The Hominid:

“This will take you to the Devonian period.” Dr. Handwich Gelatin was handed an orange pill. “And this,” he was handed a pink one, “will bring you back.” So these were the atomic pills of the legendary Dr. Martin. Somehow, he had created a probability model that reverse-predicted atomic movement, storing that information in pill form that, once dissolved, sent the information to your brain and sensory organs to form the world around you (at the quantum level, perception and physical reality are inseparable). With the help of atomic footprints, he could correctly know the atomic state of the world in past times. In a physics sense, knowing the atomic movement and the final destination, the pill could solve for the initial location based on desired time. After recording the past, then in theory, a new pill would be able to predict the future, which is much harder since unlike the past, there were no footprints. Dr. Handwich Gelatin, then, was one of these pioneers mapping the past for the company Geochronyx, only one of many. So far they had mapped back to the very end of the Devonian period. “And here are your mapping glasses.” The glasses he received were capable of three-dimensionally filming whatever he saw in the past and storing that footage inside them. Once back, the lab would have visual proof of what the past was like. The director of the lab, Frickleton Blood, came to Gelatin’s side as he was preparing to leave. “Remember, you’re there merely to map, nothing else. We don’t expect you to stay for more than a few days.” He gave a nod, then popped the orange pill.

In an instant, the world Dr. Gelatin knew was gone. In its place stood a new megafloral land. From the vantage of a tall rock he stood on, Dr. Gelatin could see before him a prehistoric valley swathed in ten foot grasses swaying in the wind. Colossal ferns lined the east side and unfathomably high sequoias and ginkgos darkened a forest to the west.

The air was unbearably thick and sweaty. The same familiar sun shone hot, but somehow dimmer. From behind him growls and chirps bounded endlessly through the air, their animals hidden far behind the cluttered floor. In response to the heat, Dr. Gelatin was mid brow-wipe when an astounding view came upon the valley. A large cluster of avians blotted out the sun above. About thirty of them, each nearly twenty feet long, sailed across the horizon.

*Is that* P. sandersi? But that bird shouldn’t exist yet. *And the megaflora…*

It seemed to Dr. Gelatin that this ancient world was not one that agreed with the records. Cautiously, but curiously, he crept into the forest behind him. The sounds immediately got quieter, but sharper. The thick wall of shrubs and trees blotted out and distorted the many noises. Dr. Gelatin would hear a chirp off to his right only to find the nine-foot cicada crawling away on his left. Beetles as large as his head scuttled underfoot, occasionally hissing when his foot brushed them.

As he walked, the sheer size of the place and its species astounded him. It was one thing to read about nine-foot centipedes, it was another to feel one crawling three feet up your leg. But to the scientist within Handwich it was as if he had rolled up the pages of his history textbooks and smoked them, blessed to wander in this prehistoric dream.

However, one obvious thought was lodged in his mind. *This is not the Devonian period.* *The megaflora and large insects suggest the Carboniferous period, but why were there post-Jurassic avians?* If anything, they had undershot by millions of years. Or perhaps they had shot it just right…

In any case, Dr. Gelatin maintained rapid eye movement while he moved, scanning everything he saw, copying as much atomic information as he could. Wherever he was, it was a period Geochronyx would be happy to know about.

Again, he trudged on through the forest, but when he looked down to scan, the insects were gone. He noticed as well that the forest was quiet, no growls or chirps. Something had scared the animals away. Slowly, he pivoted and calmly started back to where he had come from.

At first he dared look up and between the many plants he could make out two large eyes staring right at him. He looked to the other side and three more sets of eyes stared. Quickly, he looked back at the ground and picked up his pace. But before he had gone a few steps, they were on him and his vision went black.

The large eyes stared back at him. He could see clearly now that these eyes were encased in an obtuse skeletal structure. They all had large noses and wide mouths. They stood upright much shorter than him and much, much hairier. *This was…Australopithecus?? But that couldn’t be. This environment was hundreds of millions of years older than apes, much less bipedal hominids.* A sudden grab at the wrist kicked him out of his mind. About twenty of them stood in a circle around him waiting. *For what? For him?* Slowly, Dr. Gelatin pulled out his dagger from behind him and crouched to the ground. The hominids squatted with him, apparently apprehensive and visibly ready for attack. But Handwich remained slow and calm. He picked up a large branch from his feet and began whittling away at the end. After a minute, he picked it up and handed it to the hominid in front of him. He grabbed it and felt the pointy end. Then he took a sharp rock from his hand and gave it to Handwich. *They’re showing high levels of trust, negotiation, and curiosity. This is unreal.*

After hours of careful observation, poking, and feeling, the hominids’ rigid posture softened as they saw that Dr. Gelatin was not there to hurt them. Eventually, a few of them took Dr. Gelatin back into the forest with them to go hunting. Unsurprisingly, it was he who came back with the most substantial food. And day after day this continued until Dr. Gelatin had been fully adopted by the hominid tribe, teaching them hunting techniques, traps, weapons, fire, and even how to see their reflections in the pond.

Early on, he saw that his knowledge was far superior to the hominids’. But he didn’t intend to keep it that way. Here, he was a god, lighting fires a million years before they should’ve been lit, cutting through brush with daggers whose precision wouldn’t be engineered for another million. *Think of the head start. Speeding up our evolution by millions of years, I will make humans more powerful than could’ve ever been imagined.*

Of course, he remembered the atomic pill. But this ancient world, the world of mysterious science, was the one he really cared about. Did he want to return and babble about what he saw? No. He was living it fully here. So one day, when he was out hunting with only one other hominid, Dr. Gelatin gave it his glasses and his pill. Immediately, he vanished. The tribe would assume that the hunt was unsuccessful and the hominid had been attacked and killed. To Handwich, sending the Hominid back was the obvious move. Why send himself back just to explain this world when he could send the real deal?

The alarms were still screeching terribly when Director Frickleton Blood arrived at the scene. Armed guards and scientists were rushing around the Geochronyx lab frantically. The scene was definitely fresh and only the facts were yet visible to Director Blood. On the ground beneath his swivel chair lay the chief temporal scientist, his head torn from his body at the neck and his chest gaping open. His heart lay half beside him and half inside the mouth of a shot-dead ape wearing glasses. Despite the years of cold statistical reactions, even Director Blood couldn’t help but exclaim out loud, “What the *fuck* happened here?”

After some cleaning up, an assistant came to his side. “Sir, it seems Dr. Handwich Gelatin must’ve sent back the ape. We’ve reviewed the footage from the glasses and can confirm that he has begun intense assimilation with these creatures and may have planned this attack *intentionally.”*

“What happened here stays silent. If anybody finds out about this Geochronyx is done for. We need to go in there and shut him down.”

“Shut him down? Sir, with all due respect, it appears he has been highly successful in learning from and training these hominids, which are in fact Australopithecus Afarensis. We could have more than a few key breakthroughs here.”

“Forgive me, but last time I checked, four-million-year old hominids weren’t enjoying backyard barbeques. Gelatin is messing too much with evolution and we need to shut it down. This was only supposed to be an observation mission. So if any of you,” Director Blood turned towards some of the guards, “aren’t willing to take the fucking pills, then I will.”

The forest air vibrated, then stilled. *At last, the man from the pond has come.* From behind the plants they watched these men from the pond, these strange hominids that haunted Handwich’s dreams. He had seen these men when he looked into the water, always blurry, but waiting. And he knew sooner or later that these nightmares would become very real. Finally, it was time. On Handwich’s nod, they encircled the men, weapons drawn. What ended as a barbeque started in blood.