at Instagram.

HEBE: Okay. Fine. You want Dad jokes? Here's some dad jokes. What does Zeus wear under his robes? Thunderpants. What happened when Zeus hurt his foot? He started A-Lympian. What's Zeus's favorite Pixar movie about a war and a giant wooden horse? Troy Story. I can't believe you actually like these jokes. *(Depending*

on the audience reaction to those jokes, she might instead say “Oh, groaning. So cool.”)

Lights shift to ATHENA talking to ARES.

ATHENA: Ares, one war deity to another, I need you to explain the plan here.

ARES: As you know, it would be imprudent to divulge tactics in the middle of an operation and... wait, what?

ATHENA: Why are you taking the risk of mocking Zeus to his face?

ARES: Be... cause... Dionysus said it would be okay.

ATHENA: Dionysus thinks Disney's going to call him any day to offer him the lead in the next Marvel movie. He's delusional. Do you really think Zeus is going to sit here all night and take these insults and not explode into a murderous rage?

ARES: I... I... oh no.

ATHENA: Oh yeah.

ARES: He's going to kill us. He's going to kill us so hard!

ATHENA: I thought so too. But Nike thinks we can win.

ARES: No! No, we cannot! Look, I have been god of war long enough to learn that there is very rarely an actual winner in war but there are always lots and lots of losers. If Zeus decides this isn't funny anymore and starts shooting lightning bolts, we are going to look like badly burned baclava very quickly! I am getting out of here!

ATHENA: No! You are not. Despite all of... this... you are actually much better in a fight than most of these puddles of tzatziki out there. So you are staying put!

ARES: Okay, but if he comes looking for us, we agree that this is all Dionysus's fault, right?

Lights switch back to the dais. DIONYSUS is there.

DIONYSUS: Thank you, your majesty Queen Hera, thank you Hebe. Truly you'll never see a more lovable mother-daughter pair outside of reality television. Now sailing to the stage is the god of the seven seas—Poseidon!

POSEIDON enters. He has the vibe of a wealthy yacht owner from Connecticut.

POSEIDON: Ahoy, ahoy landlubbers! (To *THESPIS*.) Cap'n!

THESPIS: Good evening, brother.

POSEIDON: It's simply spiffing to come ashore and see you all. I don't spend much time on dry land. Of course, Dionysus doesn't spend much time dry at all, does he? But, of course, you're in god of theatre mode tonight. You know we have theatre in the ocean, too—there are ocean versions of all the great shows—*Annie Get Your Harpoon*, *Starboard Side Story*, *Phantom of the Orca*. Dionysus you put together a lovely buffet. Unfortunately, I am on a seafood diet. When I see food, I eat it.

THESPIS: That joke is older than both of us!

POSEIDON: Oh, I should warn you, since I am your brother, Zeus, that makes me uncle to most of the audience, so that's the kind of joke you should expect from me tonight—uncle humor.

Speaking of brothers, you know, when I was a baby, most of my siblings and I were swallowed alive by our father. Ho-hum, typical family drama.

THESPIS: Every family has it!

POSEIDON: So true. But Zeus wasn't swallowed. He managed to escape our dear papa's gullet and eventually set us all free. And don't think he ever lets me forget it. You know that friend who's always saying "remember when I picked you up at the airport? You really owe me one!"—just imagine if the airport was the digestive tract of your evil father.

A long time ago, my brother Zeus and I decided that he would be master of the sky and I would rule over the ocean. And that works pretty well, though we do occasionally argue about who's in charge of the seagulls.

Remember that time we talked about switching jobs?

THESPIS: We did?

POSEIDON: We thought I'd handle the sky and you'd take the ocean, but for some reason you just couldn't fathom it.

Sometimes Zeus reminds me of a lobster, because he's so shellfish.

Sometimes Zeus reminds me of the ocean, not just because he's got a lot of muscles. But because he's deep, and deadly, and very, very salty. And sometimes he reminds me of an octopus, because he's so well armed.

And sometimes Zeus can be unfriendly. I mean, my ocean waves at him all day, and he never waves back.

But Zeus is smarter than me. My report cards always came back with seven Cs.

Lights shift to ATHENA talking with HERA and THEBE.

ATHENA: Your majesty, little sister—

HEBE: *(Still looking at her phone.)* Half-sister.

ATHENA: That was excellent roasting, but I was hoping to ask how Zeus was doing before he came here. Was he in a good mood? Was he saying "boy, I hope they get me good tonight!"?

HERA: I have no idea. I haven't spoken to my husband in a month.

HEBE: Mom and Dad are having one of their spats.

ATHENA: Why?

HERA: Oh, he watched the season finale of _____ [Insert popular TV show] without me. So I'm not speaking with him until after the solstice.

ATHENA: Okay. *(To Hebe.)* Did you talk to him?

HEBE: Yeah we had a real heart to heart, like on an old sitcom. *(Eye roll.)*

ATHENA: So nobody has any idea what mindset Zeus is actually in tonight?

HERA: Athena, this is not easy for me to say to one of the many children my husband had without any help from me. But, due to the circumstances of your birth, you may actually know my husband's mind better than I do.

HEBE: Oh, yeah, didn't you, like, burst out of his forehead fully formed? (*Disgusted sound.*)

Lights shift back to DIONYSUS at the dais.

DIONYSUS: Thank you, Poseidon. I love that book Hemingway wrote about you—*The Old Man, the Old Jokes, and the Sea*. All right, all you lucky lads out there, it's time for the gal who puts the *amour* in *glamour*... the goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite!

APHRODITE comes to the podium. Very glamorous and passive-aggressively dismissive of people who don't live up to her standard of beauty, which is everyone.

APHRODITE: Hello everyone! It's so great to see you all looking so... nice. You know, as the goddess of beauty, I really do appreciate the efforts that you all take to... do your best.

Hermes. Messenger god. Just like you, your fashion sense always sends a message. And that message is "I got dressed really fast." But seriously, Hermes, you are my favorite... brand of handbag. I just wish you would stop pronouncing your own name wrong.

Apollo, the sun god. We know you love being out in the sun. Always gives you that "chicken fried steak" look. You know they're doing wonderful things with SPF these days.

And Artemis, goddess of the moon. I get it. I understand the moon is only full once every twenty-eight days. And if I was in only partial light twenty-seven out of twenty-eight days, I wouldn't care what I look like either.

But of course, we're all gods and goddesses. We're all beautiful... oh... sorry Hephaestus. Oh, Hephaestus my husband. Yes, it is interesting that the goddess of beauty is married to... you. But I do want to let you know that underneath all of that grime and grease, Hephaestus is... there.

And Ares, my special friend. You may think it odd that the goddess of love and the god of war are so close. But all is fair in love and war, as I always tell my husband.

But of course, we're here tonight to celebrate that handsome, hunky, lovable, heroic god of thunder. Unfortunately, Thor couldn't be here tonight. So we'll settle for Zeus.

THESPIS: Ugh. Thor. How many movies does that guy need?

APHRODITE: Tell, me Zeus! How excited were you when giant hipster beards came back into fashion... for a few minutes...?

THESPIS laughs and strokes his beard.

APHRODITE: Seriously, you are very handsome. You look like a movie star.

THESPIS: I do?

APHRODITE: Specifically, Tom Hanks in *Castaway*. When you go to the barber do you tell them "give me the ZZ Top"?

Lights shift to POSEIDON and ATHENA.

POSEIDON: Ahoy, Athena! You're looking ship shape!

ATHENA: Thanks. Hey I'm trying to figure out why we're not all being murdered right now. Did you speak with Zeus before all this?

POSEIDON: Of course! Well, not recently I suppose. Not since we sent him off on that cruise.

ATHENA: A cruise? You sent Zeus on a cruise?

POSEIDON: It was Dionysus's idea. Put him on one of our best vessels, all the amenities—buffets, pools, spa, a Beach Boys cover band—you know, butter the old man up before we roast him like a haddock.

ATHENA: How long was the cruise? When did he get off the ship?

POSEIDON: Let me check my calendar... *(Takes a day planner out of this pocket.)* Hmm... this is odd. He's not scheduled to disembark until tomorrow.

ATHENA: He's supposed to be on the ship right now?

POSEIDON: He must have left early—too bad. Tonight is Funny Hat Night in the Fiesta Room. Not sure how he could drag himself away.

ATHENA: Maybe he didn't. Maybe the real Zeus is standing in line at the taco bar, wearing an oversize novelty Stetson right now, and that guy over there is an imposter.

POSEIDON: Well scrub my deck! What a whale of a tale that would make.

Lights shift to APHRODITE.

APHRODITE: But Zeus, honey, I hope you know that we tease you because we love you. And I know all about love. I also know all about proper skin care, so if you're ever interested in that, call me.

Applause as APHRODITE air-kisses ZEUS on both cheeks and leaves the podium. DIONYSUS returns.

DIONYSUS: Thank you, thank you, goddess of beauty for expressing those truly ugly sentiments.

Next up we have the goddess of the hunt. Let's see if she can poach a few laughs from you. Please welcome Artemis!

DIONYSUS steps away as ARTEMIS takes the podium.

ARTEMIS: Okay. I'm a hunter. That means I like to go for a quick kill.

So I'm gonna shoot some zingers at my father here, then I'm gonna get out of the way and let my brother Apollo talk. *(Raises her bow. Every time she delivers a punchline she twangs the string as if she is firing an arrow.)* It's a good crowd tonight, but I can see some important folks didn't make it. Not that I miss them. I never miss anything. *(Twang.)* Hercules couldn't be here tonight. Apparently even he can't handle this many dumbbells. *(Twang.)* The hydra couldn't be here tonight. He canceled when he heard the tickets were fifty bucks a head. *(Twang.)* Pegasus couldn't be here tonight. So don't worry, Dad, you are definitely the biggest horse's butt in the room. *(Twang.)* Tonight we celebrate my father. But if I wanted to see an old man who gets furious over nothing I'd turn on cable news. *(Twang.)*

THESPIS: Ooh! You got me!

ARTEMIS: Dad, if I wanted to see a guy who lives on a mountain and hates when people are happy I'd watch the Grinch. (*Twang.*) My father is the king of the gods. That means, like a lot of older men, he spends all day sitting on the throne. (*Twang.*) Zeus's symbols include the olive tree and the oak tree. Those are both nice trees, but you don't see Hera putting acorns in her martinis. (*Twang.*) The Romans named a planet after you, Dad. Personally I don't think it looks much like you. I think you look more like Uranus. (*Twang.*) Of course, as gods, we are all immortal. So we can never die, unlike most of the jokes you've all been telling here tonight. (*Twang.*) All right. That's all I have to say. Here's my twin brother. He's the god of the sun so you'd think he'd be a lot brighter. Come on up, Apollo.

APOLLO enters. He has the vibe of a surfer poet. ARTEMIS stands to the side.

APOLLO: Thank you, beloved sister. Truly I have not seen such excellent work with a bow since the final season of *Dukes of Hazzard*.

THESPIS: Oh! Because one of the Duke boys was named Bo!

APOLLO: Yes, Father, that was indeed the reference.

Good evening. It is most righteous to see you. Truly, it is a pity we do not gather more often in such a festive manner.

What is there to say about my father, Zeus? Many a son feels overshadowed by his father. And seeing as I am the god of the sun, and he is the god of thunder clouds, in my case, that overshadowing is most triumphantly literal.

Oh, yes. The sun. That glorious ball of fire in the sky. For so many years humans looked up to it and wished that they could have the secret of fire. It was the titan Prometheus who heard those pleas and dared to steal fire from Olympus to bring it to humans. This brought great anger from my father who punished Prometheus most harshly.

THESPIS: Well, of course I did!

APOLLO: Zeus got so wickedly mad at Prometheus that he chained him to a rock. And every day an eagle would swoop down, tear into the flesh of poor Prometheus and eat one of his vital organs. It would then grow back and the process would repeat every day for thousands of years. And, as the god of music, I will always cherish the song that Paul Simon wrote about that—"50 Ways to Lose Your Liver."

While we all pity Prometheus for this fate, we must think also of the poor eagle who, like an American child in the 1950s, lamented every night "liver for dinner again?"

Of course, I am also the god of poetry, so I have composed a poem about you, father. Would you care to hear it?

THESPIAS: Of course!

APOLLO:

Zeus.

Z is for the zapping that he does with lightning bolts.

E is for everything his mighty power jolts.

U is for unstoppable, like his worshipers in Rome.

S is just for short. His name is, so's this poem.

Lights shift to ATHENA talking to APHRODITE.

ATHENA: Aphrodite! I need your help!

APHRODITE: Oh! I have been waiting for centuries for you to say that! Now, this is going to be a top-to-bottom makeover. First things first we take that armor and melt it.

ATHENA: I do not need your help with fashion advice. I am perfectly happy with my personal style choices.

APHRODITE: Oh. Of course. I must have missed that article in *Vogue* about how bronze is the new black.

ATHENA: Listen. You care more about how people look than any other being in the universe.

APHRODITE: Hey. Remember that time you and I were competing in that beauty contest, and I won? That was fun.

ATHENA: That contest started the Trojan War!

APHRODITE: Yeah. Good times.

ATHENA: Please. Please. For just one moment I need you to look at the dais and use your godly understanding of personal appearances to tell me if that is really the real Zeus.

APHRODITE: Oh. Okay. Um... No. That's not really Zeus.

ATHENA: It's not?

APHRODITE: No. The nose is one millimeter too long. The eye color is off by one and a half tones. And he's missing two wrinkles from the crows' feet. Do you think I would look good with bangs?

ATHENA: I knew it! But if that isn't really Zeus, what is it? An illusion? A magical doppelgänger?

APHRODITE: Of course I would. I look good with everything.

Lights shift to DIONYSUS back at the podium as APOLLO and ARTEMIS are leaving.

DIONYSUS: Thank you. Thank you, twins. I'm still uncertain which one of you is the Zack and which one is the Cody. *(Feel free to substitute whatever pop culture twins you'd like for this joke.)* Our next performer is the one we call when we need new shoes for a horse or more horsepower for a Shu-baru, Hephaestus, the god of blacksmiths!

DIONYSUS brings HEPHAESTUS onstage. He has a thick Boston accent. His hands are stained with grease.

HEPHAESTUS: Hello, and welcome to my talk. As you know, Zeus is my father. How are you, Father?

THESPIIS: Oh, I'm taking quite a beating tonight.

HEPHAESTUS: Yeah, they're hitting you pretty hard. But they learned it from you—if you can't solve a problem with logic and wisdom, use pure force and brutality.

You know, folks, like a lot of fathers, my father likes to tell dad jokes. Of course, for most fathers, a dad joke is like, "pull my finger." For Zeus it's more like, "let's start a war between two nation-states."

But people are hard on Zeus just because his temper overheats faster than a 1984 Mitsubishi Lancer.

My father's temper is so short it needs a booster seat.

My father is so cranky you could use him to start a Model T Ford.

THESPIS mimes cranking an old car.

HEPHAESTUS: As a blacksmith, I do a lot of work with metal. And I would like to say that, although Zeus can be cold and hard, he's nothing like metal. Metal is much more flexible.

Before we go any further about my father, I have been asked to read a list of the names of Greek people who have made this evening possible, if not endurable.

Our athletic uniform shirts are by Socrates Soccer Tees.

Our weigh-ins are conducted by Ptolemy Ondascale.

Our Department of Looking the Other Way is run by Zeno Evil-Hear-No-Evil

Our Facebook page is operated by Social Medea.

Aphrodite's concealing makeup is applied by the firm of Hyde 'n' Arachne.

Our Political Action Committee is run by Leda of the PAC.

Our cattle fence is maintained by Elektra Fied.

And of course, our very trustworthy legal counsel is Hedylus Daedalus Didymus of the law firm of Didymus, Ledus and Howe, known to the toga-wearing yoga instructors in Harvard Square as Hey Diddle Diddy.

Lights shift to ATHENA taking with APOLLO and ARTEMIS.

ARTEMIS: How's the investigation going?

ATHENA: How do you know I'm in the middle of an investigation?

ARTEMIS: I can tell when somebody's on the hunt.

APOLLO: Whoa. Have we a mystery afoot? Radical!

ARTEMIS: You're still trying to figure out why Zeus is letting us roast him?

ATHENA: No. I'm a step ahead of that. Guess what. That's not really Zeus.

APOLLO: No way!

ARTEMIS: Are you sure? I mean, that looks like Zeus to me. And I can tell the difference between an Arizona Whitetail deer and a Dakota Whitetail deer at thirty paces under a fingernail moon.

ATHENA: Oh, I'm sure.

APOLLO: Then that is one most excellent doppelgänger.

ARTEMIS: I don't often agree with my brother. But he's right. I have used a lot of decoys in my life but never one that close to the original.

APOLLO: But then what manner of duplicate could this imposter be? An illusion? A shapeshifter? CGI? Perhaps the work of those ingenious geniuses at Industrial Light and Magic?

ATHENA: Apollo, I would love to have a grown-up conversation with your sister right now.

APOLLO: No problemo. I shall step aside and maintain a noble silence, and only interject if I have something truly righteous and worthy to contribute.

ATHENA: So I'm trying to figure out what might've happened and—

APOLLO: A robot!

ATHENA: Not now Apollo—wait... what did you say?

APOLLO: It was my speculation that perhaps the mysterious double of our father is a mechanical fabrication of some manner.

ATHENA: By the peak of Olympus, it is embarrassing that you thought of that before me.

Lights shift back to HEPHAESTUS at the dais.

HEPHAESTUS: So, in conclusion, don't drive like my father.

HEPHAESTUS exits. DIONYSUS returns.

DIONYSUS: Thank you, Hephaestus. Truly, I have not seen that much grease since I joined the national touring company of the musical of that title.

THESPI: I remember that. You played Doody!

DIONYSUS: I beg your pardon. I *became* Doody!

Moving along. In my other life, as god of wine, I am highly suspicious of those inferior libations made from grain. Nonetheless, I have great fondness for our next guest, the goddess of grain herself, Demeter.

DIONYSUS brings DEMETER onstage and exits. Her vibe is very natural and "hippie at the farmer's market."

DEMETER: Hi everybody! Oh, this is just so beautiful that we're all here, sharing this energy! And I know they were having fun with some insults and some teasing, but I know that it all comes from a place of love and that is so beautiful.

So, yes, it's the time in the show when the ex-wife gets to talk about the honoree. Zeus and I were married for a while. Right, honey?

THESPI: Well, yes, yes, long time ago...

DEMETER: And it didn't work out. But that's okay, because life is a journey.

You know, my Roman name is Ceres, and that's where the word cereal comes from. And I do think about which cereals some of you all are like sometimes.

For instance, my daughter says I would be Corn Flakes. Because I'm kind of corny and kind of flaky.

Ares would have to be Cap'n Crunch. After all, it's the only cereal with military rank. Plus it leaves the roof of your mouth like the site of a bloody battle.

For Dionysus, Grape Nuts because you're the god of the grape. And you're a little... you know.

So I wonder, what kind of cereal is Zeus most like? What do you think?

THESPIS: Oh I've... never thought about it...

DEMETER: I don't think you're Cheerios, because you aren't cheery. Maybe Frosted Flakes, because you love to tell everyone how grrreat you are?

No, I think it's Rice Krispies because, when you decide you're mad at someone, "snap, crackle, pop" will be the last sounds they hear.

Oh, Zeus, our marriage failed. But it did produce one wonderful thing and that's our daughter Persephone, the goddess of spring. Let's bring her out!

PERSEPHONE enters and takes the dais as DEMETER stands beside her. PERSEPHONE is a lot like her mother, with an added element of Valley Girl about her.

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ZEUS ROAST

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