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CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Or

Why there are more rats in Chicago than there are people?

By

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Monday, 65 Million Years Ago

All the advisors shuffled into the Cabinet Room and took their seats, chatting amiably. The Secretary of the Interior, at the head of the table, leaned over to his friend, the Secretary of Evolution, "Hey, Pete, how was your weekend?"

"Pretty good, John. How about that fight?"

"Yeah, I thought the Tri-Top was going to get butchered. Then the Raptors couldn't make a move. It was like they just froze."

It's the horns, John. They're savage."

Interior replied, "Yeah, I guess. That was some of your best work. So, it should be a good week, right? Got anything going?"

"Just the usual, you know, flowers to bloom, bees to fly."

"Oh, yeah, how's it going with the bees?"

"They're great. They still think they're ants, but they'll come around."

Interior said, "I'm sure they will. Hey, what about those worms? I know you were working on the worms. Any progress?"

"No, they're impossible, John, no sex. They just don't want to have sex. I don't know what I'm going to do with them."

"Ah, that's a shame, Pete. You know, they're not very pretty."

"Pretty is relative, John."

"Interior was embarrassed at his mistake, but his friend Pete didn't exploit it. Pete, the Secretary of Evolution, said, "I'll just have to keep working with them, but I'm running out of patience with the worms."

Mrs. Clinton, the Secretary of Slate And Clay and Shale, hushed them, "Shhh.

He's coming."

Interior listened closely. He asked, "How do you know He's coming?"

"I can feel it in the topography, footsteps."

Everyone turned toward the door. God came in and sat at the head of the table opposite Interior.

Evolution whispered, "Uh oh. He looks grumpy."

God said to the group, "What's going on with these dinosaurs?"

Everybody looked at God nervously. Interior spoke up, "What do you mean, sir?"

"When are they going to start worshipping me?"

"I'm sorry Sir. You must know that it takes time." He looked for help from the members at the table, who avoided his gaze.

Evolution said, "Yes, Sir, they're doing fine. They're thriving. We figure they'll worship you pretty soon. They just need a little more time."

God shouted, "They've had 200 million years, for Christ's sake!"

Interior asked, "Whose sake?"

God said, "Never mind."

The advisors all frowned and looked at each other.

God asked, "What's the problem, anyway? You said it would only take about ten million years."

Evolution said, "Yes, sir, but it's going to take a bit longer. You see, the dinosaurs are a little bigger than we planned them to be."

"So?"

"So, they're not really sure if they need God right now."

All the advisors cringed at the mistake. Evolution turned to Mrs. Clinton, who shrugged her shoulders, in case she should get blamed for being associated with that

terrible remark.

God exploded. "What? What did you say? They don't need God? Did you just say that to Me?"

"No, Sir, I didn't say that. I mean, I didn't mean it. Of course they do. Of course they need you. You're God."

"Maybe I don't need so many secretaries."

Interior interjected, "Now, Sir, don't get all upset."

God calmed down a little and said, "Ok, so they're too big. What about those little furry critters with the long tails?"

The advisors all looked at each other in confusion. Interior asked, "You mean the rats?"

"Yeah, yeah, the rats. They're cute. I like them."

"Sir, they're not even rats yet."

"I know what the hell they are. They're going to be rats, aren't they?"

The Secretary of the Interior looked to the other members for support, but they looked away out of guilt. "Sir, we've calculated that the rats are going to be extinct in less than fifteen million years."

"Damn."

"Please settle down, sir. You know, your blood pressure." Glancing at another member of the group, Interior said, "The Surgeon General here says that it's not good for your health for you to get so upset."

The Surgeon General snuffed out his cigarette. "That's true, Sir. Let me tell you what happens when you start to develop ischemic cardiopathy..."

God roared, "My blood pressure has nothing to do with it! I want those dinosaurs to worship me by Friday. Friday, do you understand? Friday!"

God slammed the door as he left the meeting.

The advisors were in shock. They pointed fingers at each other and shouted insults, each looking to deflect the blame. The Surgeon General said to Interior, "Why did you drag me into that? I wasn't even paying attention."

"Well, you should have been paying attention. He's fourteen billion years old, you know."

The Surgeon General lit another cigarette out of frustration, and was going to reply, when Evolution said, "What's he talking about the rats for? They're itty-bitty things. How does he expect the stupid rats to worship him?"

"I don't know. He's being unreasonable again. I'll have to talk to him."

"And by Friday? Is He nuts? What's going to happen on Friday?"

Interior said, "I don't know. I don't have anything on my calendar for Friday that I remember, but we have to come up with something before then."

All the advisors looked at each other in dismay. The Secretary of Evolution addressed the only woman present, Mrs. Clinton, "What do you think we should do, Madam Secretary? You've been unusually quiet this morning."

"I don't know. I'm thinking."

"You're the Secretary of Slate. Don't you have anything to say, or do you just want to see me get fired?"

"No, Mr. Secretary. I don't want that. I'm sorry. I just can't think of anything right now. I have to think."

Interior said, "Ok. Let's not fight among ourselves. How about we meet tomorrow and see if we can come up with something about the dinosaurs, and we'll talk about the rats.

Evolution said, "There's no point in talking about the rats. They're goners.

Anybody can see that.”

Everybody agreed and apologized to each other.

Tuesday, 65 Million Years Ago

Interior started the meeting. "OK, gentlemen, and, uh, sorry, lady, anybody have any ideas?"

Mrs. Clinton indicated that she wasn't offended, but nobody spoke, except Evolution. "They just eat each other, the dinosaurs. What's wrong with that?"

Interior replied, "I think God expects a little more from them."

"They've been doing that for like, forever. There's no reason for them to worship Him."

The Surgeon General said, "And they're extremely healthy."

Interior said, "But God wants them to evolve."

Evolution said, "They have evolved, plenty. Some of them can even fly. That was really hard for me to do. Do you know how hard it is to make feathers?"

Everybody had nothing but self-praise for the success of the dinosaurs. Nobody came up with anything useful. Mrs. Clinton said nothing.

Interior finally ended the meeting. "Ok. I have a meeting with Him on Thursday. I don't see any hope but for the dinosaurs."

Evolution said, "You have to convince Him that they'll evolve."

"I'm going to recommend that we need more time, maybe another fifty million years. I think He'll understand."

Evolution said, "I'll get started on it right away, first thing tomorrow."

"No, do it today. We can't lose any more time."

"I'm clearing my calendar."

Everybody shook their heads in agreement, happy that they had a plan.

Except Mrs. Clinton.

Thursday, 10:00 AM

The Secretary of Evolution waited outside the Cabinet Room. He could hear loud voices coming from inside, but he couldn't make out the words. The Secretary of Interior came out, visibly shaken.

Evolution asked, "What did he say?"

"It was a disaster. He rejects the viability of the dinosaurs. I mean, He didn't even listen to me. It was like talking to a wall. Jeez."

Evolution hung his head in sorrow. "So what's going to happen now? Are we, I mean, me, am I going to lose my job? Did he say anything about me?"

"No, Pete, He seems to blame all of us. I don't know. It's bad."

"I'm sorry, John. I didn't mean to sound selfish. It's just that... hey, what's 'jeez' mean? That's a funny word.

"What? Oh, I don't know. It just popped into my head."

Friday, 7:00 AM

The Secretary of the Interior sat at the kitchen table. His wife, Connie, made toast at the counter. Connie said, "Oh, John, I hate to see you so upset."

"Oh, it's not so bad."

"Do you think He'll fire you? I'm worried, you know, the little ones."

"No, I don't think He'd do that. I've been with Him for three billion years. Hey, I did the Pangea breakup. That's still paying dividends, except for the earthquakes, but that's not my fault, although the San Andreas one was, but I'm still working on that."

"What? What are you talking about? Who's Saint Andreas?"

"It's a fault. Never mind."

"Why is He doing this, anyway?"

"Aw, He gets this way every once in a while, crazy. Remember the Permian Extinction?"

Connie laughed, as did the Secretary. She said, "Yeah, that was bad. I thought your Evolution friend was going to collapse."

"Pete? Yeah, He sat at his desk and stared straight ahead for twenty million years, didn't say a word. That was funny. So I don't think He'll fire me, but Pete could be in trouble. He's worried."

Connie brought another piece of toast over to the table. The Secretary wolfed it down and said, "Thanks for breakfast, hon. I'd better get in. I have to come up with some more ways to move the dinosaurs along."

"Oh, John, please don't let it bother you. I hate to see you so upset. Please try and have a good day. We'll have a nice weekend with the children. You'll be home regular time?"

“Yes, I should.”

Connie smiled. “Have a nice day, dear. I’ll see you tonight.”

The Secretary of the Interior got up from the table, kissed his wife, and moved toward the door when, through the window, they both saw it:

A huge fireball erupted off the Yucatan Peninsula in the Gulf of Mexico.

Interior exclaimed, “What the hell was that?”

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The meteorite exterminated most of the tropical sea life almost instantly. The oceans rose three hundred feet and flooded half of the land mass of the world. An enormous cloud of acid, ash, dust, and poisonous gases spewed death into the sky, covering the entire globe. The sun went dim for many dozens of years, and a deep cold descended on the earth. Without the sun, the plants died within months. Without the plants, the surviving dinosaurs quickly followed.

Monday, Five Million Years Ago

God entered the meeting. The Secretary of Evolution whispered to Interior, "He looks grumpy again. Does He look grumpy to you?" Interior stared intensely at God, but God didn't take a seat. He just stood and paced. Then He spoke.

"These monkeys are going nowhere. How do you expect them to worship me when they're up in the trees?"

Interior said, "Sir, that's what they do, that's where they live."

God said, "Well, why do they have to live in the trees?"

"It seemed like a good place to put them, Sir."

"And how the hell are they going to build temples and churches and mosques when they're up in the trees all day, huh? I'm not getting any younger, you know."

Interior said, "Technically, Sir, you're not getting any older, either."

Evolution interjected, "It's my fault, Sir. It took me longer than expected to turn the rats into monkeys. The rats don't evolve well. They don't really need to."

Other members mumbled inarticulately, without commitment, and shifted their gazes one way or the other, so that God couldn't tell if they agreed or not.

God thundered, "Get the God-damn monkeys out of the trees!"

All the advisors backed away from the table in shock, so fast that they almost fell out of their chairs. God's face turned red. He stabbed his finger through the air and shouted, "I'm sending another meteor down there!"

Evolution put his head in his hands and muttered, "Oh, no, not again."

God stormed out of the room. Chaos was in effect. Members got up and yelled at each other, even shoving. The Surgeon General reached across the table for Evolution's throat and barely missed as Evolution jumped away and slammed backward

into the wall. One member ended up on the floor, and another fell face down on the table.

Mrs. Clinton sat silently.

The Secretary of the Interior hopped onto the table, stepped over the wounded man, and yelled, "Stop that! Stop it. Right now. Take your seats. Stop it."

Interior climbed back into his seat as the other members stopped fighting. "What are we going to do? We can't disagree among ourselves, and we can't take another meteor. So what are we going to do?"

The members all returned to their seats. Interior turned to Evolution in despair and said, "What about the rats? Can we move them along? He likes the rats. Isn't there something we can do with the rats?"

"No, it won't work. They're too stubborn. They'll eat anything, plants, bugs, dirt, anything. They'll root through the dung and eat the undigested left-overs. It's disgusting. A dead mastodon will feed hundreds of them for weeks, and there's plenty of dead mastodons around. It just won't work."

Interior shook his head at the hopelessness of the situation.

Mrs. Clinton said, "Why don't we just take away the trees?"

Evolution's jaw dropped. He was horrified, just horrified. "What? Take away the trees? Are you crazy? It took me fifty million years to get them *up* into the trees, and now you want to take away the trees? What are we going to do, burn down the trees? We'll kill all the monkeys. Are you out of your mind?"

"No," she said. "We can make a mountain range rise up in Africa. The west will be jungle, but the east will be grassland."

The Cabinet members stared at her in stunned silence. She recovered her confidence and said, "There'll be very few trees, because the wind blowing over the

ocean won't carry the water over the mountains."

Everyone was astonished. Interior said, "Oh, my God, that could work."

So that's what they did. Five million years ago, a mighty mountain range rose up in Africa. The monkeys in the west stayed monkeys, but the monkeys in the east had to learn how to get out of the trees and depend on themselves and each other in order to live.

And God was pleased.

Monday, Present Day

The advisors all entered the Cabinet Room. God was already there. Interior said, "Hello there, Sir. Good to see you here already."

God said, "Yes, I have something I want to say to all of you."

The members took their seats quietly, solemnly, and suspiciously.

God said, "You did a good job on this one. Most of these 'people,' as you call them, worship me. Not all of them, but that's all right. I can live with that. I just wanted to thank you, and especially you, Madam Secretary, but all of you equally. Thank you for what you did."

God walked toward the door. Behind God's back, the members congratulated themselves, slapping hands and smiling, but just as God got to the door, He turned around.

"Oh, just one other thing."

The board members gawked at Him in fear. The Surgeon General dropped his cigarette on the floor.

God said, "Just in case these people don't work out,

Keep those rats around."

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