

“PANDORA'S BOX”

a retelling of the Greek myth

by Don Kisner

When the world was much younger, man had many unanswered questions such as: Who made the world? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Why does the sun rise in the morning? Where do I go when I die? Why do bad things happen? The ancient Greeks created stories that answered these and other similar questions. Central to most of the stories is a place the ancient Greeks called Mount Olympus. These Greek story tellers populated Mount Olympus with twelve gods and goddesses and made Zeus the ruler god. And rule he did, with all the passion and human foibles of his creators.

One of these stories tells how Zeus saw that his war with the Titans had destroyed all the creatures of the earth. He was saddened by this and decided that the earth needed life to make it complete again. Wanting to give the task of repopulating the earth to someone wise and practical, he immediately thought of Prometheus, a Titan who had helped Zeus's Olympians win the war over the Titans. Zeus knew Prometheus to be a careful thinker. In fact, the name Prometheus translates literally as “fore-thought.” Prometheus had a brother, Epimetheus, who was the opposite of Prometheus and went about doing things with no thought as to their consequences. It was as unfortunate as it was true that Prometheus and Epimetheus were inseparable. So, when Zeus provided gifts for all of Earth's new creatures and gave the task of creating them to Prometheus, it was inevitable that Epimetheus would help.

Prometheus went to work creating man. Working very carefully and taking great pains to get all the details perfect took many days. During this time, Epimetheus created all the other creatures and gave all the gifts but one to his creations. When at last Prometheus finished creating, he gave this last gift—the gift of thought—to man, and set him upon the earth.

There came a time when the earth grew very cold and was covered with great sheets of ice. One day man came to Prometheus and complained about the injustice of his living conditions. “Oh Mighty Prometheus, when the wind blows and the snow falls, I have no way to keep warm. The Wolf has his thick fur coat for protection, but I must hide in the mountain.” Prometheus saw that this was true. Man could only sit shivering in his damp cave covering himself with his hands and eating raw meat. Prometheus knew that man needed fire to survive, but Zeus' gift collection had not contained fire. Prometheus also knew that questioning the wisdom of Zeus was not the prudent approach. There was plenty of fire on Mount Olympus. The only thing to do was take fire from Mount Olympus and give it to man. Prometheus did just that, and man was very pleased.

One morning, Hera found her husband in a terrible state of rage. When asked what the matter was, Zeus pointed at man, warming himself by fire. Zeus had not given permission for man to have fire. Since the beginning of time, fire had existed only at Zeus' hearth on Mount Olympus and that is where it should have stayed. Someone had stolen fire and given it to man. Zeus knew that man had not come to Mount Olympus and taken it. Zeus reasoned that only Prometheus would dare such a thing. Both Prometheus and man must be punished. After a great deal of thought, Zeus decided upon the perfect punishment. Man's punishment would come through Prometheus, the fire stealer.

Zeus had his craftsman construct a beautiful box and commanded each of the other gods and goddesses to place something in the box that would bring grief and destruction to man. Zeus's eleven brothers and sisters filed past the box and placed their gifts. Zeus then created a mortal woman, a woman so beautiful that no one, be he man or god, would be able to resist her charms. He called the woman Pandora and, because Prometheus loved music, he gave her a talent for playing the lyre. For his own devious reasons, he also gave Pandora a powerful curiosity.

Zeus gave Pandora a kitten to keep her company and commanded that she take the box to Prometheus and offer herself as his bride. He told her that the box was a wedding gift and should be opened by Prometheus and no one else. Zeus stressed his edict that Pandora should never open the box.

Epimetheus greeted Pandora when she arrived. Pandora asked for Prometheus and said that she had been sent as his bride. Epimetheus called his brother. Prometheus was immediately suspicious of gifts from Zeus and refused to accept Pandora or the box. He warned Epimetheus to do the same.

Epimetheus, however, was so taken by Pandora's beauty and charm that he took Pandora as his bride.

The box was placed unopened on the mantle, and Pandora resisted opening the box for a long time. But alas, Zeus had given Pandora a powerful weakness—curiosity. When at last she undid the latch and raised the lid, every scourge the gods could create swarmed out into the world to plague mankind. Pandora could only watch as Fear, Hate, Envy, Violence, Evil, Pain, Sorrow, War, Disease, and Jealousy sprang from the box to plague mankind for the rest of his existence.

One of the gods, however, had taken pity on man and, instead of putting a pestilence in the box, had given man the one thing he cannot exist without—Hope.