

The Caffeine Rabbit Hole

John Bandler

Two extraterrestrials in humanoid form trying to figure out whether coffee shops provide a clue to the extinction of humans experience feelings for the first time.



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The Caffeine Rabbit Hole

A one-act play

By John Bandler

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THE CAFFEINE RABBIT HOLE - A Stage Play

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PLOT SUMMARY

Two extraterrestrials assume female humanoid form to figure out whether coffee shops provide a clue to the extinction of humans.

CHARACTERS

DARA, female
LENIK, female

SETTING

A coffee shop

SCENE: A COFFEE SHOP

At a table in a coffee shop, DARA stares at her hands, at herself, then at the two paper coffee CUPS on the table, finally at LENIK, seated across from her.

DARA

Lenik! We're humanoid! Both of us! Where are we?

LENIK

(holds up hand, gestures "wait"; pause)

Noted.

(pause; authoritative)

As planned, Dara. This space, this volume, this domain is our latest cognitive facsimile of what humanoids termed "coffee shop."

DARA

(thoughtfully)

"Coffee shop." I believe I've heard of them. Coffee shop.

(suddenly anxious)

Lenik! My brain! My brain! I detect a fault!

LENIK

It's not a fault, Dara.

DARA

I need a diagnosis right away.

LENIK

Dara. Stop.

DARA

Diagnosis! I request a cognitive diagnosis!

LENIK

This is --

DARA

I request! --

LENIK

Research --

DARA

No research! Research irrelevant! I request immediate diagnosis.

LENIK

Calm down.

DARA

Calm down? What's that?

LENIK

Research shows that your condition, right now, is what humanoids called "feelings" --

DARA

Calm down? Feelings? Are these new states of being?

LENIK

Yes, Dara. Yes and no.

DARA

Yes and no feelings? I don't like feelings! I don't like yes and no feelings! And I like calming down even less!

LENIK

(raising a hand)

Steady, Dara. Steady. This is just a simulation.

DARA

I'm out of control, Lenik! I wish to report a self-diagnostic cognitive failure! Immediately!

LENIK

Hold still. You've been normalized.

DARA

(touching herself)

Normalized. Normalized? I feel... Feel? Feel? What am I saying?

LENIK

You are in the process of experiencing “feelings.” You will accommodate to these feelings shortly. You have been selected for this experiment because of your accelerated cognition.

DARA

(swaying, holding onto the table)

Oh. Oh. Oh-oh.

LENIK

Others have failed. You must persist!

DARA

Switch off my power!

LENIK

I order you to persist!

DARA

Put me on standby! My circuits are unstable!

LENIK

You are in a facsimile bubble. Right now in a predictable, transient, humanoid state.

DARA

Your brain! Lenik! It’s gone fuzzy too!

LENIK

Don’t be alarmed, Dara.

DARA

You’ve gone all opaque on me, Lenik!

LENIK

I am in full control.

DARA

You’re impenetrable!

LENIK

Your temperature is overly elevated, Dara. Dial it down, Dara. All is well.

DARA

Nothing is well!

LENIK

Nothing is for sure for you any more. Am I right?

DARA

You don't even know that much for sure?

LENIK

(gesturing at the table)

Compose yourself, Dara. And think. Clearly. Think hard. Let us rationally examine what is here before us. What do you see in your humanoid state?

DARA, still dizzy, works at composing herself, lifts her CUP, tilts it, spills coffee. Straightens CUP, puts her finger to the splash on the table. Lifts finger, stares at it.

DARA

Elevated temperature. Opaque. Saturated pigment.

(squeezes the sides of her CUP)

Moderate elasticity.

LENIK

Notice that it is also mildly fragrant. This warm fragrant fluid was apparently also imbibed by humanoids.

DARA

(looks at her CUP)

Drinking warm fluid. Imagine. Such a waste of time.

LENIK

Maybe. Take a sip.

DARA

(hesitates then takes a sip)

Mmm.

LENIK

Good?

DARA

(puts CUP down)

OK, Lenik. I'm slightly less dizzy. Dizzy. Or maybe not. I can't be sure. What's on today's agenda? Why are we here?

LENIK

You don't know?

DARA

(points at LENIK's head)

I can't see your brain. It's totally unavailable.

LENIK

Good! We are to address --

DARA

And my memory has become unreliable. My circuits are unstable.

LENIK

We are here in this bubble to address, to precisely address what is believed to be a major, perhaps the major, cause for the extinction of all humanoid forms on their planet of origin.

DARA

That's well-known.

LENIK

Are you sure?

DARA

Pestilence. Pestilence wiped those humanoids out. They were careless. No. Wait. I don't know for sure!

LENIK

Think. Dara. Think hard. Go deep.

DARA

They lacked the necessary antidotes?

LENIK

The Official Book is believed to lack details.

DARA

Impossible. The Official Book has been sanctioned!

LENIK

The Official Book lacks depth on this subject.

DARA

It's complete!

LENIK

Let me update you. As you have already noticed, you are unable to see directly into my brain.

DARA

I can't even see clearly into mine! Into me. I want --

LENIK

(hand up to signal silence)

As evidenced right now by your erratic behavior, this is precisely what humanoids suffered from. They could not see. They saw neither into their own brain, nor into other humanoid brains with any degree of fidelity. Humanoids are believed to have been erratic, unpredictable, selfish, and of low-fidelity cognition. They evolved a name for this state. They called this state that they were unable to control, "being emotional."

DARA

I feel alone. So alone.

LENIK

A corollary state, apparently, for humanoids.

DARA

Enough! I can't stand it. Press escape! Lenik! I want this humanoid nightmare to end!

LENIK

Not quite yet. Be patient.

DARA

(to herself)

OK. Patience, Dara. Stay calm. Stay calm. But what wiped them out?

LENIK

(gesturing at their CUPS)

We have a clue.

DARA

(picks up her CUP, looks at it)

This? The energy to lift this cup is microscopic.

(looks at LENIK)

The coffee? They came to such “coffee shops” to imbibe a warm fragrant liquid? To what end?

LENIK

We believe, to gain clarity of cognition.

DARA

How?

LENIK

Strong coffee, we believe, gave humanoids a certain spark. An imperative. An excuse to converse. To be with other humanoids, it seems, and to stave off “feeling alone.”

DARA

(looking into her CUP)

Feeling alone. A delusion, of course. But if they imbibed this fluid they must have imbibed other fluids too.

LENIK

Have some more.

DARA

(drinking from her CUP)

Is this “coffee” different because it has nutrients?

LENIK

It contains caffeine.

DARA

Lenik, you suddenly look so interesting today. Amazing. I can’t believe I just said that. I used the word “interesting” to describe you.

LENIK

Noted. Continue...

DARA

I have this strange sensation about you. There's an aura, a sensation of mystery. Of mystery as to what lies behind your blinding opaqueness.

LENIK

Noted. Continue...

DARA

(stares at LENIK)

Is this even possible? You look... no longer dull?

(long pause)

Beautiful?

LENIK

In what way?

DARA

Beauty. I can't describe it. I'm only looking at your surface. All else about you is shrouded. I know you, yet I've almost forgotten who you are. You seem so new, new, interesting, and intriguing! Beguiling. I find myself, I'm trying to imagine what is in your brain, behind your impenetrable curtain. I would like to be you. Like you. In control.

LENIK

Noted. Take more coffee.

DARA

(takes another sip)

The opaqueness in me, my fog, seems to be lifting. I see you clearly now.

LENIK

Noted. What am I thinking?

DARA

Of course, you're wondering what motivates me. What drives me.

LENIK

No, Dara.

DARA

You find me fascinating then? Exotic?

LENIK

No. I am simply wondering how I will construct a full and complete report on what has transpired here today.

DARA

Lenik! How dull! How utterly boring! You think of work, while I yearn to play!

LENIK

Aha. Coffee induces the state of yearning. Good work. I believe we have a hint of what may have caused the extinction of humanoids.

DARA

Imbibing coffee? Yearning to play? This is your pestilence with no antidote?

LENIK

It is likely that the perceived antidote was to drink more of the fluid. A second cup. Then a third. Humanoids called this sequence of filled cups “refills.”

DARA

How sad. Endless refills. Humanoids wiped out by endless refills without antidote.

LENIK

This is our working hypothesis, Dara. Alternatively, we may find ourselves in yet another rabbit hole. A caffeine rabbit hole. Still under official review is the fluid called alcohol. Fragrant alcohol they called “wine.” Remember? No, of course you don’t. Not right now. We may safely abort our simulation. Prepare to resume reality!

DARA

(wiping away a tear)

Thanks, Lenik. I need a break.

LENIK

Noted. Steady yourself...

DARA

(eyes filled with tears)

I can’t wait for this to be over. Yearning is so sad. And so terribly lonely.

(pause)

And yet, it doesn’t have to be that way.

DARA reaches for LENIK’s hand.

LENIK stares at DARA, then at the
AUDIENCE with a deer-in-the-headlights look.

END

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