

The Vote

“Quiet! I call you all to be quiet!” Gods - they are obnoxious. “Please take your assigned seats! No, no, Hera, do not sit next to Zeus, you’re two rows over, next to Aphrodite. Poseidon! The trident must be left with security at the doors! How many times must we go over this?”

I hate my job.

They said I was a mathematician, but it was the younger, wilder sister of math that possessed my heart when I was alive. Statistics.

Math, so awfully perfect, allows no margin for error. Statistics reminds me of life itself. Fickle and unruly, with a twisted sense of humor.

Imagine a reclining young woman, about to give birth. On average, she and I, an elderly, not to mention dead homosexual man, are four and a half months pregnant each. How disturbing, but true, statistically speaking.

Athena’s owl is flying over the assembly. I’ve often implored her to keep it caged for the duration of the meeting, lest it defecate on someone’s head. With this particular crowd it could start a war. I signal to Prometheus’s eagle to go scare the owl into some corner of the amphitheater.

Athena herself is pouting, because Sisyphus has just arrived and once again hasn’t showered beforehand. Her nose wrinkles in disapproval. Next to her, Aphrodite, horny as ever, whispers into Hera’s ear loudly enough for all to hear, “Look at those quads! And biceps! He’s gotten so jacked since getting his boulder! Maybe it’s time for something else to rock his world...” they both giggle. Athena rolls her eyes. Sisyphus blushes.

“I call this meeting to order! Please, we have a busy agenda for today,” I say.

When the gods lifted me to Olympus, and Athena anointed me the chairman of the monthly divine regulatory assembly, my ego nearly burst with the delight of self-importance. I soon discovered the pitiful truth: from the most acclaimed scholar of my days, I, Pythagoras, have been made a glorified kindergartner.

I go through my lists, checking off names. Today only one is missing, not too bad.

“Does anyone know where Gaia is?” I ask.

“Preggers! Again!” one of the Moirai, the three fates, offers with a gleeful hiss. They don’t have a voting right, they just come to heckle. Gaia is always carrying. I don’t see why that should count as an excuse, but if I nag her again she has it in her mean powers to make me pregnant, and I’m not referring to the misleading power of statistical means.

“Today,” I say loudly, trying to overcome the hushed snickers from the back rows, “we first consider a proposition from Prometheus.” I turn to face him, “Please state it clearly for all to hear.”

I wonder with little excitement what it’s about this time. He’s always up to some crazy scheme to benefit humans, to everyone’s dismay.

“Let’s grant humans immortality!” he bellows happily, waving his enormous hands and flashing his smile around. Dear gods. What an idiot.

His eagle, back from scaring off the owl, is hungrily picking at his liver, pulling out long bits of entrails. I turn my head away, swallowing my breakfast for the second time.

Still, it’s on me to ensure they play the game by their rules. “Remarks ‘for’ will be delivered by Prometheus,” I announce, “followed by remarks ‘against’ by?” I look around for raised hands, “Zeus.” Good. He’ll bury this nonsense in no time.

Prometheus speaks enthusiastically about the wonders of having humans roam indefinitely, like the giants, and the monsters. He gesticulates wildly, at times accidentally knocking off his feasting eagle, pausing to apologize to the beast in some squawking bird tongue. It's tedious. I can't tell if he's really into the idea, or had finally gone completely mad. Being someone's daily meal might be a contributing factor.

Zeus is duly pissed off. "Do you really want those little fuckers running around forever?" he eloquently introduces his side of the debate, only to be immediately interrupted by all those who clearly think this particular topic is too funny to sit out.

"You could still kill them!" Hephaestus shouts, shaking an enormous spear in the air. Where is that security detail?

"True. Immortal doesn't mean one can't be killed by sword, god, or a good old fashioned natural disaster," Uranus contributes with a smirk and a wink.

"I have no interest in wasting my time personally killing them!" Zeus's veins visibly pulse on his forehead.

"I might," Hades growls. Of course. Making humans immortal means things will get dull for him in the underworld.

It quickly deteriorates into a rowdy discussion rather than a proper two-sided debate. Everyone seems to be in a clownishly uncouth mood today. I groan inwardly.

Finally, they simmer down enough for me to wrap it up. "The vote will be done confidentially," I remind them, and some of them boo. We had to go the confidential vote route after I discovered too many of them were adding and subtracting limbs from one another willy-nilly during raised hand counts.

I hobble around, distributing soft clay bits. All this walking is hard for me. Being in the afterlife doesn't eradicate rheumatism, turns out.

The gods make their marks on the clay and harden them with simple magic. Arachne, bless her many legs and arms, helps me collect the votes back. I call for a break.

I limp to my little office, behind the main amphitheater, and sit down with a sigh. I carefully count the small tiles.

I'm stunned by the tally. I thought it would be all 'against', save for one single 'for' from that buffon, Prometheus. It's 29 for, 28 against immortal humans. I'll bet anything the ones in favor all had the same juvenile epiphany, wouldn't it be funny to cast 'for', each vainly assuming they'd alone could conjure such a hysterical idea.

Statistically speaking, there's no meaningful significance in such a small difference. It's just observational noise, a measurement error. One more or less doesn't mean anything. Mathematically, it's a clear cut decision. Two contradictory views, offered by two contrarian sisters.

I, a man who was blessed with immortality, some might say cursed with it, have no desire to see it bestowed upon my fellow humans. I am in the same chariot as Zeus. I don't want those little fuckers running around forever. They do enough damage as it is.

The gates of Olympus are open to all immortals, gods or otherwise. I can't begin to imagine the mess I'll have to deal with if they too come visiting here, observing, and interfering at every turn. Second only to the gods is mankind's love of scheming, and relishing in manipulation.

Statistics laughs as she approximates truth, fudging it along the way. She nudges me to absent-mindedly take things into my own hands. I hold two 'for' counts in my palm. I lightly finger them, carefully. It is not my role to intervene, I attempt to remind myself.

Stuck here, immortal, unhealthy, at a dead-end job I never asked for, I think: screw them all. I slide the two clay bits away from the large pile. Now the count is 27 for, 28 against. It's all the same, I tell myself, statistically speaking.

Unannounced, Athena walks in. I hurriedly shift my palm to cover the stray clay bits.

"You did not expect this," she says. Goddess of wisdom who sees all, under my palm, into my soul.

"I don't understand the lot of you," I admit. "There's no logic to it. Wouldn't immortal humans be a disaster?"

"I picked you for the role because I believed you to be a devotee of finding the truth, Pythagoras," she says, ignoring my question, with her infuriating, all-knowing smile.

I think I'm about to get fired. I wonder what happens next.

"As it stands," she continues, "I also don't want those little fuckers running around forever. My own idiotic lot is enough to handle."

I sense a scorching heat under my palm, and retract my hand with a yelp. The two clay bits are now marked 'against'.

Good call. Everyone would have seen there were two less counts than participants. I was not thinking straight. Contemplating immortality for all will tarnish the logic of even the best of scholars. It's a terrifying prospect, not only because of increased bureaucracy at the gates of the gods' residential neighbourhood.

“Also, Pythagoras, you sic that stinking eagle at my owl one more time and I feed you to the Cyclops,” she says and leaves my room.

Lovely. I’m allowed to sabotage divine decisions with no repercussions, but goddess forbids I attempt to stop her owl from pooping on her family and friends. Good to know she has her priorities and punishments all sorted out.

I make my way back to the stage, to announce the decision. I check my notes to see what’s next. Oh jolly. The afternoon deliberations will cover Ionian aesthetics, for or against.