

Memos to Bacchus

What's a god of wine to do when he's caught in a bureaucratic tangle of quarterly reports, flow charts, meetings and memorandums? BY TIM MORIARTY

Memos received by Bacchus from Mercury, messenger of the gods, circa 3.8 million B.C.

Bacchus: You aren't returning my messages—again—so just a tickler on the meeting regarding Planet Third from Gasball #777/Milky Way. Life requiring the favor of the gods should be arising there in about 3 million years, so we don't have much time. Please study the enclosed specs on the planet and have proposals ready by Monday sharp.

P.S.: Fauna will spearhead the agricultural group on this project. Jupiter will supervise and, word to the wise, don't tick him off like you did on the Mars project. We don't want another red planet, now do we?

Dear Bacchus: Let me start by saying: We all loved the samples you provided. Delicious. You've outdone yourself again. Bravo. However, your plan, if we understand it correctly, is to have this "vino" obtained via a pull chain that dangles from the clouds; it rains down, to be collected in goblets. Not to mince words, Jupiter is plenty irked. You know how proud he is of his clouds. Are you reading any of the material I'm sending you? Clouds are water conveyances, and at such a height that pull chains are completely impractical. Come up with something else by Tuesday.

B: You really do need to reconsider your attitude. Sulking over the cloud thing isn't going to help. And neither is your Plan B. Acids, tannins, yeasts? Hand-picking? Crushing? Racking? Maceration? Storing it in vessels made out of trees? Do you even know what a tree is? And the whole plan hinges on predictable temperature changes, sun exposure and rainfall. Excuse the expression, my friend, but what have you been drinking? Please come down to the boardroom immediately. No one can make heads or tails of this fermentation business.

Hello? B?: You absolutely must start attending the meetings. "Sleeping it off" no longer qualifies as an excuse. (We don't exempt Cupid for target practice.) Jupiter has asked me to remind you that these planet inhabitants will be of limited intelligence...not as smart as, say, Martians. (Or as good-looking either. Only two eyes? What's that about?) If we implement your new plan, we fear they'll never discover vino, let alone master it. A couple of points you need to address: The ripeness

issue...awfully chancy, isn't it? Here's a fun idea: How about a colorful flag pops up when the fruit is exactly ripe? We like the tiny, round fruit concept, but all agree that six colors are too many. They've asked me to ask you: Pick two. Also, the name "kiwi" is taken. Can you come up with something else?

B: You couldn't leave the cloud thing alone, could you? You had to send a memo to Jupiter. You really think your grapes are more important than his weather patterns? What were you thinking? Enclosed are the minutes of the Friday meeting. Let me summarize:

In response to your memo, Jupiter asked Fortuitas for an even more random formula for weather patterns. He then doubled the number of clouds and created all new ones—we now have you to thank for cumulonimbus.

Then, just because your specs call for flat terrain, he orders Terra to contour the whole planet—we're talking hills, mountains, valleys, gul-

leys. And Terra gets her toga all in a twist and says if she has to do this extra work because of "that hiccupping horndog" she'll add all kinds of soil types. "Let's see," she says, "chalky, stony—and volcanic!" We say, what's volcanic? She says it's from a mountain that spits fire. She came up with this idea on the spot. She was hopping mad.

Oh, but there's more. Sol then raises his hand. "Hey, Jupiter, I've always wanted to tilt the axis of a planet, and move it elliptically around its sun. Can I do that?" Jupiter says, sure, go nuts. And Fortuna starts pouting: "How come Sol gets to do anything he wants?" And Jupiter says, what's on your mind? And she says, "Rot! Mold! Frost! The glassy-winged sharpshooter!" And Jupiter says, sounds like fun.

That's not all. Guess what? You left a big loophole with the two "basic" grape colors. Saturn's team is having a skull session even as I write this—they're up to over a hundred varieties. So, to sum up: flat terrain, stable temperatures, predictable sun and rain, common soil, standard ripening? In Jupiter's words: "pfffft!" This vino business will never fly, my friend.

Bacchus, Baby: You're gonna kick yourself for missing the 10 o'clock. Venus finally made her presentation, and you should see what she's come up with this time. Hubba-hubba. ☘

