

Made Out Of Meat by Terry Bisson [4'00"]

AUDIO

We hear two voices OFF, VOICE ONE and VOICE TWO. It doesn't matter whether they're male or female voices, as long as they have an air of authority. The tone of the conversation will recall captain Kirk & Mr Spock from *Star Trek*, intense and serious people. We slowly realise they are not human beings, and that they have been observing our planet for quite some time. VOICE ONE is telling VOICE TWO the conclusions from experiments that they have carried out. We never see either of the characters. VOICE ONE and VOICE TWO may well be looking at the same images as us, on a screen. The screen this short is projected onto could in fact be the same screen VOICE ONE & VOICE TWO are watching on board their ship as they talk. As well as the two voices, there are the background hums and whirs of navigation instruments and a lift door whizzing open and closed, which will remind us of the bridge of the *Enterprise*.

VOICE ONE: They're made out of meat.

VOICE TWO: Meat?

VOICE ONE: Meat. They're made out of meat.

VOICE TWO: Meat?

VOICE ONE: There's no doubt about it. We brought several on board our recon vessels from different parts of the planet and probed them all the way through. They're completely meat.

VOICE TWO: That's impossible. What about the radio signals? The messages to the stars?

VOICE ONE: They use the radio waves to talk, but the signals don't come from them. The signals come from machines.

VOICE TWO: So who made the machines? That's who we want to contact.

VOICE ONE: They made the machines. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Meat made the machines.

VOICE TWO: That's ridiculous. How can meat make a machine? You're asking me to believe in sentient meat.

VOICE ONE: I'm not asking you, I'm telling

you. These creatures are the only sentient race in the sector and they're made out of meat.

VOICE TWO: Maybe they're like the orfolei. You know, a carbon-based intelligence that goes through a meat stage.

VOICE ONE: Nope. They're born meat and they die meat. We studied them for several of their life spans, which didn't take long. Do you have any idea of the life span of meat?

VOICE TWO: Spare me. Okay, maybe they're only part meat. You know, like the weddilei. A meat head with an electron plasma brain inside.

VOICE ONE: Nope. We thought of that, since they do have meat heads, like the weddilei. But I told you, we probed them. They're meat all the way through.

VOICE TWO: No brain?

VOICE ONE: Oh, there's a brain all right. It's just that the brain is made out of meat!

VOICE TWO: So ... what does the thinking?

VOICE ONE: You're not getting it, are you? The brain does the thinking. The meat.

VOICE TWO: Thinking meat! You're asking me to believe in thinking meat!

VOICE ONE: Yes, thinking meat! Conscious meat! Loving meat. Dreaming meat. The meat is the whole deal! Are you getting the picture?

VOICE TWO: Omigod. You're serious then. They're made out of meat.

VOICE ONE: Finally. Yes. They are indeed made out of meat. And they've been trying to get in touch with us for almost a hundred of their years.

VOICE TWO: Omigod. So what does this meat have in mind?

VOICE ONE: First it wants to talk to us.

Then I imagine it wants to explore the Universe, communicate, contact other sentients and swap ideas and information. The usual.

VOICE TWO: We're supposed to talk to meat.

VOICE ONE: That's the idea. That's the message they're sending out by radio. 'Hello. Anyone out there? Anybody home?' That sort of thing.

VOICE TWO: They actually do talk, then. They use words, ideas, concepts?

VOICE ONE: Oh, yes. Except they do it with meat.

VOICE TWO: I thought you just told me they used radio.

VOICE ONE: They do, but what do you think is on the radio? Meat sounds. You know how when you slap or flap meat, it makes a noise? They talk by flapping their meat at each other. They can even sing by squirting air through their meat.

VOICE TWO: Omigod. Singing meat. This is altogether too much. So what do you advise?

VOICE ONE: Officially or unofficially?

VOICE TWO: Both.

VOICE ONE: Officially, we are required to contact, welcome and log in any and all sentient races or multibeings in the quadrant, without prejudice, fear or favor. Unofficially, we advise that we erase the records and forget the whole thing.

VOICE TWO: I was hoping you would say that.

VOICE ONE: It seems harsh, but there is a limit. Do we really want to make contact with meat?

VOICE TWO: I agree one hundred percent. What's there to say? 'Hello, meat. How's it going?' But will this work? How many planets are we dealing with here?

VOICE ONE: Just one. They can travel to other planets in special meat containers,

but they can't live on them. And being meat, they only travel through C space, which limits them to the speed of light and makes the possibility of their ever making contact pretty slim. Infinitesimal, in fact.

VOICE TWO: So we just pretend there's no one home in the Universe.

VOICE ONE: That's it.

VOICE TWO: Cruel. But you said it yourself, who wants to meet meat? And the ones who have been aboard our vessels, the ones you have probed? You're sure they won't remember?

VOICE ONE: They'll be considered crackpots if they do. We went into their heads and smoothed out their meat so that we're just a dream to them.

VOICE TWO: A dream to meat! How strangely appropriate, that we should be meat's dream.

VOICE ONE: And we can mark the entire sector unoccupied.

VOICE TWO: Good. Agreed, officially and unofficially. Case closed. Any others? Anyone interesting on that side of the galaxy?

VOICE ONE: Yes, a rather shy but sweet hydrogen core cluster intelligence in a class nine star in G445 zone. Was in contact two galactic rotations ago, wants to be friendly again.

VOICE TWO: They always come around.

VOICE ONE: And why not? Imagine how unbearably, how unutterably cold the Universe would be if one were all alone ...

VISUAL

The images accompanying the conversation might illustrate the experiments VOICE ONE mentions. The images are visual voyeurism, coming one after the other in quick Cut & Paste succession. The sequences have something in common: people communicating, or attempting to. No sequence is complete, none are essential, and they must all be short; they have to make us think they make no

sense, almost making us forget the conversation between VOICE ONE & VOICE TWO. No sequence corresponds to any particular stage in the conversation. Any sequence can be swapped for any other that shows people communicating. The ones here are merely templates, following a vague road from birth to death, but that is just for the script; the order is not important. Nor do there have to be the same amount of sequences, but it's better to have too many than too few, to avoid giving the impression that the individuals portrayed are important, which they aren't.

The images can be old ones, black and white, stock or archive footage, and could even be from films set in the past, showing historic characters. They should also show a wider range of races and cultures than I have represented.

At no time do we hear what is being said in any sequence, nor are there any sound effects (apart from the instruments on the bridge, mentioned above). The actors' actions must speak for themselves.

-Sequ 1: Kitchen - A mother plays with her baby. She's singing, the baby is moving its mouth, copying its mother

-Sequ 2: Bedroom - A frightened young girl is hiding under her blankets, we see her parents arguing and shouting

-Sequ 3: Schoolyard - Three girls whispering, giggling and peeking at their teacher, who has her back to them

-Sequ 4: Church - An altarboy makes his fellow altarboys laugh by mimicking the priest as he says mass

-Sequ 5: Church - A little girl in the confessional makes the priest boggle, he crosses himself several times and eventually covers his ears and closes his eyes

-Sequ 6: Bedroom - A mother desperately tries to get her good-for-nothing daughter up, nagging her in vain

-Sequ 7: School - After class, a stunning teacher gets off by trapping a pupil and making him blush with her provocative body and oral language

-Sequ 8: Exterior/Pub - A couple leaning against a wall. She's talking. He's just nodding, eyes closed, smiling blissfully as he breathes in her smoke. She puts the ciggie out, motions for them both to go back in the pub

-Sequ 9: Church - The groom has said he does, the priest now waits for the bride. She is thinking it over, the groom is sweating and horrified, whispering to her as she looks towards her lover, the best man

-Sequ 10: Football terraces - Fans insulting the referee

-Sequ 11: Concert hall - Two Basque bertsolaris take turns improvising songs about each other, trying to outdo the other's last snatch of song

-Sequ 12: TV Studio - An interviewee can't get a word in edgeways as the woman interviewer wipes the floor with him

-Sequ 13: Disco - Friends of a half-drunk guy laugh their heads off watching him try to chat up a girl with long-hair without realising his prey is actually a fellow. The long-haired fellow turns round and takes an interest

in the guy

-Sequ 14: Rugby field - During a pep talk, the psychopath of a manager urges his lads to crush their opponents

-Sequ 15: Wood - A search party with dogs and torches desperately shout out the name of someone they are searching for

-Sequ 16: Market - A stallholder with a microphone shouts out his wares, reeling the housewives in with his "you're gonna be the ruin of me" routine

-Sequ 17: Temple - Lamas cross-legged on the floor, discussing the finer points of Buddha's revelations

-Sequ 18: Square - An idiot who has been stung by a card sharp stupidly harangues him for his money back, the card sharp calmly packs his things away, telling the fellow to fuck off

-Sequ 19: Operating Theatre - Two surgeons, scalpels at the ready, argue where to make the first incision and which of them will do it. A nurse tells them they are both wrong, the anaesthetist backs her up

-Sequ 20: Street/Traffic - A taxi causes a bus to screech to a halt. The woman bus driver leans out of the window to berate the taxi driver

-Sequ 21: Jungle - The tribe listens spellbound to what the shaman is saying while in a trance

-Sequ 22: Street - An old pisshead writhes on the pavement, shouting obscenities, but the passers-by ignore him

-Sequ 23: Park - Two flea-bitten, half-deaf pensioners sitting on a bench talk at each other without listening to what the other is saying

-Sequ 24: Street - An old lady tells her woes to a couple who don't even know her

-Sequ 25: Wake - In front of the coffin, amongst all the well-wishers, two women in mourning, apparently praying, are pulling the dead lazy bastard to bits