

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/3

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God's Patch

Happily I sit, slouched on my space-time fishnet hammock, admiring that sun-loving, seductive little sapphire I call Goldilocks for her perfectly tuned location in the cosmos. Watching her spin at her plump, warm equator almost makes my own head spin. How did I ever coax that ridiculously weak force of gravity to coalesce this lovely oblate spheroid from its cosmic dust bunny in only 4.5 billion hominin-years?

This particular solar system, I admit, is not my favorite, with its uninhabitable, bloated gasbags like Jupiter and Neptune, and lumpy, methane-spewing moons and asteroids spread all over like a case of shingles. Even Saturn's rings are overrated IMO. But just once I did get it right: only zircon-rich little Goldilocks is worthy of its true name, Earth—even if it does sound a bit growly and eructative. Yes, I could have named her Aphrodite or Iolanthe but what's done is done. Yet, a certain flaw in my masterpiece triggers a nagging sense of remorse I can't discard.

That would be pain.

As an infinitely loving imaginary deity, I wanted none of my Creation to suffer. Hadn't I patiently waited billions of years for earth's atmosphere to shed its glut of toxic hydrogen sulfide, just so Life could peek out from its smoking hydrothermal vents? Think of it! I magically catalyzed inorganic carbon and nitrogen into organic molecules just so I could pop up the charming little crawlers I was envisioning.

Anyway, fast forward a few hundred million years, and I finally had my early biota all lined up for launch. But while my creatures learned photosynthesis handily enough, earth just wasn't going much of anywhere, evolutionarily speaking. The surface of Goldilocks remained no more than a massive, roiling sea of uniform algae. As the eons passed, I researched some way to spin up a metabolic system that would allow earth do more than just bore me silly. And I finally it on it: I called it predation. Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

After some early failed experiments, my creatures took to their lessons quickly—allow me a minor temblor of pride. They learned how to meander up imperceptibly to some unsuspecting rotifer, pierce its membrane and suck down all its tasty cytoplasm. Perhaps I should have taken that eagerness as a warning, rather than signing off and letting evolution go driverless into high gear.

But I'd earned a break. So I turned Creation loose to follow its own path, hoping it would eventually produce a zygote that would evolve into William Shakespeare or Albert Einstein or other entertainers. However, when I finally checked back after a geologically brief nap, I just about lost a dimension.

They'd been busy, all right.

Poor Goldilocks was teeming with parasites, amoebae, fungi, bacteria, helminths, prions, you name it, all insatiable. There were even bits of matter named viruses ("v" for vicious) that served no purpose at all, reproduced endlessly, and took hostages. And even I couldn't tell if they were alive or what?!

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How had I lost control of Creation? And what to do about pain? Because pain was now everywhere. Any organism nimble, patient, and cunning enough had a license to devour. One creature's tender, dewy offspring was another's bloody, twitching gourmet morsel.

They were feasting on each other in total defiance of my best intentions. And rather than a peaceful paradise, Goldilocks was a violent horror show, all crowned by a perverse near-hairless mammal variant that was one voracious eating machine, gobbling up whole species it had taken me millions of years to evolve.

And the poor oceans! My droll little copepods had evolved sharp, calcified prongs for the sole purpose of ripping other life forms into gorgeable chunks. Their handy intake vacuoles had become massive tunnels surrounded with daggers and boiling acidic juices. Whose nightmares were these?

Wasted everywhere was the bountiful blood that I had ingeniously blended using the *same components as sea water*, just so it could deliver oxygen to every cell in the right amount. But now, what blood they didn't instantly slurp down, they spilled everywhere for squads of bacteria to turn into stinky muck and grow more of themselves in. Worst of all, the very senses that I had installed to warn my creatures away from sharp rocks or hot liquids now delivered unrelenting, purposeless pain.

Only then did I recall the almost forgotten Law of Unintended Consequences, which was now fully operative on poor Goldilocks.

Why would I, a well-meaning Illusory Being, desire that a living creature, defenseless, disabled and mortally ill or wounded, should suffer to its fullest extent before eventually expiring in agony?

I needed a quick solution without throwing out the entire Creation, much as Boeing someday would toil to reengineer its rogue killer 737 Max without sacrificing all that slick, nearly fault-free technology and ticket money.

And suddenly, I had an inspiration: I could create a patch—in the form of a pretty little angiosperm. I would tempt my creatures to sample the sap of its curvy, colorful blooms. My magnum opus—natural selection—would do the rest. I cleverly decided to call my patch Hope-ium. While it wouldn't help a wildebeest being dismembered by hyenas, those agonies were mercifully short-lived.

But creatures who fell victim to injury, illness and infection faced such torment that they would actually prefer the Abyss—tossing out my priceless gift of life like some nosh past its expiration date.

And that was a concern. Because the brain of the oxymoronically named Homo Sapiens, had quite recently grown out of control, with trillions of neurons and synapses squeezing themselves into ugly gray folds and wrinkles across its pre-frontal cortex. The end result was that consciousness spontaneously arose, and the creature decided that it was *equal to me* and capable of Knowing what only I Know!

At first it concocted some rather touching entreaties and rituals to

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honor and placate me. But soon, many of these practices grew shockingly irrational and even called for *inflicting pain and death* in my name.

In fact, some nervy ones even decided that they *were* me. They rose up on their hind legs and shook their front paws and shouted death threats if I didn't do as they saw fit—even over trivial issues like finding it an 'optimal' mate. Because of course the depraved creature is obsessed with reproduction, devising all sorts of ways to prolong and intensify its own sensations during simple fertilization.

Did this creature ever stop to think that I have a whole universe to oversee? Whole tranches of galaxies to set spinning and smashing into each other and star nurseries to tend, and quasars and pulsars to track? And all the while supernovae going off left and right like a migraine prodrome? The universe is racing away from itself so fast that in a few billion years even I won't be able to see where it has gotten to.

And that was only at the cosmological level! I also had to work out quantum entanglement ("spookiness at a distance" that arrogant Einstein scoffed), and the holographic principle. Not to mention figure out where bosons and fermions fit in so I could cook up the Grand Unified Theory I keep promising myself to get to one of these days.

But now Hope-ium will offer me precious free time and a clear conscience. I generously gave it the ability to grow almost anywhere and need only simple preparation to produce an instant Godlike sensation! In fact, rather than just removing pain, Hope-ium makes a creature feel *even better* than before its misfortune. I jammed a little as a reward after completing my first draft of the universe and it delivered a euphoric conviction that I could do no wrong!

At last now, I can show my creation how much I love them and prove that I really have been listening all along. With pain under control, all of Goldilocks can rejoice and celebrate my Name every time they enjoy Hope-ium's magnificent benefits. I can rest at peace, awaiting the paeans of praise, relief, and tribute they will be sure to offer up.