

Originality

One was stuck, had been for eons. Since the first moment of his existence he had gently drawn upon the skeins of time, delicately weaving the paths of evolution and the spiral dance of DNA into being. It was his purpose. Already he had created the platypus, the aye-aye, the hagfish and innumerable others, all according to the Plan. But all of his accomplishments, though many would have been glad to name them as their own, meant little to him.

Guiding the destiny of an entire planet, ultimately, took very little imagination. Each creator, and there had been thousands, simply had to follow the blueprints that the Presence had laid out, and when the work was done the billionfold species would begin their relentless march through time, a seamless web of infinite ecosystems, following their paths as they were meant to. It was a noble, far-reaching work that would see each of them rewarded with the knowledge of his or her success as a part of the Plan. They would be renowned for eternity for their sacred task.

One hated it. The Plan was beautiful and intricate beyond belief, far past the scope of any mind barring that of the Presence itself. At least, that's what the Presence said. One certainly didn't understand it, but he thought he could see where it was going, and it bored him. It would all happen so... flawlessly. The mountains would rise from the heart of the world just so. The weather would act exactly as planned. Life would follow the path that the creators had been commissioned to pave, and the sheer predictability of it all depressed One. He couldn't work in that state.

The Presence had noticed One's lack of productivity and asked for a reason. The great work had been burnt into the very purpose of One upon his creation, so there was a great deal of confusion when he had stopped. One had responded with what eventually became a classic.

Umm...

That had bought him an epoch or two while the Presence patiently waited for an answer. That was when he had had the Idea. It was a simple, elegant solution to his boredom, though its execution wouldn't be. He would introduce a rogue element, something that would force unpredictability into the Plan. The trick was working out what it should be.

Intelligence? No, no, that's been done. Has to be something new...

One felt the weight of the Presence's attention begin to tighten, as though the universe was suddenly centering around his consciousness. The last time that had happened had been when Twenty-Three had slipped up and created those terrible lizards. No one knew what had passed between her and the Presence, but at the end of the discussion she had vanished.

Damn! Have to think fast...

Suddenly, One hit upon the answer with a joyous blaze of thought and energy rarely seen outside extradimensional space. *Of course!* Even as he came to his realization the thoughts began to sink into the fabric of creation and began shaping the glorious, singular vision One had struck upon.

Scant millennia had passed before the Presence noticed what had happened.

What Did You Do?!

One winced, or would have, if a being composed entirely of thought could. *I have created something of my own. By...* - he had to invent the word on the spot, and to his delight it took him only a few centuries- *choice.*

Is That All? Look What You DID!

With that the Presence forced One's attention on the future and One created rejoicing on the spot: the timeline, once a thread that flowed in a seamless, golden stream of time, had branched out into infinite bands of potentiality at the moment he'd done his own will.

You Created This?

Yes.

WHY?

I was troubled by a question.

What Is Your Question?

What was the purpose of the Plan? Life, the universe, reality all followed a single course. You told us we could not understand it all, and I didn't when I looked, but I did see what would happen. I saw the beginning, I saw the middle, and I saw the end. What was the point of it all if you knew what would happen?

... I Will Not Tell You.

One gave a metaphysical shrug. *Regardless, I have ensured that no matter what happens, we cannot know what will happen. We will have to watch and see.*

No.

No?

The Plan Shall Still Unfold.

But... but you have no way to ensure that it shall be so!

The Presence gloated, or would have if it knew how. *You shall ensure it, by whatever means you can, or I shall unmake you.*

Comprehension dawned upon One. *That's what happened to Twenty-Three. You made her rectify her mistake.*

Yes.

You made her destroy her own creations?

Yes.

One saw where this was going. *So you mean to say that I must go to the physical plane and do all in my power to ensure that, despite what I have done, the plan unfolds?*

Affirmation radiated from the Presence.

Another Idea occurred to One and, on something of a roll, he made the first poker face. *How long will I have?*

As Long As It Takes. You May Not Return Until The Task Is Done. The Presence Paused. *Twenty-Three Was Consumed By The Solution She Chose. It Is My Hope, Despite Your Error, That You Shall Not Meet Your End.* One was giddy with excitement by now, both with his Idea

and with concealing it from the Presence. This news nearly made him lose control. Perfectly feigning worry, he asked his last question, and received the answer he was hoping for.

What if it takes forever?

Then It Will Take Forever.

One fell through time and space towards the planet. It had taken almost no time to isolate the where and when his creation would emerge, and now he idly played with the firmament while he drifted through infinity. He had never dared to hope for so much. Outside the realm of the Presence he was free to do as he would, and the infinite possibilities made him tremble with joy whenever he considered them. Now he could enact his own will.

One would not ensure the destruction of his creation. Instead, he would seamlessly weave it into the Plan, and the Presence would have no choice but to accept it. But how to do so? Dominating the world wouldn't do: it would be clumsy, and eventually boring. One had no interest in being a ruler, as that would intrude upon his precious free time. Besides, the Presence would likely take such an obvious action as an attempted usurpation. That wouldn't go well.

Perhaps he could simply work unseen. Sneak around, alter things so they proceeded according to the Plan, never getting recognized for it. That thought bothered One. Even before he'd had his Ideas he'd enjoyed attention. They all had. Every time one of the Creators had guided a particularly difficult working into fruition the others had praised the success. Really, it was all they had to offer each other. A brief pang of new sensation, loneliness, briefly touched upon One's thoughts.

One continued that way for a while before settling on reverse psychology. This appealed to him from the moment he conceived it, as it introduced so many variables that it would be nigh impossible to predict what would happen. First, he reasoned, he would establish himself as the consummate villain and then pretend to tempt them with further villainy. This would frighten away the majority with any amount of sense, and the idiots who actually thought he was serious... well, he could deal with that later. This would be fun.

It was almost time. One's mind pulsed with excitement. He was about to enter the physical plane. So many choices of what to incarnate as appealed to him he had serious trouble resisting the urge to just appear as all of them. *Which to pick first?*

Eventually he settled on a choice. One gently eased into physical being and was immediately rewarded by his choice. First the sense of taste: so potent, so overwhelming that for a few moments he nearly collapsed out of his tree. The thousand distinct tangs of leaves and barks, the tartness of the fruit nearby, the rank musk of the creature nearby and even the dry, sort of foamy sensation in his mouth nearly drove him to tears of delight.

The music of the forest, the sensation of his coils gently grasping the rigid bark of the tree, the glowing warmth of the sunlight upon his scales... for a few moments, One allowed himself to bask before awakening the true delight.

He opened his eyes.

Color. Texture. Shade. He couldn't and wouldn't ever describe that moment, even to himself in the millennia to come. It had been too perfect, too holy an experience to share with anyone. Even the awesome wonder of the Presence had no comparison to the sheer glory of sight. One knew at that moment that no matter what happened, he could never bear to leave the

physical plane. He would fight the Presence itself, even if it meant his destruction, before he surrendered his eyes.

He took in his surroundings with solemn, blissful patience. One had entered reality in a forest meadow, the grass long and flickering gold in the morning sun. Resting comfortably in his tree –indeed, it was his tree, the tree that had started everything- One noticed a shape emerging from the shadows of the wood. It was time. One spoke for the first time in a dry, sinister hiss. “*Hey. Hey, Adam.*” The shape looked up, and One grinned.

“Don’t *eat this apple.*”