

**Fault:  
A Full-length Lie Based on a Real  
Earthquake that Never Happened in Gosnell,  
Arkansas on December 3, 1990.**

By  
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2nd Draft for the Raj

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### Cast of Characters

**TONY FREEMYER** M, mid to late 30's, HS biology teacher

**JANET MIDDLETON** F, 40's, HS principal

**DONNA FREEMYER** F, early 30's, HS Earth Science Teacher,  
TONY's Wife

**WILLIAM MATTHEWS** M, 50's, a climatologist

**JARED "TANK" TUNKEL** M, same age as TONY. Old high school buddy of  
TONY's that works at the new Japanese steel  
mill.

**FOREMAN** M, 40's, foreman at the mill. (Same actor as  
MATTHEWS)

### SETTING

**TIME** 1990, fall, winter

**PLACE** Gosnell, Arkansas

### NOTES

The "Mad" in New Madrid is pronounced like the word, "mad."

"Gosnell," is **Gos-nuhl**, not Gos-**Nell**"

"Blytheville," is **Bly-vuhl**, not **Blythe-ville**. The "th" is silent.

When using dialects, err on the side of subtlety. Think more  
Marsha Norman, less Sam Shepard.

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ACT I, SCENE 1

*AT RISE, a classroom, chalk board,  
perhaps a bulletin board, and a teacher,  
TONY, dressed simply enough: self aware  
but not “showy”.*

*The words, “Observe, Hypothesize,  
Predict,” and “Test,” are written on the  
board, along with the date, September 26,  
1990.*

*The lecture is in progress, and there are  
no students present on stage. They are  
implied by the context of the scene and the  
staging.*

TONY

“No amount of experimentation can ever prove me right. A single experiment can prove me wrong.” Who said that?... Anyone?... Take a guess. Anybody, just jump out there... Alright, here’s a hint: he’s a scientist... Well, actually, a physicist..

*Pause*

Albert Einstein said that. Albert Einstein. And, that is the limit, and the beauty of the scientific method.

*Points to the board, where the following  
has already been written.*

Observe. Hypothesize. Predict. Test. And then what?... Remember the quote I just gave you... We repeat. We re-test, we replicate, we verify. Someone else out there picks up our research and they test it, and then someone else does, and someone else, and so on, and so forth, etcetera, etcetera, until it’s proven wrong, or until enough people believe that there just might be something to it, after all.

(MORE)

TONY (cont'd)

Then, it gets to become a full blown theory, and maybe, just maybe, a law, like gravity, which most of us like to believe is a pretty solid guess. It's a system based solely on the search for truth through the gathering of facts. Facts. From experiments, observation, interviews, whatever, but the FACTS are all that count here, and anything else: hunches, gut feelings, uhm...

*SFX: School bell, the rustle of zippers, feet shuffling.*

Wow. It's that time. Well, I guess you get the point, or at least I hope you do. All of this will be on the state exam. So, you should all be ready for that. Your grade and my job both depend on that.

*TONY erases the board and moves over to HIS desk. The room is now empty save for TONY.*

TONY (cont'd)

I guess, uh, well, I guess time flies.

*SFX: busses, children, chatter, etc.*

*TONY is writing in his grade book.*

*DONNA, TONY's wife and the Earth Science teacher, enters.*

DONNA

Earthquake!!

TONY

What! Huh! Donna? Earthquake? What was that? A test?

DONNA

Sorry.

TONY

Earthquake?

DONNA

You ready?

TONY

Were we meeting for lunch today? I think I already had-

DONNA

It's three-fifteen, babe.

TONY

Oh. Yeah. I guess it is.

DONNA

Did you even eat lunch?

TONY

I think so. I guess so. I must have.

DONNA

Are you hungry?

TONY

I could eat.

DONNA

Early dinner?

TONY

Sure, I just gotta finish up these notes.

DONNA

Notes?

TONY

Don't want to forget where we are in the lesson. I'm liable to start teaching third period's lecture in sixth period and vice-versa. Anyhow, I ran out of time in both classes, but at different points... Blah, blah... I'll be right out.

DONNA

OK. But, don't forget your helmet. Again.

TONY

I won't.

*DONNA moves to exit as JANET, the principal, enters.*

*She is a task-master that you might have a beer with, if such a thing were socially pertinent.*

JANET

Hello, Freemyers.

DONNA

Hi, Janet.

JANET

Hi, Donna. Do you have those progress reports?

DONNA

Yeah, they're on my desk. I'll grab them for you.

JANET

That would be wonderful. I'll wait here.

*DONNA exits, as JANET approaches TONY at HIS desk.*

TONY

Annnnnnnnd, Done! Alright, let's blow this popscicle-- Good morning Ms. Middleton.

JANET

Afternoon, Tony. It's 3;15. Are you feeling OK?

TONY

Oh, sure, sure. I just, well, there's a lot going on, trying to keep my lectures straight, that's all. I'm fine. Thank you. Where's Donna?

JANET

Progress reports.

TONY

Oh...

*Pause*

Oh! You probably want--

JANET

Yes. I do.

TONY  
Tomorrow?

JANET  
End of the day.

TONY  
Thank you, Janet.

JANET  
Last chance.

TONY  
Or what?

JANET  
Who knows? Guess it depends on what happens to me.

TONY  
Right. Well, don't worry. I'll have them.

JANET  
You better.

TONY  
I promise.

JANET  
Actually, I've been meaning to--

*DONNA re-enters.*

DONNA  
Here we go. Sorry about that. Am I the last one?

JANET  
Not even close, but the apple didn't fall very far.

TONY  
We were just talking about that in sixth period.

DONNA  
Are you sure?

TONY  
Yes.

JANET  
In biology?

TONY  
Well, we were talking about the scientific method, and we digressed.

JANET  
We?

TONY  
Yes, the class and I. We digressed. Anyhow, I'll definitely get those to you.

JANET  
Tomorrow.

TONY  
Absolutely.

JANET  
End of the day. No later.

TONY  
No problem.

JANET  
The Board of Ed's gonna have my ass if we don't have 100 percent by the 30th.

TONY  
I promise.

DONNA  
I'll remind him.

JANET  
Please do. Bye Donna. Tony.

TONY  
I'll do them tonight, Janet.

*JANET exits.*

*DONNA erases the board and writes the numerals 1-9 and a zero on it.*

TONY (cont'd)

What are you doing?

DONNA

Writing numbers. Showing you something.

TONY

We don't do numerals until the twelfth grade now, or didn't you get the memo?

DONNA

You won't believe what Carla Crawly brought into class today.

TONY

An abacus? I thought we were leaving.

DONNA

You made me wait. Now its your turn. Check this out.

TONY

I'm checking. What am I looking for, though?

DONNA

An earthquake.

TONY

Don't start that again.

DONNA

This is why I started in the first place.

TONY

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and zero. So hard to pick a favorite. What's yours?

DONNA

Be nice.

TONY

Well, tell me the joke, or whatever. I'm hungry.

DONNA

I wish it was a joke. Did you know that we are going to have an earthquake on December third?

TONY

I guess I was unaware.

DONNA

That's what I said, and then she came up and wrote this.

TONY

I guess I just don't get it. Are the numbers a metaphor for something?

DONNA

Nope. You're gonna love this. Look: on twelve dash three, at approximately 4:56, an earthquake with a magnitude somewhere around 7.8 on the Richter's will hit the New Madrid fault line in the year nine-zero.

TONY

That Nostradamus?

DONNA

Nope. Carla Crawly.

TONY

And, where'd she get it from? If she's anything like her sister, she didn't make it up herself.

DONNA

She's not at all like her sister, more like her mother, from what I hear, and I didn't ask her where she heard it.

TONY

Well, that's the most ridiculous thing I've heard all day. Why didn't you ask her?

DONNA

I don't know. What do you mean *ridiculous*? I was just... I didn't know what to say. I guess we were both saved by the bell on that one. What do you mean--

*There is a tremor.*

DONNA (cont'd)

What the hell?

*Stuff falls on the floor. Not a large quake, but enough to be felt, noticed.*

TONY

Is that a--

DONNA

Don't you dare... Desk!

TONY

No! Doorway!

DONNA

Oh! Right!

*BOTH stand in the doorway. There is no more noise or movement by the time they get there.*

DONNA (cont'd)

Well...

TONY

It's over. I think. Was that an--

DONNA

Tony!

TONY

What?

DONNA

Don't. It's too voo-doo-y.

TONY

I'm serious. That was an earthquake. A tremor. Something small, but that had to be an earthquake, right?

DONNA

Yeah. I guess it was. I guess Carla was off by a couple of months.

TONY

Well, you still wanna grab some dinner?

DONNA

Yeah, might as well. Wanna head back to the house, grab the car and head to Blytheville, see what they're saying about it?

TONY

Might as well. If we're gonna go into Bytheville.

DONNA

We can go to the book store, but only for like twenty minutes.

TONY

It's not even that dusty in there.

DONNA

It's a *used* book store.

TONY

Alright. Let's go before we start talking about a flood.

*DONNA moves to erase the board.*

DONNA

Sounds good.

TONY

What are you doing?

DONNA

Erasing the board.

TONY

No. Leave it.

DONNA

I don't mind. I wrote it.

TONY

No. Seriously, I'm gonna use that all day, tomorrow.

DONNA

Alright.

TONY

Gotta nip this in the bud. Before it spreads.

DONNA

Don't forget about the state-wides.

TONY

I won't.

DONNA

Talk about the fire spreading.

TONY

We'll be ready. I just finished teaching them everything Vicki over at the Junior high should have taught them two years ago. Now, maybe I can move on to actual life-science lessons.

DONNA

You gonna tell them about the birds and the bees?

TONY

I don't know. Depends on how many permission slips we get back.

DONNA

Ooh!

TONY

What?

DONNA

Progress reports.

TONY

Right. Thank you.

DONNA

Helmet.

TONY

Thank you.

## ACT 1, SCENE 2

*Same classroom. Next day. The board still has the numbers with various circles, dashes, and colons from multiple explanations of yesterday's "prediction." The lecture is in progress.*

TONY

You see? There it is! In black and white... green and white, but you get the point. I hope you get the point, or rather, that you don't get... what I mean to say is... Watch.

*TONY furiously erases the board and re-writes the numerals.*

There. See? Remember? Think back to when you walked in here less than an hour ago. What was this? Numbers. Right? Numbers. Now, a year from now, when you, when most of you, go next-door to my wife for earth science, she's gonna tell you all about earthquakes and how they happen, among other things, and she's gonna tell you that numbers have never caused a single earthquake. She's also gonna tell you how nobody has ever predicted an earthquake. Why? Because that's her job. Same as mine. To get at the truth. Not to speculate, grandstand, or try to get on the news, but to actively engage a question until an answer can be found. That's what we're supposed to be teaching you.

*(indicates the chalk-board)*

This is fun, sure, but so is this.

*TONY, again, erases the board and writes the pre-requisite spiral and letters for a proper game of "M.A.S.H."*

Alright, we have our spiral, and we have our letters. M, A, S, H. Mansion, apartment, shack, house...wait.

*TONY erases the spiral.*

I've gotten ahead of myself, here. It's been a while. Now the spiral.

*HE draws another spiral*

Round and round, and round he goes. Where he'll live: nobody knows. I'm gonna make this a big one cause I don't want to jinx it. Annnnd, stop!

*TONY audibly counts the rings that he has made in the spiral, then uses that number to count through the letters of the “MASH,” as per the rules, looping back to “M” from “H,” until he lands on one of the letters.*

*There is a comment about his future living situation which is ad-libbed by the actor, based on the results of the night, with a chuckle that he gives to himself after.*

*Then, a pause*

TONY (cont'd)

And, there you go. I've just predicted my future. Right? This time I used letters, but I think you get the point. Those letters “predict” my future because of meaning I placed on them. They don't really predict anything. Look, I understand that yesterday's tremor might have freaked a lot of you out. Freaked me out. I'm a Mid-west boy. Heck, I only left Gosnell to go to the U of A, then I came right back, and we don't know nothin about earthquakes around here. At least, I can't remember ever feeling one. But yes, some of what that guy said on the news is real. The New Madrid Fault is real, and it has done some serious damage, but not since the early 1800's or something like that. And I'd imagine we're due any time for another big one, but we have no way, I repeat, No Way, of reliably predicting earthquakes. It's never happened. Not once. I'm not saying it can't or that it won't, but it'd have to happen a whole lotta times for me to start thinking it wasn't a coincidence. That's what this class, what all science classes are all about. Right?

*Pause*

So, I'm not making fun of you if you'd seen this before today anymore than I would if you played Mash as a kid. It's easy to get swept up. But I strongly urge you to try your best to keep your heads about you. Ask questions. Right?

*SFX: The bell rings.*

Alright. You guys have a good night. Go Pirates!

*JANET enters, quickly, before the students can exit.*