

"THE MELTESE DODO"

by  
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(Based on the short story by Michael Hurwicz)

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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 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.

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.

THE EARTH (CONT'D)

Yeah?

EVIE

(over the phone, not seen)  
There's a Homo sapiens to see you.

THE EARTH

What's that, Evie? A customer?

EVIE

(over the phone, not seen)

I think so, but you'd want to take a look, anyway. Nice-looking, know what I mean?

THE EARTH

Well, all right, show 'em in.

HOMO SAPIENS enters, shakes The Earth's hand, sits.

THE EARTH (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

So this species ambles in. The temperature in the room goes up four degrees. Or is that just me? Holds out its hand. Opposable thumb. Ape family. But balancing on its hind legs, no tail and not much hair. It has one of those smoky voices: the kind of smoke you'd get if a perfume factory burned down. Introduces itself as Homo sapiens.

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

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

And the species launches into this long string of natural 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

And 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 one smells...

(aloud, to Homo sapiens)

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

(V.O.)

... like a flaming flock of Mercurian mudslappers ...

HOMO SAPIENS

I have no other choice. Please.

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

... feasting on ringtailed rot-rats.

HOMO SAPIENS

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

And call your partner.

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?  
Come on! You're kidding.

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?

HOMO SAPIENS

Really? But do they live long enough to actually have anything to talk about?

THE EARTH

In Kalaallit Nunaat, Greenland, dormant bacteria (*Chryseobacterium greenlandensis*) recovered from two miles down in 120,000 year old ice have been revived. 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. 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. Now ... two or three years is all I have to turn it around. That's what the wise guys say. After that, I'm toast.

THE EARTH

(V.O.)

I shove the green back at the species. I'm pretty sure it's not going to pick it up.