

C Minus

Story Notes (perhaps better read after reading the story)

I remember some quarter-century ago standing in my bedroom, the attic of my parents' house, absent-mindedly staring out the angled windows, having some thoughts about evolution and intelligent design. I recalled an interesting discussion with a fellow student in an Intro to Evolution university course I was taking. During class earlier that week, he muttered to me "Please tell me you see how convoluted some aspects of evolution theory are, no? By Occam's razor the explanation to the complexity of life and how it came to be has to be better than that."

Back then, I was a staunch atheist, armed with science and great faith in evolution. He was a religious fella, and also very bright. While I was somewhat shocked by his disregard to what I clearly thought was the undeniable Truth, I sat with his comment for a while. I thought, half jokingly, "Let's entertain Intelligent Design". But still, we must accept the undeniable proof of some aspects of evolution. DNA replication, random mutations. Speciation from common ancestry shown very obviously through genetic analysis of DNA strands, the fact it's possible to generate new variants of life ourselves, by picking desirable phenotypic traits, and breeding for them, which is exactly what husbandry is about.

If the answer is that God created evolution, among other things He was busy doing, then yeah, there's a cleverness to it - create something that just evolves itself into complexity and variability via a very simple set of rules, and then you don't need to sweat out the details. But also, it's a bit lazy, no? There isn't a lot of capacity for quality control. A Fire-and-Forget kinda approach which can lead to unwanted complications.

I recall thinking "What if that's exactly what happened? God was supposed to create life but was too otherwise preoccupied to directly deal with it. But if so, what was keeping Him busy?" I recognized at that moment - that would be kind of a cute idea for a short story, wouldn't it?

This was an exceedingly rare occurrence. I did not have ideas for stories in those days. In fact, I cannot recall any other idea ever making its presence known until well into these past few years. Back then, I considered making this pup of an idea into a story, but I had no idea how. What would it be about? It simply stayed with me, napping.

In late 2019, with a few short stories under my belt, I took it out for a walk, but it didn't go very far, and I didn't know where it wanted to go.

At the end of 2022 I gave it another go. Again, it went dawdling. I usually write my short stories rapidly, near-furiously. Not this one. I kept at it, and by early March 2023 I had something I liked well enough. There was a story now, not just an idea, some likeable characters, a beginning, a middle, an end. But something wasn't quite right. Once again, it went back into digital slumber.

Soon after, love entered my life. I remembered some of what has been forgotten. Recently love left. Since then writing has been challenging and disturbing. A few days ago I decided to treat myself to something lighter and discovered that perhaps the story now makes more sense than it previously did. The time has come for it to go mushing.

I hope you enjoy it.

Inmar, March 20, 2024

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The story always begins in the same way: once upon a time, a boy fell in love with a girl.

One minor detail to consider: this boy was God. Some posit there is only one of Him. Of course that's nonsense. We have it on good authority that God was still learning His craft at the Multiversal Academy of Divinity, where students and faculty of the Gods, Goddesses, and additional deity variants roamed the grounds, skies, darkness of the void, and other liminal spaces required for the task of learning how to divine. As you can, and should, imagine, Hogwarts is a joke compared to that place.

And so it was that God fell thoroughly in love with a young classmate (young being a malleable term). One of the Hindu traditions, if we recall correctly. Hardly surprising, statistically speaking, there being so many of Them.

He fell in love with Her in a way that we cannot faithfully describe, because we no longer remember what being in such love feels like. But to venture some guesses as to what attracted Him: that black-hole darkness-level Fara Fawcett hair fluttering round Her head, Her eight curvy arms, the wink hiding in every one of Her smiles.

Her laughter bubbled when She passed Him in the hallways, surrounded by Her equally glorious friends as She sauntered around campus, tragically unaware of His longing, or His existence for that matter. Oh and the low rumble of Her voice, a hint of Her thunderous magic. And a million other things one becomes infatuated with when one admires from afar. If humans crush so hard, just imagine the endless multitudes of what a God can be allured by and how it must feel. Yes. We can't either.

But at this moment we're visiting, this right now, God's sitting in Professor Hashem's "Introduction to Creation of Universes 101". The distinguished professor, a recipient of many Best Universe awards, and the custodian of a stern, somewhat unpleasant personality, common to deities of Early Mesopotamian Planet Earth, is busy describing the term's final assignment. As he drones on and on, a slow and methodical unease is making its way through God.

The words appear suspended in the air, in front of God and His fellow students:

Design a World with life (at least 20k variants)

Develop its creation myth.

Using the Creation Generator, fully Instantiate and submit the World.

Creation Generator Cloud resource allocation: 37 tokens

Submission deadline 31.12

Passing Grade: D+

Important: use version ∞ .3.117, as the most up-to-date version has a security flaw.

Hashem proceeds to answer the alarmed questions of the students. Already overwhelmed by the egregious requirements of God School, this assignment is going to be a doozy. There is some saving grace: the universe boilerplate setup in which said World is to be implemented has already been generated by the fastidious TAs. It contains basic planetary templates, predefined rule-sets of energy transformations, and so on. Really, it's all but ready for life.

God, I'm fucked, God thinks, for many reasons. One is that He sucks at ethnobiology. More importantly, being well-aware of His current obsession with said Goddess, God knows concentration would be a nearly impossible goal. Nearly, because, of course, He is omnipotent. Still it doesn't mean everything comes easy. Common mistake, this.

His mind (or the God equivalent of it, grand and ineffable as it is) keeps skipping around to Her, daydreams of whispering sweet nothings unto Her ears. Imagining Himself being engulfed in Her, and Her in Him. That empty hungry feeling setting His time afire. A ceaseless torture, feet tingling. Such thoughts and fantasies assail Him at short intervals.

I'm so fucked, He thinks, knowing there's no way in hell (or heaven) He will be able to bring Himself to sit down and properly design this World assignment.

At this point, we must disclose that God isn't even doing all that great in general, academically speaking. Lad's a bit lazy, shall we say? Oh, but we don't like this word, it being judgemental

and all. Let's just say He's your Garden-of-Eden-variety procrastinator. Maybe there's some attention deficit disorder thrown in the mix. Still, He's bright, real bright.

(Just kinda lazy.)

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Time to move on and away from Professor Hashem's strict instructions, and skip ahead. Now is a few days later. Go on, take a look. Something incredible is about to happen.

She notices Him. She notices *Him*. Look at Her laughing at His jokes, Her hair perfectly flowing. Granted, She's also funny as hell (or maybe it's heaven).

Would you just look at that? Here They are, walking hand in hand. For the sticklers: the second one from the top for Her.

Soon after, there it is: O. Love.

When They make love, because, see, love indeed is something you make, especially if you happen to be God, They swirl around each other, intertwined like winds. Her arms all squeeze His back. When She comes, He can see on Her face, just under the skin, pulsating swirls of pink and purple, even some silver sparkles. It really is quite striking, and not tacky at all.

It isn't the daydreaming eating up His time after all. It's the love making and those sweet nothings. She and He roam the gardens and tumble in the grasses of the vast school yards. They hush each other through giggles, and routinely escape into an attic He coaxed the key to from one of the dorm's minor Djinns. There, They spend long leisurely afternoons, curled inside one another, bathing in the glory of creation. The world They have created: Their own. Just for the two of Them. Remember love can do that? We've forgotten.

Meanwhile, His schoolwork is not exactly being attended to. Are you wondering about Hers? Well, that's a different story. Make of that phrasing what you will.

The days, painted that near impossible hue of joy, flutter by. Understandably, the paint is tainted by an ever increasing pang of homework guilt He's doing a great job of ignoring. He's ecstatic, and God, He's also exhausted. This being in love business doesn't leave energy for much else.

Suddenly, quite suddenly, it's the 24th. Only a week to go. Unsurprisingly, He's got zilch. Nothing, except a wackload of Creation Generator tokens He scored at Venus Hold'em games in the early fall, when He still had time for such things.

Thing is, these extra Generator tokens are utterly useless without a design to generate, and there's not enough time to create one up. It's the kind of task that takes weeks, not mere days, to just get to where one could say "Hello, World" and for some life to jump into existence and notice that greeting, let alone understand.

ICU 101, as the students call it, not failing to note the reference to where One might find Himself or Herself (or Themselves) under the stress of this mammoth of a course, is part of core studies. God won't progress if He flunks it. In that event, they'll cancel His scholarship. His family isn't wealthy, you know how it goes: some business of good Karma His great grandad gambled away. Don't be silly, of course not all Gods are rich and famous.

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Here He is again, running down the hallway, late for yet another class, unkempt and frazzled, clasping His internal ears shut against His humming guilt.

Then, suddenly, perfectly, in a moment of divine inspiration, halted by the shock of it, God has an idea for the assignment. *By God*, He thinks, *I might actually be able to pull it off.*

He decides to skip the class He's already late for. She's gonna be there and She might worry about Him. She sometimes worries too much. But God's gotta do what God's gotta do.

Off to the design lab He runs. It's a stuffy underground room reeking of spiritual sweat and eons. It's always too hot in there. Sometimes screams can be heard through the thin membranes separating the access stations, someone's project just collapsed into itself, or imploded into infinity.

He fleetingly wonders for the googly time why this particular lab is so damned depressing to be in, and what it implies about the MAD school philosophy regarding creation. He finds an empty spot, and logs into the Creation Generator Engine.

Stretching out His interlocked fingers, all kinks deposited from His knuckles, He gets down to the business of super-intelligent design. No, not a world full of life. He has no time for the normal process of doing this thing. He only cobbles a few specific atoms together, into a beautiful molecule He is quite proud of (it's the kind of stuff He's really good at), instantiates them unto one of the planet templates of the provided boiler-plate implementation, sends a silent blessing and gratitude to the ever effective TAs, and creates one simple, devilishly clever subroutine that only does one thing.

Replicate, with some small percentage of random error. Repeat.

For some time, He mucks about with the execution parameters. See, He's using the system in a way it wasn't quite meant to be used. This might even be considered borderline hackery, and yeah, it's the kind of stuff He's really good at.

He then blasts out what we might conceivably call a simulation (bad metaphor, it's all we've got, sorry) and lets the sucker run. He's using every last compute token He's got. Those long nights of cheating at gambling, while imbibing too many spirits (the airborne, not liquidy type) are finally paying off. Super-natural cheating, of course, same as every one of His game-buddies, so

overall it's pretty fair, He reckons. Enough tokens saved up to be considered a treasure of sorts. Not that He had any idea what he'd do with it. Ah. Sweet serendipity.

He can't tell for sure this will work, and someone might notice the resource overuse and shut the job down, but He's pretty darn optimistic. Even with the compute power He's got going, He won't know right up until the assignment submission deadline if this will converge to life, to the required form count. Let the heavens decide.

But who cares? He can now go back to Her room. Class is over, She'll be there. She might help Him with that creation myth business, She's rather, er, creative this way, and also, octi-dexterous, She do it in $\frac{1}{8}$ of the time.

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Submission day is upon us. The sort-of simulator ran, and whaddaya know? God was right. He pulled it off. There's a full-fledged world to turn in, teeming with life, as they like saying. Much bigger count than expected. And yes, a pretty good creation myth to go with it as well. Not enough time to run any Universe testing, or to analyze the results. It'll just have to do. Whatever. The term is over, it's time for winter break. They are about to take off to a private multiverse Her (rich) parents maintain. An epic vacation is about to begin. He hopes Her parents approve of Him. He plans to be on His best behaviour.

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When He's back on campus, having almost forgotten about it, the marked assignment awaits. He won't be expelled. He did it. He made it. God built a world. Our world. You knew that. That world isn't half bad. This clever trick He invented to avoid time-consuming intentional design got some fine delights going for it.

There's solid mythologies as well. She did help. Actually, quite a few of them. He returned once to the lab to integrate the base one into the design, and it also went off spawning variants and metaphorical speciation of its very own. That was a neat surprise although some of the local hypo-intelligent life-forms enjoy ripping each other's throats over minor differences of their preferred variants.

In his tidy feedback, Professor Hashem implied he was rather impressed with the core idea, and slightly annoyed with the overuse of school resources which he correctly estimated and wondered about. Mostly, he was understandably underwhelmed with the quality of the final result. Yeah, it's a good enough world, but it's not as good as it gets. Not exactly the world of an overachieving deity. Plenty of room for improvement. Certainly not the A+ kinda world. Too much of it makes no sense. There's often too much pain.

God feels sorry for His creations, He does. But right now, He can't be bothered to care all that much. He's got His own grief to contend with. You see, the story always ends in the same way: once upon a time, a girl fell out of love with a boy. This was never gonna be a "And They lived happily ever after" kinda tale of the fairies, it's a story of God, for God's sake.