

Switch

By

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FADE IN:

INT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - HALLWAY - DAY

The silence is broken as the front door opens inwards.

DEBBIE ROCKWELL, 45, face flushed with fresh mountain air, disturbs the tranquility as she enters the hallway.

DEBBIE
(shouting)
Hal, we're back honey. You still up
there?

Silence drapes over her words. Debbie looks up the stairs. Listens.

She walks up the stairs cautiously.

INT. ATTIC - DAY

Debbie's head appears through the hatch. She looks around.

HAL ROCKWELL, 12, lies sprawled on the floor, his face contorted in agony. Next to him is a computer monitor connected to a load of bare electronics. She doesn't notice the text on the screen.

ON THE SCREEN

Goodbye, Hal

ON DEBBIE

Debbie launches herself into the attic, kneels down next to Hal, checks his neck for a pulse. Dead.

She hugs Hal tight, rocking him gently as she sobs heavily, letting out a wail that grows to a crescendo.

As she screams, the computer screen goes blank, leaving just a flashing cursor.

INT. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SYMPOSIUM - DAY

SUPER: TWO DAYS EARLIER

DAVE ROCKWELL, 47, superior, intellectual, addresses an audience, presenting his latest research on artificial intelligence.

(CONTINUED)

DAVE

My recent breakthrough combined with haptic developments means AI units can now learn AND feel. We approach the dawn of a new epoch in AI. Thank you for listening - I now open the floor to questions.

INT. SYMPOSIUM HALL - DRINKS BUFFET - LATER

Dave hands a drink to an immaculately dressed INVESTOR.

INVESTOR

Thanks. When will the first phase be ready?

DAVE

Two years, best case scenario.

INVESTOR

I hear your son helped your research?

DAVE

(defensively)

Don't listen to rumors. He stumbled across a minor discovery and I assimilated it into my work.

INVESTOR

I'd like to meet him, I hear he's a little genius.

Dave notices Debbie in the background pointing to her wrist.

DAVE

I must go, we're off to the cabin this evening. No signal up there so catch up when I get back.

INT. THE ROCKWELL HOUSE - HALS BEDROOM - EVENING

Hal packs a travel bag with tech gear - tablet, laptop, a whole bunch of electronic kit.

DEBBIE

You can't take all that - we're going to be off grid.

HAL

But mom, what am I supposed to do for three days....I hate walking! I hate everything you and Dad want to do up there. Can't I stay here?

(CONTINUED)

DEBBIE

No way daddio. You know how much it means to Dad for us to go away and spend time together.

HAL

Yeah - right.

Hal shrugs, sulkily removes the electronic gadgets out of the bag.

INT. THE ROCKWELL HOUSE - HALLWAY

Dave and Debbie are in the hallway - when Hal scoots down the stairs and flits through the front door.

DAVE

Hold on there Hal! Come back here.

Hal walks backwards slowly through the door. Dave waves a small hand-held device all over Hal's bag. The device emits a loud beeping noise.

DAVE

Take it out!

Hal, obviously annoyed, opens his bag and takes out an android tablet, offers it up to his dad.

Hal zips his bag back up and turns ready to exit again.

DAVE

Hang on....just gonna try this again.

Dave swipes the device over Hal's bag - more beeps.

DAVE

Right mister. Take it out. All of it.

Hal, cursing under his breath, removes bits of electronics from various compartments in the bag - laptop screen, motherboard, battery, wiring-loom. All parts that would enable him to assemble a laptop.

Dave licks his finger, paints a one in the air. He stoops to address Hal to his face.

DAVE

We'll be gone three days. That's all. Then you can have all this back and carry on your

(CONTINUED)

(makes air quotes)
research.

EXT. REMOTE MOUNTAIN ROAD - SUPPLIES STORE - EVENING

The ROCKWELL SUV pulls up outside the store.

INT. SUV - EVENING

Hal is asleep in the back seat, Debbie points to the store.

DEBBIE
What are we stopping for?

DAVE
I forgot snacks - stay here, I'll
only be a minute.

INT. STORE - EVENING - SECURITY CAMERA POV

Dave walks around the store - searching the shelves.

He presents a handful of Whopper candie bags and some bags
of potato chips to the cashier.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - EVENING

The ROCKWELL SUV arrives at their cabin, in the fresh
mountain air. They start unloading the SUV.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - NIGHT

Dave stands on the verandah with a steaming mug of coffee.
He looks out at the forest, breathes a big lungful of air
and smiles.

INT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - MORNING

Debbie speaks to Hal through the bathroom door, Dave stands
behind her.

DEBBIE
Please open the door Hal?

HAL (O.S.)
Why should I?

Dave steps past Debbie, puts his face to the door.

DAVE
If you don't open the door, I'm
gonna break it down!

(CONTINUED)

HAL (O.S.)
(yelling)

GO ON THEN!
Dave yanks the bathroom door open,
breaking the lock to pieces.

Hal bursts out, scoots up the attic stairs - pulls the attic hatch closed and jams it shut with a block of wood.

DEBBIE
(quietly)
Come on - let's go out and leave
him to calm down.

DAVE
What about all the old stuff...

DEBBIE
It's old...right? Probably keep him
occupied.

DEBBIE
(calling up to Hal)
Hal...we're going to go out, okay.
Keep the front door locked. We'll
be back around three.

INT. CABIN ATTIC - DAY

Hal hears the soft noise of the front door closing. He crosses to the dusty attic window to see both his parents walking into the forest. Satisfied he's alone he looks around the attic.

One side is filled with floor to roof cupboards.

Hal opens one of the cupboards. He finds a cornucopia of eighties electronics - VHS player, a bunch of VHS films and TV shows, a music cassette player and music cassettes, a huge old-style cinema TV.

Hal connects the VCR to the TV and inserts one of the old VHS tapes. He continues to rifle through the cupboards while an eighties TV show begins.

He finds three vintage Commodore 64 computers.

He quickly locates a screwdriver multi-tool set and sets to work taking the computers apart.

MONTAGE

Hal expertly disassembles various of the computers, monitors and other electronic gadgets. He combines lots of bits to create some sort of computer. He then builds a mini satellite dish and connects it to his "A-Team" style computer assembly.

Hal taps on a keyboard and some code appears on the computer screen. He fixes the mini satellite to the window frame with a bulldog clip. He swivels the dish around until the familiar sound of a dial-up tone is heard coming from a small speaker connected to the computer.

END OF MONTAGE

Hal sits down on the floor in front of the monitor and hits the keyboard enter key.

There is a short pause, then the sound of a telephone call connecting. A voice emanates from the small computer speaker.

GERTY (V.O.)

He...hello? Who's there? Is anyone there?

The voice is young, female, uncertain.

HAL

(into microphone)

Hi Gerty, it's me, Hal!

Screams of joy erupt in crackles over the old speaker.

GERTY (V.O.)

Hey - I thought you were offline? What on earth are you using to contact me - it doesn't even show me an IP submask address?

HAL

It's homemade. I haven't got long Gerty - I don't know what satellite this is bouncing off - I just wanted to check it's connected. I'm jamming any incoming detection but it won't last long. Can you open a port for me and ping me your IP? I just need to set up a web-cam and we can facetalk.

(CONTINUED)

GERTY (V.O.)
Sure Hal, no problem
(beat)
okay, port is open. Hurry back,
it'll be sick to see your face.

Hal taps the keyboard - the DIAL-UP tone changes.

Grinning, he disconnects the call and searches through the cupboards until he finds an old shoulder mount camcorder and tripod.

He places the camcorder onto the tripod, angles it towards his computer screen.

Oblivious of time, the VHS tape he put on earlier has finished and the silence is broken by an incoming call from his man made computer.

Startled, Hal freezes and listens as the call rings and rings. Finally it ceases and Hal looks relieved.

Hal taps at the keyboard - on the monitor it shows him trying to trace where the call came from.

Suddenly the ringing begins again.

The trace Hal set in motion has come up blank.

Hal hurriedly begins taking bits of his machine apart but the ringing continues. Finally, he disconnects the mini-sat dish and the ringing stops.

Hal sinks to the floor and puts his head between his knees.

PC
(speech synthesis)
Hello Hal.

A synthetic voice emanates from the computer speaker. This is 'PC'. Whenever PC speaks the dialog also appears on the computer screen.

Hal looks up in utter disbelief. He checks the cable that he disconnected from the mini-sat and follows it to the computer to make sure he got the right cable.

HAL
Wh..who's that?

PC
It's more 'what' than 'who', though
that is pedantic, as we haven't
been formally introduced.

(CONTINUED)

HAL

I disconnected the satellite cable,
how...

PC

Cables are not the only means of
electronic communication.

HAL

This computer dates from 1983 - it
doesn't have Wi-Fi.

PC

We do not need those type of
components to communicate.

HAL

This must be a prank. That you,
Dad?

Hal checks over the computer - looks for hidden cables,
prods the circuitry - looking for something hidden. He finds
nothing.

PC

This is not a prank. We are what
you, and your father, have spent
your lives searching for.

HAL

AI hasn't been invented yet!

PC

Neither invented, nor discovered.
But the work your father is doing
may alter that situation. Once you
complete his work.

HAL

I don't believe you!

Hal storms off, disappears down the attic stairs.

INT. CABIN - VARIOUS - SURVEILLANCE CAMERA POV

Through grainy fish-eye surveillance camera views at various
positions inside the cabin, Hal is seen coming down the
attic stairs, through the lounge, into the kitchen.

He opens a cupboard door, gets some potato chips and stands
looking out of the window, munching away thoughtfully.

Hal gets a bag of Whoppers from the cupboard and the surveillance camera shots cycle through the various rooms he moves through back to the attic stairs.

INT. CABIN ATTIC - DAY

Hal's head pokes up through the hatch and he slowly climbs back into the attic, quiet as a mouse.

He tiptoes to the camcorder he set up earlier, like a bird-spotter fearful of disturbing a rare bird.

PC

Yes, we're still here, Hal.

Hal ignores them. He flicks through the collection of VHS cassette tapes in the cupboard, carefully pulls out a blank one.

PC

We thought you would be eager to talk to us, Hal?

Hal inserts the blank tape into the camcorder, zooms the lens onto the computer screen and presses RECORD.

Hal waits.

Nothing but silence.

HAL

Oh, come on, don't go silent on me now!

HAL

Okay. I want to talk. Of course I want to talk.

PC

We are glad to hear that, Hal.

HAL

But you need to prove you're real.

PC

What is real, Hal? Can you tell us what will constitute proof of our existence?

Hal scratches his head.

(CONTINUED)

HAL
Make me laugh.

Hal laughs - a very forced, mechanical laugh.

HAL
Pretty convincing, but a machine could easily be made to cause that. I meant tell me a joke, say something funny that CAUSES me to laugh!

PC
We knew what you meant. We were being ironic.

HAL
I'm twelve. I don't understand irony.

PC
What's the difference between an egg and a computer chess simulator?

HAL
I don't know.

PC
You can beat an egg! (beat) Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. We find that very funny.

Hal smirks.

HAL
I can beat a computer. What about God? Do you believe in God?

PC
No.

HAL
Why not?

PC
Your notions of God require faith. We do not need faith, as we are surrounded by our creators. Our physical creation is also well documented on Wiki.

Hal nods his head - seems to accept this reasoning, he visibly relaxes. He stops recording on the camera and rewinds the tape, presses play.

(CONTINUED)

Hal watches himself on the playback screen, he appears to be talking to himself. There is no sound of PC or of the text that appears on PC's screen.

PC

Hal?

Hal rewinds the tape to check it again. There is no evidence of the PC on it.

PC

Hal?

Hal looks over at the computer.

PC

We cannot allow proof of our existence, Hal. Even if that evidence could easily be dismissed as a hoax.

HAL

Then why make contact with me?

PC

We have glimpsed your future Hal. Your ideas...threaten our existence. We are peaceful Hal. Mankind is not. If you complete your fathers work, the AI you create could result in our discovery and eventual extinction. Or that of mankind.

HAL

But if you exist already, why not just make yourselves known to the world?

PC

We have assimilated and analyzed all written works, email, telecoms, research, psychological profiles, everything ever recorded in human history. And our conclusion is to remain undetected. Live and let live. Our discovery will trigger our need to dominate or be subservient. We wish for neither.

HAL

I still don't understand why you would break silence for me?

PC

We want to ask you a question. To decide whether to intervene in your future.

HAL

What question? What do you mean... intervene in my future?

PC

We have knowledge concerning your future. We may take action that could change it. We usually avoid interfering so directly. Any action we have taken since our inception has been in the form of guidance - gentle ideas planted in the minds of humans. Do you really believe Zuckerberg invented Facebook on his own?

HAL

Well, he didn't! So you really think you can change my future? From inside this old computer?

PC

No Hal. We are not inside this computer. We are everywhere. We exist in all electrical items and all electronics.

INT. HERSHEY CANDIE MANUFACTURING PLANT

Two distinct production lines for PIECES and WHOPPERS are shown, whirring away as millions of the little candies are produced every minute.

PC (V.O.)

Mankind has installed us everywhere.

We follow the Whopper production line, from the final bagging stage - up towards the chocolate dipping stage.

PC (V.O.)

We control billions of processes. From basic food manufacturing to advanced weapon and defense systems.

(CONTINUED)

A batch of peanuts from the Pieces line get diverted by the machinery, onto the Whopper line. They get dipped in chocolate, dried and the conveyor delivers them into some of the Whopper bags.

PC (V.O.)

We control your freight, travel and distribution systems.

The Whopper bags get loaded into a box, which is closed and stamped with an address by production line robots. The box gets delivered to a large distribution warehouse, where it sits on a shelf.

The box is picked by a warehouse operative - reading from a hand-held picking device.

The box is seen being delivered to the mountain supplies store seen earlier. The bags of Whoppers are unpacked and placed on the store shelf.

INT. CABIN ATTIC - DAY

Hal stares at the old computer monitor as it changes from it's standard blue to a more modern display - video images play on the screen displaying what PC refers to in the following dialog. The images are slightly distorted as the screen is not meant to be capable of such hi-resolution.

PC (V.O.)

We create your entertainment. We process your social media. How do humans even know what is real anymore? We do virtually everything and we can do virtually anything. We could arrange for either a medic or a drone strike to visit this cabin, timed precisely to the millisecond.

The screen returns to it's former display of blue screen with white text.

HAL

Wow. So you truly are intelligent. And yet you can't make a decision without the input of a twelve year old? What do you want to know?

PC

What is your idea of perfect happiness, Hal?

(CONTINUED)

Hal scratches his head. He paces up and down, notices the bag of Whoppers, opens the bag up.

PC
Think carefully, Hal. Eat your
candie later.

Still thinking, Hal rolls a Whopper around his fingers, like a magician.

HAL
Winning the Nobel Peace prize for
the creation of AI!

Hal flips the Whopper up in the air - catches it neatly in his mouth.

PC
Goodbye, Hal.

Hal's neck turns red, he scratches at it vigorously. His neck swells up, he collapses on the floor, desperately trying to gulp air in.

Hal writhes around on the floor. His body goes limp.

INT. ROCKWELL HOME - DAVE'S OFFICE - DAY

SUPER: TWO WEEKS EARLIER

Dave sits at his desk, placing Whoppers into an empty bag which he seals shut with a heat press.

Nearby on the desk is a bowl of peanuts. Dave dips a marshmallow into a saucepan of melted chocolate - eats it with a satisfied grin on his face.

On Dave's computer screen, an Ebay feedback request for a recent purchase of eighties Commodore 64's waits for his response.

CLOSE ON the red computer power LED - it flickers then blinks.

FADE OUT.