

The JudgeMan Cometh

“Quiet!”

“What?”

“I said quiet.”

“Yes, but why?”

“Just shut your mouth and listen.”

Two figures lie on the floor of a once convenient store which is now the home of our survivors. The shop is largely undisturbed except for a growing pile of candy wrappers rising near the magazines. Harry and Charles, the survivors, appear quite disturbed. Their hair is matted and split from weeks without washing. Blood shot eyes and deepening wrinkles from nights with little sleep and days with little access to skin care product. They are dressed in rumpled and stained collared shirts and skinny jeans which have recently gone out of style.

Outside moves what they are hearing. Its electronic motor hums, turning the gears which spin the duel rubber belt drives propelling the machine down the empty city block. Its head rotates constantly, sensors recording data equivalent to the five human senses. Midst its shell of reinforced solar panels resides the manufacturer’s badge, Toyota JudgeMan V3.

“Do you hear that?”

“Yes, it’s sort of a buzzing and humming and...”

“And! And!”

“And...and a voice, kind of like if Simon Cowell was speaking through a desk fan.”

“Speaking through a desk fan? Exactly! That’s a Judge-O-Bot out there. I can’t...I mean...if he comes in here. I know my clothes aren’t really in style anymore and that my front teeth aren’t perfectly straight, but I don’t need him telling me.”

“Right, so...”

“So shut up and stop your shouting so he doesn’t come strolling in!”

“Really though Harry, you’ve been doing the shouting.”

“Quiet! He’s close...for the love of God, be quiet!”

Silence, except for dust settling on unscratched lottery tickets. Even Judge-O-Bot is still. His artificial nose inhales and exhales collecting particles. There is a disturbance. A new smell, circulating in the sea of familiar. A mix of body spray and the B.O. it couldn’t entirely mask. A quick analysis of spatial particle density and Judge-O-Bot locates the smell’s source emanating from a convenience store.

The uncomfortable silence is broken by the chirping bell of the store’s door. Judge-O-Bot turns to face our survivors, prepares his British Talent Show Judge voice simulator (BTSJvs), and...

“Who do we have here? A poorly executed Jonah Hill impersonator and a Channing Tatum wannabe who’s lacking in muscles, basic good looks, and a sense of style that changes with the changing times.”

“I...we’ll... you’re made of metal and it’s a stupid metal.”

“You’re wit sparkles like a diamond sweet heart. But it’s hard to take someone with 5 o’clock shadow consisting of Cheetos and bits of rice crispy seriously...and what is that smell?”

“I don’t smell...I don’t smell! Do I smell Charles? Do I?”

Charles shakes his head in a noncommittal circle. Honesty is the best policy, but sometimes life requires lying or simply abstaining from the truth.

“See Judge-O-Bot, Charles thinks I smell great.”

“Charles thinks like a politician speaks, inaccurately. In reality, you smell like a rat crawled into a can of body spray and died and the rat is covered in its own feces. You smell like you’re covered in your own feces.”

(Harry was covered in his own feces, but often times it is the truth which hurts most.) Harry’s eyes roll back in his head. His body is shaking violently. His thrusting arms and flailing legs sweep out a horrified snow angel on the linoleum tile floor. Charles grabs at Harry’s limbs, they stop, but Harry is already gone and so is Judge-O-Bot.

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At the end of the 20th century humanity began its love affair with television programs designed to exploit insecurity for public enjoyment. But three decades of reality TV, talent shows, and the documentation of failed weight loss were not enough. So Toyota created the JudgeMan V1 for use on American Idol. It was designed to destroy the psyche, to use science, math, and dry British wit to find and attack our deepest insecurities. The judgmental masses swarmed to his insults, Toyota made more. Soon he walked the streets, lived in our homes, and worked in department stores helping people find jeans that didn’t make their asses look huge. As it happens our self-loathing appetites could be satisfied and over stimulated causing intense anxiety and the eventual snapping of the mind resulting in death. Millions have gone the way of Harry, destroyed by words. Charles is not the last, but each time the JudgeMan comes, he leaves another dead.

“That explanation is rushed, lacking in depth and plausibility.”

Damn you Judge-O-Bot. Damn you.