

The Meltese Dodo

Written By

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THE MELTESE DODO

FADE IN:

INT. T.E. DETECTIVE AGENCY - DAY

THE EARTH, feet up on desk, wearing a fedora, reading "The Maltese Falcon", mops sweat off his forehead with a handkerchief.

Lower third title: The Earth, T.E. Detective Agency

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

I was just getting into what should have been the cooling down side of one of those 100,000 year cycles. You know: Every year, you tilt your head a little farther away from the sun and feel that tingle as the ice inches down the back of your neck, like a conspiracy of twelve-toed Plutonian creep-frogs.

It's okay. You start off as a fiery swirl of gas, and it seems like you barely cool down to molten rock before they bury you under ice. Then you get smacked with this heavy, humid, tropical heat that makes you wish one of those dinosaurs or pterodactyls would hurry up and invent lemonade or iced coffee. Then it's another ice age.

You gotta have a split personality to do this job. It never quits, and there's nothing to be done about it. You spin on your axis, wobbling a little in my case (old Big Bang injury). Every now and then, you need a change, you reverse your magnetic polarity.

The phone rings.

EVIE

(over the phone, not
seen)

Mr. Earth ...

THE EARTH

Yeah?

EVIE

(over the phone, not
seen)

... there's a Homo sapiens to see
you.

THE EARTH

Homo what?

EVIE

sapiens.

THE EARTH

You know, I'm not feeling good. I
got a fever ...

EVIE

You'd want to take a look at this
one, anyway. Nice-looking, know
what I mean?

THE EARTH

Well, all right, show 'em in.

HOMO SAPIENS enters.

THE EARTH (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

So this species ambles in. Suddenly
it's four degrees hotter than it
was a minute ago. Or is that just
me?

Homo sapiens holds out hand.

THE EARTH (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Opposable thumb. Ape family, I'd
say. But balancing on its hind
legs, no tail and not much hair.

HOMO SAPIENS

Hello. I'm Homo sapiens.

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

The name echoes through my memory like a half-forgotten song that maybe brought a tear or a smile back in the day. Homo sapiens. Can't place it. But, look, when you're 4.6 billion years old, you're happy if you can remember what direction to orbit in.

THE EARTH (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

HOMO SAPIENS

I hope so. I'm sure you've heard of The Environment? The evil genius psycho mass serial killer who strikes out of nowhere, murders 99.9% of all species with tsunamis, tidal waves, typhoons, diseases, droughts, famine, floods, heat waves, cold snaps, hurricanes, dust storms. And always eludes capture.

THE EARTH

Yeah. I know him. Masterminded that big hurricane down south. Rough customer.

HOMO SAPIENS

Well, I think The Environment is back. And I think it's after me.

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

And the species launches into this long string of unnatural disasters, homicidal weather, and freak occurrences that should happen once every million years or something, and now we're seeing them every other weekend, like clueless in-laws. And every time, coincidentally, Homo sapiens gets jacked up one way or another.

(spoken)

Yeah? Well, that's the way the baby bounces.

HOMO SAPIENS

You think I'm crazy. I thought I was going crazy, too. Then I got this note.

THE EARTH

(reads)

I have the Meltese Dodo. Do not attempt to separate it from me. TE.

(to Homo sapiens)

So? What do you want me to do about it?

HOMO SAPIENS

I need to get something on The Environment. Something that'll give me the upper hand.

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

And I'm thinking - This smells like methane meandering through melting Alaskan tundra.

(aloud, to Homo sapiens)

You want to go up against The Environment? And you want my help?

HOMO SAPIENS

(sobbing)

I have nowhere else to turn. Please!

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

It's enough to curl your nose hairs into a bow-tie.

(out loud)

All right, all right. Enough with the waterworks.

HOMO SAPIENS

Thank you! Thank you! But, uh ... do you work alone?

THE EARTH

No, I got a partner.

HOMO SAPIENS

Because, The Environment is big. Real big.

THE EARTH

Don't I know it. But my partner, they call him The Extincter. You want to talk about coming out of nowhere? When this guy gets through with you, you'll have to hike a 100 light years just to get back to nowhere. We been working together since I could remember. Not a big talker. But a big doer.

Homo sapiens reaches into her purse, comes up with a big pile of green.

THE EARTH (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Watch yourself. This one could blow back on you like a Saturnian night special semi-automatic with a dirty slider and over-sized ammo jammed in backwards.

HOMO SAPIENS

Are you going to call your partner now?

THE EARTH

Gotta do some leg work first. Talk to some species.

HOMO SAPIENS

Like ...?

THE EARTH

Reliable sources. Life forms I've known for millions of years. On the down and dirty. Bacteria. Yeasts. Molds. Guys like that.

HOMO SAPIENS

You're going to talk to bacteria?

THE EARTH

Perhaps you're not familiar with the work of Bonnie Bassler, the scientist who showed not only that almost all bacteria can communicate, but that they do all the time? Real quiet, of course.

HOMO SAPIENS

Really? But do they live long

(MORE)

HOMO SAPIENS (CONT'D)

enough to actually have anything to talk about?

THE EARTH

In Kalaallit Nunaat, Greenland, they've hauled up these dormant bacteria from two miles down in 120,000 year old ice, and revived them.

Bacteria shivering.

Lower third title: Kalaallit Nunaat, Greenland, dormant bacteria (Chryseobacterium greenlandensis) waking up

THE EARTH (CONT'D)

And bacteria can live in my permafrost for half a million years, and in my sediments, amber, and halite for millions of years.

HOMO SAPIENS

I guess you would know.

THE EARTH

I guess I would.

Scratches where his belly and leg join.

THE EARTH (CONT'D)

Talk about an itch. Man! Now give me a couple centuries. I'll get back to you.

HOMO SAPIENS

(nervously)

I don't think I have centuries.

THE EARTH

I work on my schedule. Nobody hurries me.

HOMO SAPIENS

I've already let this go too long. For fifty years, I've watched it get worse and worse. We have to turn it around now. That's what the wise guys say. Otherwise ... I'm toast.

The Earth shoves the green back towards Homo sapiens.

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

I'm pretty sure it's not going to
pick it up.

Homo sapiens recoils from the money.

HOMO SAPIENS

See what you can do. Please.

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

Big, sparkling, sad, intelligent
eyes. Full of imagination, love,
poetry. The kind of species you'd
hate to lose. (Then again, I miss
them big, bumbling, nutty
brontosauruses, too.)

Flashback as Earth remembers the brontosaurus.

Lower third title: Apatosaurus (formerly Brontosaurus),
Jurassic Period, about 150 million years ago

THE EARTH (CONT'D)

(out loud)

Well ...

HOMO SAPIENS

Please.

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

And I'm thinking - Maybe that smell
is just fear. Sweat. It's got
plenty to sweat about.

HOMO SAPIENS

I'll come with you. I'll help you.

THE EARTH

I appreciate that ...

(V.O.)

... like a swift kick in the South
Pole ...

(out loud)

... but it'd be too dangerous.
Don't worry, though. I'll pound
some pavement, see if I can kick up
any dirt.