

With the Grain

Behavior suggests dinosaurs ‘wiped’ out

COMMENTARY

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Now I know how the dinosaurs felt. First, the toilet paper disappears, then ... [POOF] ... extinction.

The spread of Human Coronavirus (COVID-19) bears out to infectious disease theorists that the reptilian giants met their demise via a viral menace.

There is an equally compelling story, though. Why toilet paper?

Only vestiges of the scented swabs remain in grocery stores, warehouses, discount retailers — even hotel rooms. Milk, butter, eggs, and bottled water are gone ... but stockpile toilet paper?

Toilet paper has no nutritive capacity to keep us alive. It disintegrates in moisture. Plus, it's difficult to store large quantities in small spaces.

Short of an occasional Halloween prank, I can think of no repurposing for the tree-ware.

In a crisis, then, why would any panic buyer value toilet paper higher than, let's say ... SPAM? If we must shelter in place, I'd expect folks to get awfully cranky. A mountain of toilet paper in the spare bedroom does little to calm a roiling stomach.

Granted, store shelves hold few alternatives. Yet, I would put greater worth on just about any other consumable. I found plenty of beef jerky at the checkout stand, and that stuff can feed a family of seven for a generation. Personally, I'd stock up on those little floral fondants before I'd fill my cart with toilet paper.

Nevertheless, I just can't bring myself to find fault with these magpies. I'm having more difficulty with the smugness of their critics.

"Everyone is overreacting," scoffers say. "Only two percent of the cases result in death".

True enough. It's not *Zombie Apocalypse*. Nevertheless, ask this:

"If I give you 100 Skittles™, and then tell you that only two of them will kill you, how many of you are willing to take the first bite?"

This crisis is authentic, and should be honored as such. By everyone. Period.

Relatively speaking, this threat has our respect. Respect, however, is not reserved for profiteers. If we need people to empty bedpans, I suggest starting here. Reports indicate some scuffling among hoarders, yet not to a serious degree. I've seen bigger fights over Beanie Babies™.

For now, at least, the populace is acting with solemnity, unity, and resolve.

This hoarding of toilet paper may simply be a lesson. Our survival lesson. We are learning how vulnerable humankind is. Perhaps, grabbing a year's worth of toilet paper isn't the best strategy for adapting to threat, but I will never fault a father trying to protect his family the best way he knows.

Moreover, toilet paper symbolizes much more than just convenience. Places exist in the world where people enjoy computers, cell phones, and Netflix™, but toilet paper is still an unknown comfort.

Toilet paper is America's metaphor of human development; our highest exemplification of a civilized people. We need to remember that.

Because, in the end, being civilized may be all that separates us from the fate of the dinosaurs.

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