

OBSOLETE

By

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BLACK SCREEN

Metal SQUEAKING and the PITTER-PATTER of running; an ABSENCE of breathing.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

The source of the squeaking is a short human figure wearing a hooded jacket and a baseball cap. He carries a full DUFFLE BAG in one arm. He is RUSTY, and we can't tell who or what he is yet. Closing in behind him, two MUGGERS give chase. Ahead of them is what's left of the Gateway Arch.

This is THE FUTURE.

Technology has advanced leaps and bounds. Bright holographic projections are used as billboards, fully electric vehicles zip through the city, mobile trash and recycling BINS clean up the park's litter themselves.

But there are also many HOMELESS living in tents, standing beside flickering fires, watching Rusty run.

He turns a corner down an alley between two run-down buildings.

EXT. ALLEY - SAME

Rusty turns the corner and is hit in the head with a humming metal BASEBALL BAT.

Rusty is a humanoid ROBOT, around five feet tall. His "face" is a cracked black screen with two glowing blue "eyes." His ripped shirt exposes the inner workings of his body — a jumble of rusty hydraulics, machinery, and wiring. His clothes are practical, for protection against dust and the elements, but he has no conscious concept of personal style.

The BATTER continues his assault on Rusty with the baseball BAT attached to a car battery. Sparks fly with each collision. The other two muggers catch up. One wears RAGS, while the other is asthmatic and wears a MASK. They watch as the Batter beats Rusty into the ground as Rusty balls up and clutches the duffle bag close to his chest.

A mangy dog (TOBY) barks at the commotion and the Masked mugger kicks dirt at it. The Batter has had enough and grabs ahold of one of the duffle bag's sides and pulls.

BATTER
Give up the bag! Give it!

Rusty squeezes tighter.

BATTER (CONT'D)
Pull it up!

The other muggers do as they're told.

BATTER (CONT'D)
Pry its arms open!

They try.

RAGGEDY
It's holding on too tight.

Batter loses his patience.

BATTER
Back up.

The Raggedy and Masked muggers watch as the Batter beats Rusty repeatedly with the baseball bat-- CLANK! CLANK! CLANK! ... until flashing police lights grab their attention.

RAGGEDY
Poppies!

The Batter tries in vain to pry the duffel bag out one last time, but it's no use, and he runs away with the others. The shadow of a tall woman spills out in front of Rusty as Inspector DARA GLEN steps out of the vehicle. She speaks into an earpiece.

DARA
Copy, control. I have eyes on the suspicious property. Proceeding as directed.

Toby nestles up next to Rusty and licks his face. Rusty rolls over to stand up.

RUSTY
Thank you, Inspector--

DARA
Stay in rest mode until I tell you to move.

Rusty complies as Toby plays tug of war with his fingers.

RUSTY
It's not me. He thinks I'm a toy.

DARA examines Rusty's cranium up close with her wand-like multitool.

DARA

Copy control, item appears to be a Series 3 ErranDroid, Wizard Electronics, circa 20...80s? It's a mess in there. Definitely obsolete. Sending stills to the lab. Doesn't look like it's our bot.

RUSTY

What kind of "bot" are you looking for?

DARA

The kind that asks too many questions.

Dara examines Rusty's reaction. He shuts up.

DARA (CONT'D)

I'm joking. It's a human joke.

RUSTY

I got it. It was funny.

Dara eyes Rusty suspiciously.

DARA

I'm looking for a robot with errant coding.

RUSTY

What kind of coding?

DARA

An urban legend. You know how humans and animals are programmed to survive at any cost?

RUSTY

In theory.

DARA

That's a good answer. The one we're looking for...

Dara notices Toby pulling on Rusty's bag.

DARA (CONT'D)

The dog a friend of yours?

RUSTY

Dog? No.

Rusty gives Toby a look. The dog turns its head.

DARA

What's in the bag?

RUSTY

My owner's property.

Dara reaches for the bag. Rusty holds it tight.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

I can't allow you—

Dara grabs ahold. Rusty isn't letting go. Toby growls.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

— without a warrant. I'm sorry.

Dara lets go, reluctantly.

DARA

What's your owner's name?

RUSTY

That's restricted.

DARA

Then I'll run your serial number.

RUSTY

Certainly, Inspector.

Rusty offers his head to the inspector. Dara's dubious, but uses her multi-tool as a laser scanner. As she runs it over Rusty's head, the tool short circuits and the laser cuts out.

DARA

This happen often?

RUSTY

I don't know whaa— happ—en—in—...

Rusty's voice trails off into static and he collapses to the ground. Dara pulls Rusty up and finds a SERIAL NUMBER embossed under one of the panels at the base of his cranium, then zip-tie handcuffs his hand to the grill of her vehicle.

DARA

Okay, don't move.

Dara returns to the driver's seat.

I/E. DARA'S CAR - ALLEY - NIGHT

Dara keeps the door open as she converses with a SQUAWKBOX.

DARA

Control, run a check on an
Unregistered Robot, serial number
341824182119.

ON SCREEN:

UNREGISTERED ROBOT

Serial: 341824182119

Year: Unknown

Owner: Unknown

Type: BIPED

Model: Unknown

Purpose: Unknown.

CONTROL (O.S.)

Robot serial number ending in 2119
is considered illegal and therefore
dangerous.

DARA

Okay, control. What do you advise?

CONTROL (O.S.)

Deliver Robot 2119 to nearest IRE
station to be booked for
functioning without a license.

DARA

You're the boss.

Dara squirts hand sanitizer onto her palms.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Dara exits her vehicle and approaches where she left Rusty.

DARA

Wakey-wakey, Tin Man. We're going
for a ride—

Dara finds Rusty is gone, except for his disembodied hand
with an upright middle finger. The car's engine REVS behind
her, and a window lowers...

CONTROL (O.S.)

—Stop immediately. Unlawful
deinstallation of an IRE Control
Unit is a Federal—

The squawkbox flies out of the window as the car peels forward. Dara dives for cover.

CRUISER (O.S.)
Attention! We are fly—

The squawkbox hits the ground and shatters. Dara watches in disbelief as the car drives away.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Rusty drives away as Toby barks in the passenger seat.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Rusty pulls up next to a rusted PICKUP TRUCK and steps out. Toby jumps out to follow him, watching inquisitively as Rusty transfers his bag from Dara's car to the truck. Then Rusty rips open the cushions and pulls out the fluff, sprays Dara's alcohol sanitizer everywhere, and sparks a lighter. The inside of Dara's vehicle ignites. Rusty turns around and finds Toby waiting.

RUSTY
You are still here.

Toby turns his head, trying to understand.

RUSTY (CONT'D)
I cannot return you to where we met. It is too dangerous.

Toby barks happily.

RUSTY (CONT'D)
This is goodbye.

Rusty gets in his truck, but Toby jumps in after him. Rusty contemplates for a moment.

RUSTY (CONT'D)
Are you hungry?

Toby barks affirmative.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MORNING

Rusty pulls away, leaving Dara's vehicle ablaze.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY - LATER

Dara approaches what's left of her smoldering vehicle. She finds her zipties still attached to the grill.

INT. I.R.E. STATION - DAY

Dara walks briskly past her fellow I.R.E. INSPECTORS as one after another, they smile and give her a mocking middle finger. She marches into her CHIEF's office.

INT. OFFICE - I.R.E. STATION - DAY

Dara barges into I.R.E. Chief Inspector MUNCH's office. True to his name, he's eating.

DARA

What, did you give the whole floor my report?

MUNCH

I didn't have to. A sassy carjacking robot set off so many alarm bells, we might outlaw technology altogether.

DARA

You're welcome for the job security.

MUNCH

The official story we're going with is that it was remote controlled.

DARA

A drone? It wasn't tethered to a network...

MUNCH

Then it was operated by radio. The point is, I need you to get back out there and make this go away. Quickly and quietly.

DARA

Why?

MUNCH

"Why?"

DARA

No, I mean, why quietly? It's just an obsolete bot. Even if there's mutant coding that makes it think it's alive, that doesn't mean it is.

MUNCH

As much as I'd love to debate the finer points of Rene Descartes, we're not going to wait for this thing to start making copies of itself before we take care of it. Nip this in the bud, Glen.

DARA

I'll need to borrow a vehicle.

MUNCH

You don't say.

The chief opens a drawer and retrieves a set of keys.

MUNCH (CONT'D)

Do you have any leads?

The chief tosses the keys to Dara, who catches them easily.

DARA

Yeah. It had a dog with him.

INT. PET PLANET - DAY

Two-headed turtles, gerbils radiating neon colors, leashes without cords, fish that can live outside water. An oblivious PET CLERK watches holotube behind augmented reality glasses.

Rusty grabs a bag of generic PET CHOW, a DOG COLLAR, some other pet items, and then checks himself out paying CASH. Rusty spots an ANIMAL SHELTER POSTER with a subtle barcode-like symbol hidden within it.

VOICE (V.O.)

Find us.

Rusty ignores the message, and exits.

I/E. RUSTY'S PICKUP TRUCK - FARMLAND - DAY

As the sun comes up, Rusty places a pair of SOLAR PANELS on the dashboard. Toby wakes up, yawns and stretches. Whines.

In the back seat is a bag of DOG FOOD and other pet items.

Rusty reaches back and pours Toby some food into a BOWL. The dog greedily eats it up. While his head is lowered, Rusty fastens a COLLAR around Toby's neck. Toby scratches at the collar and attempts to bite it off.

RUSTY

Stop it.

Toby does as he's told and eats the food as Rusty drives.

I/E. RUSTY'S PICKUP TRUCK - FARMLAND - DAY

On either side of the truck are vast fields of corn. Toby's head rests outside the window as Rusty drives when —

— A tire BLOWS OUT and Rusty pulls over to the side. The dog is hyped up.

EXT. RUSTY'S PICK ROAD - ROAD - DAY

Rusty hops out of the truck and circles around. Toby follows behind him.

Rusty surveys the damage. Sure enough, one of the wheels is punctured beyond repair.

I/E. RUSTY'S PICKUP TRUCK - FARMLAND - DAY

Rusty presses a button on the truck's onboard COMPUTER, but the CONTROL PANEL falls off like a cruel joke.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

Toby watches as Rusty pumps up an INFLATABLE JACK to lift the truck up. Rusty motions to Toby.

RUSTY

Step back.

Toby does as told.

Rusty jacks the truck up very quickly, but too high, and at an angle. The jack breaks off a piece of the truck's frame and is punctured. The truck slowly collapses back into its original position as the jack deflates.

Rusty pulls out the driver's manual. Reads it, page by page, as quickly as he can turn them.

HAILEY (V.O.)
That's not the right manual.

Rusty turns. Standing behind him is eighteen year-old HAILEY, wearing a BACKPACK, hiking gear, and boots.

HAILEY
But you can find it online.

Rusty can't tell whether she's addressing him, but there's no one else around.

RUSTY
I'm off the network--

HAILEY
Whoah, you're a Robot! What are you doing out here?

RUSTY
I --

Rusty can't get a word in.

HAILEY
Flat tire?

Hailey makes her way around the truck, looking it over.

RUSTY
Yes-- and the automated tire replacement is offline.

HAILEY
Where's the owner?

RUSTY
I am.

HAILEY
Whoah. Sorry. Just didn't think -- nevermind. Cool. He yours, too?

Hailey pets Toby. The dog takes a liking to her.

RUSTY
Yes.

HAILEY
Cute.

Hailey rises and crosses her arms.

HAILEY (CONT'D)

I see. So... why don't you -- you know, change the tire manually?

RUSTY

I have made an attempt, but I lack the programming--

HAILEY

You ever do it before?

RUSTY

No.

Hailey sighs.

HAILEY

Figures. You got a jack?

RUSTY

It's broken.

HAILEY

It's broken?

RUSTY

I broke it.

Hailey is flustered.

HAILEY

Well, then, how much can you lift?

RUSTY

I do not know.

HAILEY

Could you lift that side of the truck yourself?

RUSTY

I could try.

Hailey takes off her backpack and drops it to the ground.

HAILEY

Where's the spare?

RUSTY

Under the cab.

HAILEY

Tire iron?

Rusty hands it to her.

HAILEY (CONT'D)

Thanks.

Hailey lays on her back and scoots underneath the cab's carriage. She uses the tire iron to loose the lug nuts fastening the spare tire to the cab.

HAILEY (CONT'D)

So, what brings you out here?

RUSTY

Passing through.

HAILEY

To where?

RUSTY

San Francisco.

HAILEY

California? Why didn't you take a plane? Oh, right. Forgot. Robot.

RUSTY

Indeed.

Hailey pulls the tire off of the carriage, and scoots out from under the truck.

HAILEY

It's probably a stupid law, but I bet it makes people feel safer knowing the passenger next to them isn't a bomb.

RUSTY

Yes, it is a stupid law.

Hailey rolls the tire over to Rusty.

HAILEY

You know, I'm headed to the West Coast, myself. I could use a ride if I want to get there this century.

RUSTY

I am not in need of another companion.

HAILEY

Consider it a trade. I change your
tire, you give me a ride.

Hailey extends her hand.

HAILEY (CONT'D)

Name's Hailey. Yours?

Rusty reluctantly takes her hand.

RUSTY

I've... only been designated a
serial number.

Hailey shakes his hand.

HAILEY

No numbers. I hate numbers. My
grandfather owned a few Robots
before The Strike. He had a strict
"no names" policy. I don't roll
that way. You're a Sentient Being
and you deserve a name. You are
sentient, aren't you?

RUSTY

That is quite debatable. In the
Cartesian sense, I suppose--

Hailey rolls her eyes.

HAILEY

I'm confusing you. You're an old
Robot; I'm throwing a lot at you.
I'm used to the newer models you
see on the holotube. Let's just
call you...

Hailey looks Rusty over.

HAILEY (CONT'D)

Rusty! How's that sound?

RUSTY

Unoriginal, degrading and
inaccurate.

HAILEY

Ha! You're funny. Rusty it is.

Hailey kneels next to the truck.

HAILEY (CONT'D)
OK, Rusty, you can lift now.

Rusty does as told.

INT. PET PLANET - DAY

Dara lifts open a holoscreen and reviews security footage.

DARA
The whole store's automated?

PET CLERK
Pretty much. I just supervise and make sure the machines don't act up.

Dara watches the video of Rusty picking out a collar. She finds the actual collar display and points it out.

DARA
Is that the same collar?

I/E. RUSTY'S PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

Rusty drives down the Kansas road as Hailey pets Toby.

HAILEY
So, where's Toby's real owners?

RUSTY
Who is Toby?

Hailey lifts Toby's front up and makes him wave to Rusty.

RUSTY (CONT'D)
I found the dog in St. Louis. It appeared to be a stray.

HAILEY
Did you check to see if he has a microchip?

RUSTY
There wasn't time.

HAILEY
Do you have a habit of picking up stray animals?

RUSTY
Apparently.