

## Theoathanatology

God was old.

It's true that he had done some impressive things during his tenure, like a functioning universe that relied on rules so exact there was no need for divine intervention. No one on the board had ever accomplished that before. And his peers were intrigued at God's experiments with free will and curiosity-driven creatures. But his universe was decaying, its short life span nearing its end.

He didn't want to hear that, of course. He argued that his universe was a resounding success and so should be allowed to prosper for another few eternities. The board wasn't interested, however, and it moved to disband God's universe and move on to the next item on the agenda.

"I've got creations aware of their own existence!" God screamed. "That's better than the last six universes. And some of these creatures are even advanced enough to reject me."

The chair ruled God out of order. Then it was announced that the search committee for the next Supreme Deity was due to give its report. No one on the board was looking forward to this. Qualified candidates were hard to come by, and even veterans of multiple universes didn't want the job. It was too much work — setting things in motion, maintaining the vast distances, responding to the pleas of the created (although many Gods conveniently ignored this last item due to supposed overload).

The search committee presented a jumbled report that offered mediocre goals and midlevel deities as viable rulers of all creation. In response, the board discussed picking someone

from outside the organization. The board stressed that the job required someone in whom it had complete confidence.

“We’re talking about a universe here!” God shrieked. “And you want to hand it over to rookies.”

Again, God was ruled out of order, but this time he refused to be quiet.

“Don’t give me that shit!” he bellowed. “We all know this is personal. Members of the board are angry that I’ve created such a smooth machine while most of theirs sputtered along in the void. They want a new God who will kowtow to them.”

Before God could be ushered out for his unruly behavior, the chair appealed for calm. The board murmured among themselves as God stewed in self-righteous anger, which was one of his most frequent moods. The muted discussion and mumbled debate among the board members was agonizing to wait through, but it finally came to a conclusion — a rather surprising one. The chair announced that God would be given the unprecedented opportunity to defend his creation, which pleased God greatly. He said his defense would remove all doubt about the present universe’s usefulness.

As the Supreme Being, he wasn’t completely dim. God placed his emphasis on the universe’s impressive potential for future developments. The board had to understand, he said, that the cosmos was nowhere near its natural conclusion. They had to believe that mighty forward strides in natural phenomena, whole civilizations, and individual lives were imminent. He added that he would throw in a few highlights of creation and dazzle them with his elegant rules of maintenance.

“Members of the board,” he said. “By any reasonable measure, the universe I have created is a success. There is more intelligent life, more beauty, and more variety within this creation than any in memory. But let me assure you, its best days are yet to come.”

He segued to a brief history of existence, much of which the board members listened to respectfully if a little impatiently. God illustrated the universe’s simplicity by showing the structure of its atoms. He demonstrated its complexity by explaining the warped feature of time and light. The demonstration of a star’s life span alternated with images of gentle plant life, and the calmness of a Brwpckian sunset contrasted with the majesty of a Jupiter hurricane. As a showstopper, God pulled out the dolphin, an obvious ploy because that creature’s development had gone over so well with the board.

“We see what has developed to this point,” God said. “And it is clear that to terminate this cosm before it has reached its apogee is counter to the very principles of the board itself. Such a universe, one capable of both super nebula and grains of sand, is obviously in a state of constant change. And that change will continue for what some may call ‘infinity.’ The board must allow its evolution to continue, and we will be rewarded by the richness of its existence.”

God thought he had presented a pretty good defense, and he said that he was ready for any questions on the subject of life itself. But as soon became clear, God got careless.

Board members asked God how many of his creations, across the myriad galaxies where life existed, would be aghast to learn that he was chosen by a committee to rule for a limited duration. Before he could answer satisfactorily, he was cut off and asked how many of his creations were close to understanding their existence and, therefore, becoming a threat to the board.

“They are no threat,” he replied.

However, the board was not appeased. Members pointed out that the Famatraldorians were of such high intellect that they saw all dimensions simultaneously. It was also claimed that even the lowly inhabitants of Earth, whom God inexplicably held in such high esteem, had the capability and potential to understand the cosmos.

“I doubt that very much,” God said in rebuttal.

Then the hammer fell. Board members hurled accusations of vanity and self-aggrandizement, asking God why he demanded such a high place in his creations’ lives.

“So I got a little conceited,” God said. “I am God, after all.”

But there was more. Board members went on about the hideousness of war, evident in every society on every planet. They mentioned painful death and wasted life. They nit-picked over vile cravings and rampaging evil. They harped on God about ugly bacteria and hideous life forms spread throughout the galaxies. Mold, for some reason, was particularly loathsome to a great many board members.

“You’re arguing aesthetics?” God yelled. “Everything has a purpose in my universe. It’s all necessary, even if it’s grotesque. And I have just as much beauty as ugliness spread throughout the galaxies.”

God was right, but rather than convince the board of his creation’s viability, this argument was what doomed it. Everything God had created was either soaringly beautiful (and therefore a threat) or utterly horrific in nature. It had to go.

“But it’s all I have!” God said.

It was unclear whether God was being truthful, pathetic, or literal (everything he had was, in fact, everything). However, it made no difference. The board took a revote, and the result was the same — only this time it was unanimous.

The chair offered the Supreme Deity the position of God Emeritus, and he had no choice but to accept. Now he faced the same dilemma that previous holders of his office had encountered: What does one do after he's been God?

The board moved on to new business, hastily picking a new God and instilling in this deity all the powers of creation, destruction, and destiny. The new God was a protégé of the old one, but rather than provoke confidence, some observers commented that this was merely betrayal at the highest (without hyperbole) level.

The board gave God Emeritus the option of destroying his universe as the last official act of his tenure, but he declined.

“Let's see what the new God can handle,” he said.

His successor didn't like the old God's insinuation. The first act of the new God would be to demolish the universe, which was anathema to the job of Almighty Creator. The new Supreme Deity sidestepped the passive-aggressiveness of God Emeritus by asking the board for a special ruling. They argued among themselves for some time before acquiescing to it.

God Emeritus was still bitter, but he gave his consent to the plan. He was, perhaps, a little pleased that his creations would go out in style, and perhaps it was this final act that he had always yearned to accomplish.

The new God looked down upon the cosmos and felt for each life within its tiny boundaries. When they were all accounted for, no matter how large or small, the new God merged them into one — a cosmic blob of being that encompassed every living thing in the universe. The molecules of consciousness and the delight of life itself swirled in the center of existence. At last the secrets of it all were revealed. The creations knew harmony and compassion, and they saw beyond nirvana and heaven and the happy hunting ground.

All were as one, individual thoughts and experiences now the intellect of the whole — hatred impossible because the being was indivisible. And just as it achieved bliss and awareness and unity and peace, the merged creation made the new God realize that the only step remaining was knowledge of the end. So right before it processed its ultimate fate, and at the height of its joy, the thing's existence was obliterated. Now it was the void again, and it was as if nothing had ever been there.

The new God set to work on the next universe, an improved one that would keep the board busy and entertained for eons. However, the creator could not help thinking about the universe that had just died. It was gone for all time, and no power — not even the freshly vested authority of this novice entity — could bring it back. Although it was for the best, the new God agonized over this demise. Through the new God's sorrow came the first command and the initial minutia of creation. But all that kept ringing through the Supreme Deity mind was the final, grand thought of the merged creations of the destroyed universe:

“Our moment lasts forever.”