

The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper



Episode 126: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, meet Matt the Rat

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“Hello journeyers on the path of adventure and new meanings,” said a raspy voice from somewhere at the end of a patio railing along the side of the path. “I’m Matt the Rat and I don’t have a hat. Do have a hat for Matt the Rat?”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, hadn’t been counting on meeting a hatless rat and they were completely unprepared. The dog, Sidestepper, ran his paws over his tiny body to see if there might be a hat hidden somewhere just under the surface of his fur. Crazy Man rummaged around in the pockets, secret stairways and unknown chambers of his walrus costume and decided that any hats on his person were his and besides, they would be too big for the rat.

Noticing the look of utter futility in the eyes of the travelers, Matt the Rat heaved a huge rodent sigh and said, “I’m Matt the Rat and I don’t have a *cap*.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, seemed to remember seeing a cap somewhere and they discussed this possibility at great length before concluding that neither one of them had actually seen a cap of any sort, especially one small enough to fit a rat’s head.

“Sorry,” said Crazy Man, “...no hats, no caps.”

“And no map to food,” said Matt the Rat. “And no lost mothers and you’re both bastards.”

Suddenly, neither the dog, Sidestepper, nor Crazy Man wanted to give the rat a hat. Or a cap. Crazy Man fantasized receiving a box of cyanide from Amazon, one with pictures of dead rats on the sides of the box. But before he could warn Matt the Rat that he was planning on buying a flame thrower sometime in the near future, Matt the Rat said, “Tell you what...I think you just don’t have enough choices. So...how about a fedora, bowler, Panama, bucket, pork pie, top hat, beanie or beret?”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, glanced quickly at each other and nodded agreement...yup, Matt the Rat was crazy as a bat and no hat would ever be safe again.

“Or maybe I could limit the choices for some stress free decision making,” said Matt the Rat. “How about a hockey toque. Maybe one with a hockey team crest?”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were suddenly suspicious. Was this rat trying to get its grubby little rodent claws into their favorite hockey toques? Not that they had any favorite hockey toques, but for every non-problem there had to be a *principle* that would prevent the non-problem from going away before it became a problem. Apparently, this was a characteristic of highly evolved species at that point where evolution may have come to an abrupt stop and decided against carrying this biological experiment any further.

“No!” said the dog, Sidestepper. “We have no hockey toques. And besides, toques doesn’t rhyme with Matt or rat, so why do you want a toque?”

“Because the crows keep calling me Matt the Hatless Rat and then they laugh and point their beaks at me,” said Matt the Rat. “I tried to draw their attention to the fact that none of them have hats, but they countered with a lot of technical stuff about aerodynamics and the role of rats in a post-apocalyptic society and I didn’t see any need for a hat in any of that. The crows are crazy.”

Having recently had an unsavory experience with shitting guardian pigeons, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, suddenly felt an irrational sense of connection with Matt the Rat, which called for an outrageous show of empathetic support...so they screamed their support as their heads spun like tops on their shoulders; they fell to the ground and roiled their support in unmentionable contortions of their bodies; they started empathy groups that nobody joined; they cried and raged and groaned against the machine of hatless rats until they stopped, thought and concluded that they’d just wasted precious moments or days feeling sorry for a rat that called them bastards.

In other words, things were going pretty much the way they’d always gone but who was counting these things on the path of adventure and new meanings?

“We don’t like most birds we meet,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “And we don’t like you. But we’d like to help you anyway because that’s the kind of idiots we sometimes are.”

Crazy Man looked at the dog, Sidestepper, and raised an eyebrow. *Was this dog calling him an idiot? Did the dog have a point?*

These words dumbfounded Matt the Rat. Nobody had ever helped him before. Being an icon for evil in books, movies and nightmares, Matt the Rat was sometimes disturbed by his own reflection when he slurped water from stagnant pools in places where only rats would go. That long nose. Those beady eyes. Those gyrating whiskers. The saber teeth.

And all he wanted was a hat. Or a cap. But a hockey toque would do...anything to make himself look less like what everyone, including himself, expected.

“Will you be my friends?” said Matt the Hat.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were speechless. Someone wanted them to be their friends. A lone voice in the wilderness of the world needed their attention, their love, their understanding, their...

“On second thought,” said Matt the Rat, “scratch the friend thing. I think the narrator took that one a little far.”

For the next twenty or thirty minutes or hours, Matt the Rat, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, pondered the audacity of narrators who couldn’t stay the hell out of the stories they tell...as if they had anything to say.

“Let’s be acquaintances,” said Matt the Rat. “I promise I won’t eat you in your sleep.”

This took Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, off guard. They wondered: *Had this animal with stilettos for teeth been planning on eating them all along? Was Matt the Rat a homicidal rodent preying on anyone with a spare hat? Was it possible that Matt the Rat had a map to food that he was keeping secret?*

Loaded with a plethora of possibilities, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, viewed Matt the Rat in an entirely different perspective. They would be friends with this rat rodent and do what friends do...they would celebrate his birthday, his achievements, his ancestry, his world view, his social media presence...but they would never fall asleep when he was around lest he eat them.

Besides, you never knew who had a map to food that they denied they had...especially if they were planning to eat you in your sleep. However, since all three were wide awake and Matt the Rat didn’t seem to be hungry, they decided it was time to dig down deep into their historical and genetic baselines and

perform that most basic of all rituals...the let's-not-eat-each-other-today friendship dance. As Matt the Rat tapped out a furious four-legged rug cutter that shook the entire porch and woke every hibernating bear within miles, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, pounded their legs into the ground and jumped up and down, side to side, 180 ° to 180 ° and then some...the some being a breathtaking display of biological contortions best not described to innocent imaginations.

Around the time the dancing began to drift into movements too disgusting to be comprehended by those born from earthly origins a green leprechaun hat fell out of the sky and landed on Matt the Rat's head. It fit perfectly and sparked an immediate change in rodent demeanor and outlook.

"I'm Matt the Rat," said Matt the Rat, "and I have a hat."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, broke into a resounding burst of applause that pleased Matt the Rat so much that he swore he would be their lifelong friend and never try eat them even though he'd promised this earlier but was just waiting for them to fall asleep before dining on sort of man and kind of dog.

At which point, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, made hurried goodbyes and continued their journey on the path of adventure and new meanings.

After an exhausting three minutes had passed, the dog, Sidestepper, said, "Good thing the rat didn't start on a sob story."

Crazy Man smiled and nodded yes, knowing that a sob story would have put them both to sleep and they would have been easy pickings for a rat snack.

"Do you think I should wear a hat?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

Crazy Man adjusted his newly acquired sombrero and looked his travel buddy up and down, noticing the long spindly legs, tiny round body with a tail the size of a baby thumb and a head so small there was not much worth describing until he smiled...at which point his saber teeth seemed to take over his entire body. But we won't get into that.

Crazy Man said, "But, if you put a hat on, it would be dog-eared."

This made no sense to either of them so they started whistling their favorite show tunes even though they couldn't remember ever having watched any shows or hearing any tunes and continued down the path of adventure and new meanings in search of a map to food, a lost mother and this *outside thing*.

(NOTE: Special thanks to the bestie, Stephanie, for help in making this one come alive. And thanks to Jason for Matt the Rat.)

To be continued...

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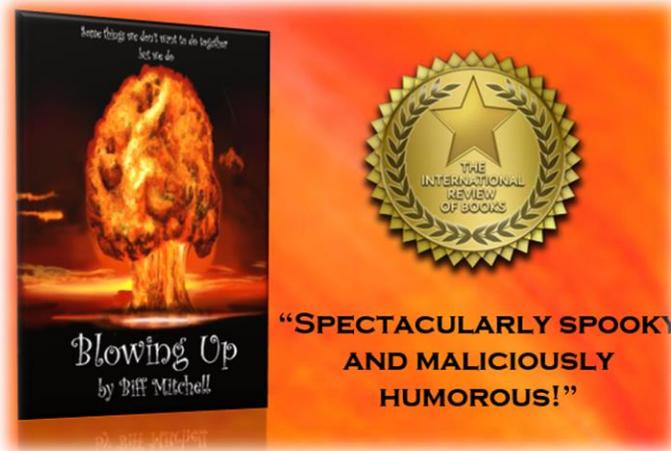
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