**Pandora’s Box**

There are some that say that the original creator of mankind was Prometheus, that he fashioned the first man in the image of the gods using clay and water. Prometheus was a Titan, one of the race of giants who fought an unsuccessful war against Zeus and the other gods – and it is certainly true that he was a great deal wiser than his brothers. For he alone knew that the war was doomed to failure. He realised that, huge and immensely strong though the Titans were, they also suffered from a common trait amongst giants: they weren’t very bright. A Titan might tear up a mountain instead of going round it, but he would probably find out later on that he was going the wrong way anyway. A Titan might be able to hurl a rock the size of Gibraltar a hundred miles or more, but he would **invariably** miss whatever he was aiming for.

On the other hand, of course, the gods were as quick witted as they were skilled in the art of war. First there was Zeus, the King of Olympus, and God of thunder, armed with his devastating thunderbolts. Then there was Poseidon, God of the Sea with his trident, Apollo, God of Medicine, with his golden arrows, the invisible Hermes, God of the Underworld...it was an invincible army, and Prometheus could see that his brothers would be lost against it.

Lose was what they did. Most of them were sent to a dark and damp prison in the depths of Tartarus. Atlas – perhaps the most famous Titan of all- was condemned to hold up the heavens on his shoulders for all time. But Prometheus, who had let everyone know that he was neutral from the start, got away free. That was, allegedly, when he created mankind.

Prometheus loved men in the same way people love their pets. He was immensely proud of what they did, boasted about them to almost anyone who would listen, and generally fussed over them in every way possible. Instead of feeding them with food, however, he fed them knowledge – scraps of information that he picked up from Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom and his only friend in Olympus.

One day she would tell him about mathematics and straight away he would rush down to earth to pass this knowledge on. The next day it might be art or architecture, the day after that science and then engineering. It’s strange to think that our entire civilisation could have been handed down to us rather in the manner of dog biscuits, but that is how it was. As the years passed and mankind became more intelligent, Zeus, who had been watching all this from his celestial throne, grew uneasy.

“I am a little worried about these human beings,” he remarked to his wife, Hera, one day over a goblet of wine.

“What about them?” Hera asked.

“Well...I just wonder if they’re not getting a bit...above themselves. Where will it lead to? That’s what I want to know. Today the rudiments of geometry, tomorrow it could be genetic surgery”.

Hera eyed him suspiciously. Whenever Zeus got ideas into his head, he struggled to get them out again. Zeus was not known for settling his disputes peacefully either.

“So what are you going to do about it?”

“I intend to keep an eye on them, that is all,” but there was a dangerous glint in his eye.

 Zeus might have been a jealous god, but he was not cruel enough to destroy the newly formed human race, so mankind continued to flourish.

Things came to a head however, one day in a place called Sicyon. The trouble was caused by a question of *ownership*.

Prometheus had taught man to stay on the right side of the gods by regularly sacrificing the best animals to them from their herds. A special sacrificial bull had been chosen for Zeus at Sicyon, but the question was, which part should be reserved for the god and which parts should the men (who had worked hard to raise the animal in the first place) be allowed to keep? As usual, Prometheus acted as the **mediator** in the dispute but, unwisely, he decided to play a trick on Zeus. Zeus did not like to be tricked.

When the bull had been killed and cut up, he took two sacks. Into one of these, he put all the most succulent portions of meat – the rump and the fillet, the sirloin and the rib – but concealed them beneath the stomach-bag which was all white and rubbery and generally disgusting to look at. Into the other went the bones and gristle, the eyeballs and the hooves, all the most unappetizing parts of the bull, but these he covered with a layer of fat to make them look as delicious as possible.

Then Prometheus took both sacks and knelt before Zeus.

“Oh mighty king!” he said. “Why should there be any quarrel between you and the little pink creatures who inhabit the world below? Take this matter of sacrifice. It seems that nobody can decide who should get exactly what. Well, as you are the king of Olympus, why don’t you choose for yourself? I have divided the bull between these two sacks. Which one do you want?”

Zeus who had never suspected that a Titan was clever enough to think up such a scheme, was completely deceived. He chose the bones and the fat, of course.

When he found out how Prometheus had tricked him, his fury erupted.

“Man may have his steak,” he thundered. “But he will eat it raw!”

With those words, he reached out with one hand and snatched all the fire from the world. It seemed that mankind had got the worst deal after all. Without fire they could take no pleasure in their food and once the sun had gone down, they could only stay indoors, huddled under animal skins for warmth.

Luckily for mankind, Prometheus was willing to do anything to help creation and one day, while Zeus was away, he stole up Mount Olympus. He still had one friend in the home of the gods: Athene. Hearing him knocking on a side-door, the goddess of wisdom unbolted it and let him in. Prometheus rode up to the sun and, using his bare hands, broke off a blazing fire-brand. This he carried back to earth, thrusting it into a giant fennel –leaf, and in this way people were once again able to enjoy their meat.

This time Prometheus had gone too far. When Zeus heard how he had been defied for a second time, his anger knew no bounds.

 “Prometheus!” he cried, and his cries shook the very earth beneath him. “You crossed me once and I forgave you because of your loyalty to me in the war of the Titans. This time there can be no forgiveness. This time you must pay for your crime.”

And so saying, he seized Prometheus and chained him to a pillar on the freezing slopes of the mountain.

If this was not punishment enough, worse was to come. Every morning a huge vulture landed on the wretched Titan’s chest and as he screamed in rage and horror, tore out his liver and devoured it. Every night, however, whilst Prometheus shivered in the sub-zero temperatures, his liver grew whole again and the whole thing repeated day after day, until the end of time. Prometheus, who had so **stoically** defended his creation of mankind, was no longer there to protect them.

So, Zeus punished mankind too. As man had only offended indirectly though, their punishment was another sort.

First he visited the crippled god Hephaestus who worked at a great forge in Olympus with twenty **bellows** pumping twenty-four hours a day. Although ugly and misshapen himself, no blacksmith was more skilled than Hephaestus.

 “I want you to make me a woman,” Zeus commanded. “I want her to be more beautiful than any other woman ever seen on the face of the earth. She must be perfect. As perfect as a goddess.”

Hephaestus did as he was told. He had only ever disobeyed Zeus once. That had been just before he became the crippled god. Now he fashioned a woman out of clay, moulding her perfect features with his own hands. He commissioned the four winds to breathe life into her and asked all the goddesses to help her dress her in their finest clothes and jewels. The result was Pandora.

When Zeus saw the blacksmith-god’s work, he was well pleased and instructed Hermes to carry her into the world at once. There, she was married to a certain King Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus and the only other Titan who had not joined in the war against the gods.

Epimetheus had been warned never to trust the gifts of Zeus, but seeing the terrible fate that had befallen his brother, he was too afraid to refuse. Moreover, he had to admit that Pandora was beautiful. Indeed, one would have to be either blind or mad to think otherwise. When she walked into a room, men fell silent and all eyes turned on her. Whatever she said, people would agree. When she made jokes, the laughter would continue until she **bade** it to stop. Whatever she did was greeted with applause. Epimetheus did feel rather proud to be married to her.

Unfortunately, the things that Pandora said were not really worth listening to, for she was not an intelligent creature. Her jokes were in truth extremely unfunny. She did very little because she was impossibly lazy and if Epimetheus was proud to be married to her, she made him a poor and unfaithful wife. For this was the revenge of Zeus. He had made her shallow and as coquettish as she was beautiful. She was to cause more trouble to mankind than any other woman before or any woman since.

Epimetheus owned a large, ebony box which was kept in a special room in his palace, guarded day and night. In this box he had collected and imprisoned all things that could harm mankind. It was the one room Pandora was forbidden to enter and naturally it was the room that aroused the most curiosity in her.

“I bet you will keep all sorts of things in that black box of yours,” she would say in a syrupy voice. “Why don’t you let your little Pandy look inside?”

 “It is not for you dear,” Epimetheus would reply. “You should leave well alone.”

 “But...”

 “No, no my love. No one may open the box.”

 “Then you don’t love me,” Pandora would say crossing her arms and pouting. “and I’m not going to love you anymore- not ever!”

They had this conversation many times until the day when Pandora couldn’t resist her curiosity any longer. For, despite everything Epimetheus had told her about the box, she still believed that it contained some special treat that he was holding back from her.

“I’ll show him, the fusty old bossy-boots,” she muttered to herself.

Waiting until Epimetheus was out, she managed to talk her way past the guards and into the room. She had stolen the key from beside his bed and nobody thought to stop her. Was she not, after all, the king’s wife and the mistress of the house? Her whole body trembling, she knelt down beside the box. It was smaller and older than she had expected. It was also a little surprising that the padlock was shaped like a human skull. She was certain it would

contain treasure that would make her the envy of the world.

She turned the key and opened the box and at once all the spites and problems that Epimetheus had so long kept locked up, exploded into the world with a great, colossal, earth-shattering bang.

Old age, hard work, sickness. They flew out in a great cloud of buzzing, stinging, biting insects. It was as if Pandora had accidentally split the atom. One moment she was standing there with a foolish grin on her face. The next she was screaming in the heart of an intense darkness that had, in seconds, stripped her of her beauty and brought her out in a thousand boils.

At that moment, all the things that make life difficult today, streamed out of Pandora’s box and into the world: old age, hard work, sickness, vice, anger, envy, lust, covetousness, spite, sarcasm, **cynicism, violence, intolerance, injustice, famine, drought, pestilence, war, religious persecution, apartheid, taxation, inflation, pollution, unemployment, fascism, racism, sexism, terrorism, nepotism**. All free to roam the Earth and make it vile.

There was a great roar and Epimetheus appeared, shouting and cursing at Pandora. With all his might and strength, Epimetheus managed to slam down the lid. By that time, only one thing was left inside the box: Hope.

Epimetheus stroked his long beard, ruminating for hours upon the problem of hope. Pandora blithered away behind him until she ran out of breath, for she did not understand why Hope would be in the box anyway. Hope, she thought was not an ill of the Earth, but a positive.

Eventually, Epimetheus stroked his long beard for the last time. He lifted the latch, and out flew Hope with a whiz and a bang.

Which is just as well. For all the problems Pandora had released into the world, where would we be without it?

**Glossary**

**Bellows -** a device with an air bag that emits a stream of air when squeezed together with two handles, used for blowing air into a fire.

**Bade –** commanded/ordered

**Invariably –** more often than not

**Mediator –** a person who tries to make people who are fighting come to an agreement

**Stoically –** doing something without complaining

**Lust** – strong desire

**Covetousness** – having a strong desire for material possessions

**Cynicism** – an inclination to believe that people are motivated purely by self-interest; scepticism.

**Famine** –extreme scarcity of food

**Pestilence** – a fatal epidemic eg disease (Bubonic Plague)

**Apartheid** – a system of racial segregation

**Taxation**- the levying of tax

**Inflation** – the action of inflating something or the condition of being inflated

**Fascism** – a form of radical thinking. A form of one political party that is against democracy and prefer to dictate their policies.

**Nepotism** – the practice among those with power to influence of favouring relatives or friends by giving them jobs