

# OF GODS AND COWS

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A one-act comedy by  
Andy Boyd

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## CHARACTERS

TROUBADOUR

PROMETHEUS

CROWS

POSEIDON

ZEUS

HEPHAESTUS

IO

HERA

VILLAGERS/MERCHANTS

Feel free to change genders and the pronouns thereof at will. A number of roles, including the Crows, Villagers and Merchants, can be further divided at will to allow for more speaking (or non-speaking) roles.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This play was first presented, in a somewhat different form (and under its original title, *Fire God Shows You the Ropes*), by the wonderful young actors of the Broadway for All program under the direction of Dustyn Gullledge. It premiered at New World Stages, NYC, on August 12th, 2014. I would also like to give a special thanks to Ashruf Ghanimah for reaching out to me about writing this play. I had a wonderful time writing it and working with the actors on revisions.

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*(POSEIDON, HERA, HEPHAESTUS and ZEUS square off against PROMETHEUS in an epic earth-shaking dance battle. The gods eventually win. A TROUBADOUR watches from the side.)*

**TROUBADOUR:** Way back when earth was still sticky lava in places, the planet had just begun to cool when gods and titans started killing each other. It wasn't long until Prometheus was the only titan left.

**ZEUS:** It's all over, Prometheus. Where are your friends now?

**PROMETHEUS:** You know where they are.

**ZEUS:** Underworld. The dark zone. The far edge of the planet. And they're gonna stay there.

**PROMETHEUS:** What do you want from me? I'm done fighting.

**ZEUS:** I want you to say it. I want you to say we're the real gods, and you're nothing but a little punk.

**PROMETHEUS:** I won't bow down to you.

**ZEUS:** Then I'm gonna take away your powers. You'll be dirt. You'll be worse than dirt. You'll be human.

*(Prometheus loses his divine splendor and godly clothes. He becomes human.)*

I'm sick of looking at your pathetic face.

**PROMETHEUS:** Zeus, wait!

**ZEUS:** It's our planet now.

*(Prometheus shivers in the cold. IO enters, notices him, and goes over to where he stands.)*

**IO:** Hey!

**PROMETHEUS:** Hey. Prometheus.

**IO:** Io. You need help getting somewhere? Getting back home?

**PROMETHEUS:** It's not my home anymore. They destroyed it.

**IO:** That's what we thought. Burned dead, fried over hunk of land. But that's not home. Home's something you make yourself.

**PROMETHEUS:** What do you mean, "make yourself"? You're not a god, you can't create.

**IO:** Well, maybe not, but we can switch things around. Hang string from trees, drape sheets for walls, and use branches for a ceiling. Our home got caught up in the war. While those gods and titans were flying overhead, we were huddling for safety on the ground. They destroyed everything. But we'll survive.

**PROMETHEUS:** I had no idea.

**IO:** You missed it? Lucky you. Come on. You can stay with us, but you have to pitch in. Hey! We got company!

*(The VILLAGERS enter.)*

**VILLAGER 2:** Who's he?

**IO:** His name's Prometheus. He's one of us now.

**VILLAGER 3:** You can share my corncob!

**PROMETHEUS:** Thanks?

**VILLAGER 3:** I've been gnawing on this thing for a week now, but I think there's still some corn left.

**VILLAGER 2:** You can have one of my apple seeds!

**VILLAGER 3:** You didn't tell me you had apple seeds!

*(Villager 3 chases Villager 2 offstage, followed by Villager 1.)*

**PROMETHEUS:** Are they okay?

**IO:** They're excited. We don't get company much.

**PROMETHEUS:** But I can't take food from them. They're starving!

**IO:** We all are. We store up what we can, but at night the rats come and steal it all away. They're hungry too. Nights are terrible now. Worse, I think they're getting longer.

**PROMETHEUS:** I know someone who might be able to help.

**IO:** Alright. I'm gonna go to bed. See you in the morning.

**PROMETHEUS:** Sure thing.

*(Io exits.)*

**TROUBADOUR:** Despite his recent banishment, Prometheus spoke to Zeus for the first time from his human heart.

**PROMETHEUS:** Zeus! Zeus, I know you can hear me!

**ZEUS:** What do you want?

**PROMETHEUS:** It's not for me. The people, they're starving.

**ZEUS:** Tell them to get a job, the lazy freeloaders.

**PROMETHEUS:** It's not that simple. After all they've been through, they need some small sign to show that you care. They need hope.

**ZEUS:** Not a chance.

**TROUBADOUR:** Zeus disappeared, leaving Prometheus with nothing but a puff of smoke.

**IO:** Who was that?

**PROMETHEUS:** Nobody. Just some guy I used to be friends with.

**VILLAGER 3:** The sun's about to set. We'd better get indoors.

**TROUBADOUR:** Back on Mount Olympus, not everyone agreed with Zeus' decision.

**HERA:** Zeus, I've had it up to here with your grandstanding. We won the war. Now let the humans be. No sense punishing them for what Prometheus did.

**ZEUS:** You think this is punishment? Not giving those earthlings handouts? It's for their own good! They'll have to learn to make do with what they've got.

**HERA:** But Zeus, we destroyed everything they had.

**ZEUS:** Ugh! When will they let that go?

**HERA:** It's not that simple.

**ZEUS:** Are you turning on me now? We're king and queen, Hera! If you help them, you're out of the kingdom.

**TROUBADOUR:** Hera decided to go against Zeus' wishes and help out the humans. She knew it was risky, but felt it was the right thing to do. She put on her best human disguise and set out to find Prometheus.

*(Hera descends to where the humans live. She searches through the forest for Prometheus, while the other actors pose as trees and woodland creatures.)*

**HERA:** Psst. Prometheus! It's me!

**PROMETHEUS:** Hera? You've got a lot of nerve showing your ugly face around here. What do you want?

**HERA:** Let's just say I'm on business. I've seen what you guys have been through. War, famine, flood. That's messed up.

**PROMETHEUS:** Like you didn't have anything to do with it.

**HERA:** Listen: I want to help.



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**PROMETHEUS:** Help? From you? I'd rather drink poison  
(*Pushing Hera once on each "again":*) Again. And Again. And...

(*Hera waves her hand and freezes Prometheus.*)

**HERA:** Then your new friends will die.

(*She releases him.*)

**PROMETHEUS:** Don't do that!

**HERA:** Then don't sass me. I want to put this thing behind us.

**PROMETHEUS:** Maybe that isn't so easy for some of us.

(*Prometheus begins to exit.*)

**HERA:** What if I told you where to find fire?

(*Prometheus stops, turns around.*)

**PROMETHEUS:** That's powerful magic. You think they can handle it?

**HERA:** I'm not sure, but I know they'll starve without it.

**PROMETHEUS:** And you're giving it to me?

**HERA:** No. You're giving it to the humans. The holy fire is kept by Hephaestus. He's the one who hammers out all of Zeus' lightning bolts. His forge is set in the middle of a crater, surrounded by lava, guarded by a swarm of crows so thick they block out the sun.

**PROMETHEUS:** I could never get through without my powers.

**HERA:** Suit yourself. I thought you'd jump at the chance to stick it to Zeus and help your friends at the same time, but I guess I was wrong. I didn't realize how scared you were.

**PROMETHEUS:** I'm not scared. I'm just...ambivalent.

**HERA:** Looks a lot like scared to me.

**PROMETHEUS:** Fine, I'll do it. But it's got nothing to do with you.

**HERA:** I never said it did. I gotta split. I was never here, alright?

**PROMETHEUS:** Sure thing.

**HERA:** I trust you, Prometheus.

**TROUBADOUR:** Prometheus left in the dead of night, traveling once more across the land. He crossed desert sands and freezing mountains, seas with waves like monsters and cities that buzzed like beehives.

*(Three MERCHANTS enter, played by the Villagers. They try to sell their wares to Passersby, who can either be played by other actors or merely implied through staging.)*

**MERCHANT 3:** Sunglasses, five dollars!

**MERCHANT 2:** Purses! Purses and handbags! Just as good as the ones in the store!

*(They see Prometheus.)*

**MERCHANT 1:** Where are you headed, traveler?

**PROMETHEUS:** I'm trying to get to Mount Olympus. You know how to get there?

**MERCHANT 1:** That's a long, long way from here.

**PROMETHEUS:** How long?

**MERCHANT 1:** I can help you. I'm a merchant. That means I sell stuff. Need a watch?

**PROMETHEUS:** Uh, no, thank you.

**MERCHANT 2:** Suit yourself. Why are you trying to get to Mount Olympus?

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**PROMETHEUS:** Can you keep a secret? I'm trying to steal fire from Hephaestus.

*(The Merchants laugh uproariously.)*

**MERCHANT 3:** Look, friend: can't be done. We've seen a lot of guys try, and nobody's done it yet.

**PROMETHEUS:** I don't care! My friends helped me when nobody in the world knew my name. I'll get them fire or I'll die trying.

**MERCHANT 1:** You'll probably die trying.

**PROMETHEUS:** Are you going to tell me how to get there or aren't you?

**TROUBADOUR:** The merchants drew Prometheus a map, which led him across the rapids of the Nile, around the gardens of Babylon, over the waters of the Dardanelles, past the island of Circe, and through the cities of Greece before finally bringing him to the foot of Mount Olympus. Prometheus climbed up the steep cliffs and gazed out over the bubbling magma below.

*(Prometheus sneaks over to Hephaestus.)*

**HEPHAESTUS:** Who goes there?!?

**PROMETHEUS:** Oh, hey, didn't think you'd see me there. I'm Prometheus, from the humans. I was wondering if I could possibly get some fire.

**HEPHAESTUS:** Hah! One does not simply ask for fire and receive it! There is a procedure!

**PROMETHEUS:** Really? What do I have to do?

**HEPHAESTUS:** You must answer three riddles correctly!

**PROMETHEUS:** That's it? Answer three riddles?

**HEPHAESTUS:** Yeah, it's ancient Greece, that's what we do. You answer three riddles and I have to do whatever you want. It's not a great system.

**PROMETHEUS:** Okay, great. What's the first one?

**HEPHAESTUS:** The first fearsome riddle is this: is the capital of Louisiana pronounced New Or-lins or New Or-leens?

**PROMETHEUS:** Dang it! I know this one...

**HEPHAESTUS:** Haha! Not so easy now, is it?

**PROMETHEUS:** Wait! Neither! The capital of Louisiana is pronounced Baton Rouge!

**HEPHAESTUS:** Impossible! Nobody has solved that riddle!

**PROMETHEUS:** Nobody except me!

**HEPHAESTUS:** Okay, here's an even harder one! I have a pocket that's completely empty, but it has something in it! How can this possibly be?

**PROMETHEUS:** Mmmmm... Wait! Your pocket has a hole in it! That's what's in it, a hole!

**HEPHAESTUS:** What are you, some sort of riddle magician?

**PROMETHEUS:** Nope. I'm just really smart.

**HEPHAESTUS:** Alright, you've solved two of my hardest riddles. But this next one is impossible! What can be found once in a minute, twice in a moment, but not even once in the span of a thousand years!

**PROMETHEUS:** Once in a minute, but not in a thousand years? That's impossible! Unless...wait! The letter M! The letter M is found once in the word minute, twice in the word moment, but never in the words "span of a thousand years"!

**HEPHAESTUS:** No!!!! You've defeated me! But you still

haven't defeated my army of dance fighting crows!

*(The CROWS enter and perform an elaborate and intimidating dance.)*

**PROMETHEUS:** What? You never told me about this!

**HEPHAESTUS:** I'm a god! I don't have to tell you anything!

**PROMETHEUS:** Here goes nothing...

*(The Crows attack Prometheus with their dance fighting moves, sometimes one at a time, sometimes all of them at once. The fight is impressive, but eventually the Crows are defeated.)*

**HEPHAESTUS:** Impossible! Those crows are undefeatable!

**PROMETHEUS:** Listen, Hephaestus: I did what you told me to. I solved your riddles, and I defeated your dance fighting crows. Now give me what I came for. Give me the fire.

**HEPHAESTUS:** Fine. You've earned it. But if Zeus finds out you have it, I'm taking it back.

**PROMETHEUS:** Deal.

**TROUBADOUR:** With fire in hand, Prometheus set out for Io's village. It took months, but eventually, reaching the top of a grassy hill, he saw her.

**IO:** Prometheus! You're back!

**PROMETHEUS:** I guess I am. I thought I'd never make it.

**IO:** We were so worried! Where were you?

**PROMETHEUS:** I've been everywhere. But I brought you something really cool.

*(He shows her the fire.)*

**IO:** What is it?

**PROMETHEUS:** Fire.

*(Io touches it.)*

**IO:** Ow! It's hot!

**PROMETHEUS:** Well doi, it's fire.

**IO:** What's it do?

**PROMETHEUS:** It makes food taste good, and it makes it safe to eat. It makes the nights seem shorter and not as scary. You can make things with it too – iron tools and burnt out canoes.

**IO:** Is it safe?

**PROMETHEUS:** It is if you use it safely.

**IO:** Where'd you get it?

**PROMETHEUS:** Can't tell. It's a secret.

**IO:** Okay. I'll take it.

**TROUBADOUR:** The villagers put the fire to work. They cut down wild grains and cooked them into a hundred different things. They made cakes and tortillas, omelets and spaghetti. They tried cooking everything they could find. Some of it wasn't that good. But some of it was delicious.

**VILLAGERS:** Thank you, Prometheus! Thank you, thank you!

**PROMETHEUS:** Don't mention it.

**VILLAGER 1:** You're our god now!

**PROMETHEUS:** What?

**VILLAGER 2:** Yeah! Those old dumb gods never did anything for us. You're the best!

**PROMETHEUS:** Guys, I'm not gonna lie, that's really creepy.

**VILLAGER 1:** He's funny! Our god is funny!

**VILLAGER 2:** Praise Prometheus, God of Fire!

**PROMETHEUS:** Look, I'm not a god. I hate those guys. I'm just one of you.

**VILLAGER 2:** He's so modest!

**VILLAGER 1:** Let's listen to every word he speaks and live our life according to his wisdom!

**PROMETHEUS:** Look! I'm not a god!

**VILLAGERS:** Prometheus! Prometheus! Prometheus!

**TROUBADOUR:** But soon, the gods noticed what was going on in the village.

**ZEUS:** What's that over there?

**HEPHAESTUS:** What? I don't see anything.

**ZEUS:** Yes you do! Over in that dinky little village! It looks like they have fire.

**HERA:** No, you're imagining things.

**ZEUS:** What? I am not! Poseidon, check this out.

**POSEIDON:** Yep. That's fire all right.

**ZEUS:** But how? Only gods are allowed to have fire.

**HEPHAESTUS:** Um, Zeus?

**ZEUS:** Yeah?

**HEPHAESTUS:** Well, there was this guy...

**ZEUS:** Yes...

**HEPHAESTUS:** (*Very quickly, embarrassed:*) And he came to the forge and he was really smart and anyway he solved the riddles and out-danced the crows and so I gave him fire it's not my fault I'm sorry.

**ZEUS:** You WHAT?!?

**HEPHAESTUS:** That's the rule! He solved the riddles!

**ZEUS:** Even the one about the pocket?

**HEPHAESTUS:** Even that one!

**ZEUS:** But how? What human could be that good at solving riddles?

**HEPHAESTUS:** His name was like Promestus or something.

**ZEUS:** Promestus...or PROMETHEUS!!!

**HEPHAESTUS:** Yeah. That one.

**ZEUS:** Hephaestus, we're going to that village. And I'm going to need to borrow your crows.

**TROUBADOUR:** Zeus and Hephaestus flew hundreds of miles, over rivers, forests, cities, and deserts, and finally arrived at the tiny village.

**ZEUS:** Fear me, puny mortals! I am Zeus, king of the gods!

**VILLAGER 1:** We're not afraid of you. We have our own god now.

**VILLAGER 3:** Go Prometheus go!

**PROMETHEUS:** Really, it's not what it looks like.

**ZEUS:** Not what it looks like? You mean to tell me you didn't steal fire and give it to the mortals?

**PROMETHEUS:** Well, yes, I did do that.

**ZEUS:** Prometheus, when we defeated you, you gave up your god powers. Fire is a god power. It's got nothing to do with those squirmy little monkeys you call people.

**PROMETHEUS:** Zeus, they were starving. They need fire to survive.

**ZEUS:** I don't care. Rules are rules. I make them, and all you



guys have to follow them. Cause I'm the boss.

**IO:** Wait, you're a titan?

**ZEUS:** Was, little girl. Now he's just a human.

**IO:** You were one of the people who waged war across our land? Who burned our fields and towns? Who dried up our lakes and streams?

**PROMETHEUS:** Io, I can explain!

**IO:** You lied to me. You said you were one of us, but you're not. I should have known when you brought us fire. You're just another one of those gods.

**PROMETHEUS:** That's not true!

**ZEUS:** It's not? Cause those three seem to think it is.

**VILLAGERS:** All hail the fire god!

**PROMETHEUS:** You need to stop doing that!

**ZEUS:** Prometheus, for stealing fire from the almighty gods, I hereby sentence you to be chained to a rock for the rest of your days! No! For the rest of eternity. Every day Hephaestus' crows will tear out your guts, and every night they'll grow back.

**HEPHAESTUS:** Hey, I need those crows...

**ZEUS:** Silence! Zeus has spoken. God power is for gods, not people. Crows, take him away.

**PROMETHEUS:** Io, I never meant to trick you! I just wanted to be your friend!

*(The Crows take him off.)*

You have to believe me! Please!!!

*(The Crows act this next part out:)*

**TROUBADOUR:** And so, Prometheus was flown back to Olympus, and chained to a giant rock. Every day, the crows would tear out his guts.

**PROMETHEUS:** Aaaaahhh!!!

**TROUBADOUR:** And every night, they'd grow back again. The pain was unbearable. But worse than the pain was the thought that halfway around the world, Io was forgetting all about him.

**CROW 1:** Give it up, kid. Hope makes the pain worse. Once you realize you'll never get out of this place, it doesn't hurt so bad.

**TROUBADOUR:** Io hurt too. She felt like Prometheus had betrayed her, but she still missed him terribly.

**VILLAGER 1:** What are we going to do with these Fire God t-shirts we got from those traveling merchants?

**VILLAGER 2:** Burn 'em, I guess.

**IO:** You think he'll come back, right?

**VILLAGER 3:** Given what I know about gods and such, I don't think so.

**TROUBADOUR:** On top of Olympus, Zeus watched it all, satisfied at a job well done.

*(We hear the screams of Prometheus.)*

**ZEUS:** Heh. Stupid humans.

**POSEIDON:** Zeus! I think you're going to want to see this.

*(They cross, look out upon creation.)*

**ZEUS:** What is it?

**POSEIDON:** It's spreading. They're making tools, baking cakes, and building cities with high walls topped with metal

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spikes. I tried to douse all the fires with hurricanes, but it's no use. They just start new ones.

**ZEUS:** Fires? Impossible! Prometheus is tied up here.

**POSEIDON:** Say what you want, facts are facts.

**ZEUS:** Must have been a stray lightning bolt, a brush fire! It's nothing to worry about. Where's the fire now?

**POSEIDON:** Zeus. It's everywhere.

**ZEUS:** Hephaestus!

**HEPHAESTUS:** Yes, my lord?

**ZEUS:** The humans have stolen fire. Again! This was not supposed to happen, was that not clear?

**HEPHAESTUS:** Well, I didn't have my dance fighting crows...

**ZEUS:** Enough! Who stole fire this time?

**HEPHAESTUS:** Nobody did. Once Prometheus took it, it spread like, well, like wildfire. Now that they know how to make it, there's no turning back.

**ZEUS:** It's that Io. Oh I hate her! Twice in one week to that stupid little village...

**TROUBADOUR:** And so once again, Zeus flew to the village.

**ZEUS:** Io!

**IO:** What do you want?

**ZEUS:** You gave fire to the humans.

**IO:** I did not.

**ZEUS:** Then who did?

**IO:** I don't know. They saw us using it and then they just did it themselves.

**ZEUS:** Liar! You've violated my laws for the last time! Do you know what happens to people who violate my laws?

**TROUBADOUR:** Back on Olympus, Prometheus suffered great pain at the hands of Hephaestus' crows. One day however, he saw a familiar face.

**MERCHANT 2:** Hey, how you doing, traveler?

**PROMETHEUS:** Merchant! Is it really you?

**MERCHANT 2:** Sure is. It looks like you're in a bit of a pickle.

**PROMETHEUS:** You got that right. I got chained to a rock to have crows tear out my guts. It's pretty awful.

**MERCHANT 2:** Bummer. Wish I could help, but, you know, will of the gods and all. Want a t-shirt?

**PROMETHEUS:** No thanks. Wait! I do know one thing you can do, though.

**MERCHANT 2:** What's that?

**PROMETHEUS:** Can you deliver a message to Io? She lives back in the village.

**MERCHANT 2:** Sure thing! What do you want me to say?

**TROUBADOUR:** So the merchant carried Prometheus' message back to Io's village, but when he got there he couldn't find her anywhere.

**MERCHANT 2:** Io! Io!

**IO:** Moo!

**MERCHANT 2:** Well, darn it. I guess now I'll never deliver Prometheus' message.

**IO:** Moo! Moo!

**MERCHANT 2:** I'll never tell Io that he feels awful about lying

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to her, but that he really wasn't a titan anymore, and that he didn't realize how much the war with the gods had hurt the humans.

**IO:** *(Deeply moved:)* Mooooo...

**MERCHANT 2:** I'll never tell her that she's the best friend he ever had, or that he'd do anything for her, or that he would give the whole world just to see her face. Oh well. Oo! Free cow!

**TROUBADOUR:** And so the merchant, now with a sweet new cow, traveled back to Mount Olympus. All journey long, the cow tried to get the merchant's attention, but the merchant didn't listen. Like most people, he didn't care much what cows think.

**MERCHANT 2:** Sorry, traveler. I did what I could.

**IO:** Moo! Moo! Mooooo!!!!

**MERCHANT 2:** Hush up, cow! I'm trying to have a conversation here!

**PROMETHEUS:** Wait! I think it's trying to tell us something!

*(Io draws her name in the dirt.)*

**PROMETHEUS:** It's drawing something!

**MERCHANT 2:** I think it's trying to tell us it's a cow! I think it's trying to tell us that its name is cow!

**PROMETHEUS:** No, it's not that, it's...I can't believe it! Io, is it really you?

*(Voice over in parentheses:)*

**IO:** Moo!!! (Yes!)

**PROMETHEUS:** Who did this to you?

**IO:** Moo moo moo moo, moo moo? (Who do you think,

dummy?)

**PROMETHEUS:** Was it Zeus?

**IO:** Moo, moo moo moo moo moo. (No, it was Martha Stewart.)

**PROMETHEUS:** Don't sass me! I've been chained to a rock for three months—the least you can do is be nice.

**IO:** Moo moo moo moo? Moo moo moo. (Have you seen me? I'm a cow.)

**PROMETHEUS:** Well, cow or no cow, I'm sure glad to have you back.

*(The Crows enter.)*

**CROW 2:** Hey hey hey! It's feeding time!

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