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The Land of the Dammed

Science. Dr. Noitall, you are the world's greatest expert on public relations, the man who got Moses and the parting of the Red Sea into the Bible, the man who got William Tell and the apple into the storybooks, and the man who got Hannibal and his elephants into the history books.

Noitall. A vast understatement of my true worth.

Science. How is public relations work in the modern era?

Noitall. Absolutely thriving. I have a large agency, and our most recent challenge is to sell a program for a dam in Death Valley.

Science. A dam in Death Valley? That is absolutely the lowest spot in the United States and also the driest. It seems an unlikely place for a dam.

Noitall. Exactly the proper challenge for a public relations expert. The more unlikely the project the greater the need for a public relations expert. Everyone thinks dams should be filled with water and on high ground so that the water flows downhill and generates electricity.

Science. Well, isn't that the purpose of your dam?

Noitall. Absolutely not. This dam is built on low ground, and will be largely empty.

Science. Well then, what is the purpose of your dam?

Noitall. We are building the first safe dam. Previous dams have had a high probability of breaking, thereby flooding homes and causing countless deaths due to drowning. By putting the dam at the lowest point in the United States and keeping it largely empty, we can be absolutely sure of its safety.

Science. How many people actually drown in dam-related accidents?

Noitall. That is the most antiquated approach I've ever heard. Nowadays we are only interested in absolute no-risk safety. The dam lake will contain only 3 feet of water, so that even toddlers can touch bottom, and we will have life guards posted every few hundred feet. Water in large doses is toxic, so we do have a disposal problem, but some of our accountants are discussing how to launder the product.

Science. But even if you do get a little water in the dam, water will not run uphill.

Noitall. That is another silly assumption. The establishment is constantly falling back on the laws of thermodynamics. Everybody assumes that water runs downhill, but we have some excellent scientists who say there is a possibility that water runs uphill, and the only reason they have been unable to publish articles in peer-reviewed journals is that the establishment will not listen to contrary opinions.

Science. What scientists are they, and what laboratories are they identified with?

Noitall. These scientists are hired by my firm, and they are the very best scientists that money can buy. They are completely reliable. I know exactly how they will testify at each trial.

Science. What will happen if water does not really run uphill?

Noitall. We will use pumps. Thus we have a completely nonconventional dam, which will consume electricity instead of producing it, a welcome relief in a country that has too many microwaves already.

Science. But that will cost money. Doesn't that make the whole project too expensive?

Noitall. Since we are solving important environmental problems, to even ask about money is to indicate a lack of moral standards.

Science. Is this a morally uplifting project?

Noitall. We have situated this at Death Valley because it will cause no displacement of the homeless, it is not in any middle-class neighborhood whose property values would be depressed, species will not be endangered, and the product is water, which has not caused cancer in experimental animals.

Science. Won't a dam hurt the locale as a tourist attraction?

Noitall. I am not in the business of solving the tourist industry's problems. The project will create job opportunities for other public relations experts, and keep lawyers off the welfare rolls. Concrete manufacturers, construction laborers, and the Death Valley Chamber of Commerce all will contribute to the campaigns of congressmen, each of whom expects the dam to be named after him or her.

Science. You seem to have a hot political prospect that has extremely dubious logic.

Noitall. We call this, "Project Hot Dam." With a good slogan, a 5-minute television commercial, and a moral message, who ever cared about logic?—DANIEL E. KOSHLAND, JR.