

The Delray Democrat

Deus Ex Machina:

Donald Trump Meets the Greek Gods (Again)¹

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Deus ex machina (“the god from the machine”) is a plot device by which classical Greek tragedies resolved seemingly intractable problems. An actor portraying a Greek god would emerge onstage from the “machine,” either a crane that lowered him or a riser that lifted him through a trapdoor.

Resolution in hand, the tragedy would come to a satisfying conclusion, creating “a feeling of wonder and astonishment” and adding “to the moral effect of the drama.”

America faced a seemingly unsolvable problem in early 2020, namely, how to prevent Trump from being reelected and hammering the final nail into the coffin of our Republic and what remained of our democracy. The ancient Greeks invented democracy; how would Aeschylus have resolved the problem?

Pathological liar that he is, Trump bragged that “his” economy was the greatest in history, adding a double lie to the tens of thousands previously documented. It was not Trump’s economy; it was Obama’s, built from the wreckage left him by George W. Bush, and it was not the best in history. The economy had performed better during Obama’s final three years than during Trump’s first three.

But few Americans were paying attention, and Trump was cruising to a second term when the first reports of COVID hit. Early indications were that Trump was incapable of responding to a crisis of this proportion, any more than he’d been able to keep his casinos out of bankruptcy courts. At the time, I suggested COVID might morph into [Trump’s Katrina](#) and like a god from the machine, end the tragedy of the Trump presidency.

COVID did offer Trump the opportunity to be a hero but he remained a [buffoon](#), and a deadly one at that. He ignored repeated warnings stretching back years that America lacked adequate medical supplies and equipment to deal with a pandemic. Then he bungled their production and distribution.

He denied the threat as the death toll mounted from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands, and he blamed everyone and everything except himself and his own colossal incompetence. He demonstrated that he cared only about his re-election, becoming increasingly unhinged as it slowly

¹ [The Delray Democrat](#), August 2024, page 8.

slipped away.

We mourned those who died because of Trump's failure—the respected British medical journal *The Lancet* [estimated](#) that nearly 40% of the 470,000 deaths that occurred during Trump's tenure could have been averted.

COVID was not a god emerging from a machine to dispense justice. COVID was a virus transmitted in droplets, and it killed randomly. It helped, however, remove a rough beast from an office he had no business occupying. And that produced a “feeling of wonder and astonishment” in the audience, which added the “moral effect of the drama.”

Freddy's Back; So Is the God from the Machine

It is a testament to the gutlessness of the Republicans that within four years Trump is back, like Freddy. Let's call the sequel *The [Sociopath](#) Strikes Back* and watch as the Greek gods work their magic.

Act 1 opens with Biden trailing Trump in the polls. Inflation has been cooling for over a year and is approaching the Fed's goal, but the public still blames Biden for the result of a perfect storm for which he bears only limited responsibility.

They forget 200 million Americans vaccinated in 100 days, three major bipartisan bills on critical issues that had languished for decades, the greatest investment in green energy in American history, and far more jobs created in a first term than ever before. In a display of mass psychosis they think Trump did a better job with the economy.

In Scene Two, the media develops a new obsession – Biden's age and health. Trump again gets a pass, and Americans, by significant margins, rate Trump as physically and mentally healthier than Biden. More mass psychosis? Or an illustration of Bill Clinton's aphorism that Americans, when uncertain, prefer someone who is strong and wrong to someone who is weak and right?

Scene Three opens with Biden's debate performance and the consequent fallout. The media reports Trump's blizzard of lies, but the public doesn't care: the media's concerns about Biden's capacity to serve four more years appear validated.

The way forward for Democrats is murky. Increasing numbers of Democrats demand that Biden step down. James Clyburn, the man who stopped Biden's bleeding in the 2020 primaries and set him on the road to the White House, has the last word: “If not Biden, then Harris.”

Act 2 opens with the failed assassination attempt. Trump proclaims that he was saved by God so that he could save the world.

Some wag wanders on stage and counters that all that was proven is that God was a bad shot. That is another way of looking at it.

But the Greek chorus has “second sight” and they explain that everything is going according to plan. The play will not end until the Fat Lady sings, and she will not sing until the god has emerged from the machine.

And so it unfolds. Republican lunatics attending the Convention (but I repeat myself) slap on fake ear bandages in solidarity with the man rated by historians as the worst president ever. Donald Trump’s idiot son pushes his father to select J.D. Vance for vice-president, and Trump makes the worst VP pick since Thomas Eagleton.

The media contrasts the lovefest at the convention with Democrats in disarray. Republicans experience the summit of schadenfreude while Democrats begin tearing their hair out from the roots.

Offstage the god approaches the machine.

Act 3 opens with a Greek chorus prophesying the disasters that would accompany Trump’s return to the Oval Office.

But the chorus reminds the audience of the dangers of hubris, “the pride that comes before the fall.” And the Republicans begin to demonstrate how that works.

A second term seems a certainty. Why stop there? The American Conservative publishes [Trump 2028](#), breezily dismissing the Twenty-Second Amendment “as an arbitrary restraint on presidents who serve nonconsecutive terms—and on democracy itself.”

Of course, all signs point to Trump 2.0 being far worse than Trump 1.0. Project 2025 provided the roadmap two years earlier, but now people are paying attention: first fire the tens of thousands of dedicated, non-partisan, civil servants that make government work for the American people and who are protected by existing law and tradition. Then replace them with barking-mad revanchists who do not worry about such niceties as the U.S. Constitution and are ready to do Trump’s bidding.

In Scene Two, we meet the man behind Project 2025. Kevin Roberts is the president of The Heritage Foundation, which has mutated under his leadership from a respected conservative thinktank into an organization hellbent on an unholy crusade.

Their language is menacing and martial:

- “*We are in the process of the second American Revolution, which will remain bloodless if the left allows it to be,*” Roberts [threatens](#).
- Project 2025 Director Paul Dans [brags](#), “*We are not tinkering at the edges. We are writing a battle plan, and we are marshaling our forces.*”

Americans begin to realize that the Republic is under attack by people trying to re-fight the Civil War and turn the country into a White Christian autocracy.

In a flashback from the runup to the midterms, Biden tentatively calls Trumpism a form of “[semi-fascism](#).” That meme played a major role in turning the projected “Red Tsunami” into a trickle (everywhere except in Flori-duh).

But Biden had been “vague about the specifics of what he identified as half-baked American fascism” in 2022. Now, Project 2025’s sinister aims have been spelled out in detail in a 920-page manifesto.

It turns out that Roberts has further expounded on his battle plan in a book originally [titled](#) “*Dawn’s Early Light: Burning Down Washington to Save America*.” In the event anyone misses the violent overthrow they are advocating, the cover includes the image of a burning match over the word “Washington.”

The god steps into the machine.

As Scene Three opens, Project 2025 is going over like a screaming baby in church. It won’t attract new voters and might drive away existing supporters.

Trump tries to distance himself from Project 2025 but that’s complicated by the fact that Paul Dans worked in his administration, as did [another](#) “140 people who had a hand in the project.” Dans resigns from Project 2025 but it doesn’t stop the bleeding.

Vance’s close association with Roberts just won’t go away. He not only wrote the foreword to Roberts’s upcoming book but had previously [advocated](#) that Trump “fire every single midlevel bureaucrat, every civil servant in the administrative state, replace them with our people.” It does not escape the audience that this is a central goal of Project 2025.

Indeed, Vance went even further: if the courts try to stop him, Vance bumptiously urged Trump to “stand before the country like Andrew Jackson did, and say, ‘The chief justice has made his ruling. Now let him enforce it.’” The clownish Vance continues to be the VP pick that keeps giving.

In an attempt at damage control, the publication date of Roberts’s book is moved until after the election, the subtitle is changed to “Taking Back Washington to Save America,” and the match is removed from the cover image. Roberts defends the delay, [explaining](#), “There’s a time for writing, reading, and book tours — and a time to put down the books and go fight like hell to take back our country.”

But wait! Isn’t that what Trump told the insurrectionists to do on January 6, 2021?

Act 4 opens with increasing calls for Biden to step down. He believes he can beat Trump but the greatest Speaker of the modern era, Nancy Pelosi, enters stage left and shows him data that he’ll hurt down-ticket Democrats.

Her anguish at hurting her friend of 50 years is palpable. David Axelrod [sums it up](#) beautifully:

I also think in her heart she knows she did the right thing for the party and the country. He did the right thing, and she did the right thing by urging him to do the right thing.”

The Act ends with Biden endorsing Harris. Offstage a voice sounds, “If not Biden, then Harris.” It is not funereal now. It is soaring and triumphant.

Act 5 begins with Harris’s joyous performance at Biden campaign HQ. She praises Joe and the crowd eats it up. The god is watching. Are we headed for a Hollywood ending?

The enthusiasm is reminiscent of Obama’s first campaign. Kamala nails her VP pick and Tim Walz nails his first soliloquy. “Weird” becomes a meme and goes viral. Efforts to pit him against Josh Shapiro fail, as they sing each other’s praises.

Trump loses it. In Trump’s primitive brain, THAT’S NOT FAIR! It had been in the bag! It’s exactly how a puling infant reacts to having his rattle removed.

Like Kevin Kline in *A Fish Called Wanda*, he’s DISAPPOINTED! All his beautiful plans have melted away with Joe Biden’s withdrawal.

Worse still, now he is the old guy in the race. And the media is paying increasing attention to his increasingly erratic behavior. It seems that poetic justice will precede real justice.

Exodus. The country has been spared the tragedy of a second Trump term. He has been found guilty by his peers.

The god emerges. Like an ancient Greek audience, we are overcome with “wonder and astonishment” at his appearance, “adding to the moral effect of the drama.” He speaks: *Nómōi peíthou* (‘Obey the law’).