**Ignatius J. Reilly vs the Pterodactyl**

Caitlin Noakes (human)

Goddess: speak. Tell, Fortuna, how the wheel turned upon a singular man. Tell how he was pinched between the turning cogs of earth and rota, and how he rose valiant and with fury. Tell how he faced the Pterodactyl and redeemed New Orleans from Cretaceous claw, Triassic tooth, and modern morals. Remove your blindfold, at least. Bear witness.

—Ignatius J. Reilly, Big Chief Tablet #1295

John and Barbara entered the Joy of Night in the melancholy of mid-noon. Barbara was a pink bloom in her poodle skirt, and John’s safari suit was ornamented with four flashing eyes: two horn-rimmed lenses perched on his nose; one lens on a Kodak Signet against his chest on a vinyl strap; and one lens on a Brownie 8 peeking through the zipper of a leather satchel. The bar was dim and sticky, but the couple floated to the counter with clear, Colgate smiles. They ignored the hennaed head snoring between cans of Dixie and the green hunting cap beside it.

‘Yes?’ asked the bartender. ‘What will you have?’

‘We’ll have two—’ John and Barbara exchanged smiles before Barbara whispered the rest of her order.

‘—Two slow screws.’ The pair dissolved into giggles. The green hunting cap whipped to face the couple.

‘Yes,’ said the bartender. ‘But what will you have to drink?’

Barbara shrieked into laughter.

‘Oh, Barb!’ chuckled John.

Plump paws slammed onto the bar.

‘What foul language is this?’ roared Ignatius J. Reilly, the earflaps of his hunting cap trembling with indignation. ‘Has Virgil lead me into the second circle of Hell? I know from your accents you are not from this city, but from someplace yet more debauched! You cannot hide from my keen perception. What are you? Californian? A prostitute? You have come to add to the horrors of the Prytania by using this place as a backdrop for your pornographic movies!’ He thrust a fat finger at John’s movie camera.

John was stunned to silence, but Barbara pressed her left hand to her collar to display twin gold bands, one with a generous diamond.

‘I beg your pardon?’ she snapped. Ignatius looked at her fingers and Barbara was satisfied. However, Ignatius motioned to the plastic beads strung across her cardigan.

‘Yes, I see the evidence of your weak morals! Did you expose yourself to earn these medals of degeneracy? I have not known peace yet, even after I nearly martyred myself in that most apocalyptic struggle against the pterodactyl that stalked the streets and waterways of this town, eating up children, ravaging virginal maidens, unlike you, and be-stilling with terror the hearts of men both virile and senile! I was almost drowned in the Mississippi! Oh, my valve!’

Before Barbara responded, John took her by the forearm to a dark corner of the bar. As they hissed in impassioned whispers, Ignatius wedged a hand between the fleshy folds beneath his flannel shirt, jiggled up and down on his stool, and belched. John pointed at Ignatius as Barbara fumed and opened the zipper on his satchel a little more.

Shortly, the couple returned, John triumphant and Barbara sulky. John sat next to Ignatius. The bartender slid two highball glasses of Smirnoff and orange towards the couple. John carefully placed his satchel on the bar and Barbara pressed her Avon Plum Pink pout to her cocktail. John smiled at Ignatius through the gastric gas still billowing from his bellows.

‘Sir,’ began John, ‘please pardon our … West Coast sensibilities. We aren’t accustomed to Southern hospitality. Are we, Barb?’

‘My screw has no slow in it,’ murmured Barbara.

‘Anyway,’ continued John, ‘I am very interested in what you described as a battle? With a … pterosaur?’

‘Pterodactyl,’ burped Ignatius. ‘Knowledgeable historians of the natural sciences understand “pterosaur” is a broad term, and one only refers to flying *sauri* of the genus *Pterodactylus* as “pterodactyl”.’

‘Amazing,’ said John. ‘I would love to hear the story … if you would tell it?’ Ignatius smoothed down the flannel shirt which had wrinkled in his vigorous attempts to re-engage his pyloric valve.

‘Well! If you would hear it, I am sure I can oblige.

‘The sordid tale begins with a gargantuan beast whose shadow blackened every corner of the Quarter. The pterodactyl, with a wingspan greater than Pan Am jetliner, and a beak like a Frisian Zweihänder. Owing to my employment as a purveyor of gourmet cuisines, I was dressed as a pirate, with mock Spanish cutlass. Although only plastic, you will see this sword performed better than the real thing. I was accompanying my hot dog wagon down St. Peter when my forearms were cinched in the tiger-tooth claws of the creature. It lifted me and I flew into the rare airs above New Orleans. So high we went that the buildings were as Pez candy, and the Mississippi was a streak of chocolate pudding in a squashed Doberge cake. When that Chernabog beat its batwings, I was engulfed in a hurricane so powerful it made me dizzy to retching. I worked the cutlass from the sash about my waist and thrust it above me until I felt it puncture that Aeolian membrane. The beast shrieked like a jet engine and plummeted with me in its terrible grasp. Low it came over the river and released me into the water, sure to dunk me like a doughnut in coffee, and suck out my insides like jelly. Little did the wyvern suspect it dropped me into shallow waters, and thus I breached the bank, where it lay wounded and flapping like a netted fish. I stomped my desert suede boot upon its longsword beak, and with my cutlass, severed its head. They now display its remains in the new Historic Collection as testament to my triumph.’

‘Incredible,’ said John. ‘But isn’t the pterodactyl … extinct?’

‘I gift you with the tale of one of the most traumatic experiences of my accomplished life and you accuse me of lying?’ blustered Ignatius. ‘I could not be more offended than if you made your perverted movie right here on the bar. Mother, wake up! We are leaving.’ The hennaed head lifted when sausage fingers pinched her arm.

‘Ignatius, honey. I dreamt I was flyin’.’ Her son did not respond, and soon the leatherette bar door was shut behind them.

Later, at the museum, John filmed a glass case displaying what looked like a poor taxidermy of a plucked heron. The plaque read:

Dermodactylus montanus. Wingspan: 3 feet. Weight: 7 pounds. Thought to have gone extinct 66 million years ago, this specimen was discovered in New Orleans in 1961. Known as ‘Missus Sippy’, for the Mississippi River, she was beloved by the citizens of New Orleans. ‘Missus Sippy’ was known to frequent to Jackson Square, where children and retirees took pleasure feeding her breadcrumbs. Missus Sippy passed in November 1962 when a resident sat on her as she rested on a park bench. This resident regards the death of Missus Sippy as a great tragedy owing to the mess she made of his tweed trousers. Believed to be the last of her kind, Missus Sippy’s species ended with her.