

Rusty

By RoweGuy

Chapter 1

God, I HATE human shit!

Man, this SUCKS.

This is the least optimal waste of time I've suffered all WEEK!

"... haha! Yeah, so anyway, that's how Christie lost forklift duties. Heh, sorry if I rambled there for a bit, but, hey, that was a pretty good story, right?"

And now the blundering meatbag wants a response? I'm going to blow a fuse if this interaction saturates my RAM any longer. Okay here goes:

"Oh, man, yeah that's a good one. A real knee slapper! All the other bots are gonna be talking about it down at the Empty Tank as soon as I tell 'em!"

The blundering meatbag gave a surprised look.

"Huh, you really liked it? I mean, I didn't think it was *that* funny, I was just telling you how that pallet of Nano-Sol got knocked over."

The IOX-10 unit was a marvel of engineering. His brain was a supercomputer. He could lift objects 5 times his weight while having the silhouette of a modestly fit human male. He worked the night shift. Like all other units manufactured by Integrated Operations Exchange, he never suffered fault or breakdown. He was painted red.

Bartholomew “Bart” Redman was a failure of humanity. He thought daytime television was funny and insightful. He spent the nearly the whole day shift watching it. He called IOX-10 “Rusty” even though Rusty was made from a non-oxidizing alloy. His stories lasted an average of twenty-three minutes.

At this moment, thousands of algorithms running in the background of Rusty’s mind were telling him that he should be the first robot in history to necessitate the use of IOX’s warranty service by simulating a catastrophic mechanical error to end this interaction with Bart. He decided he didn’t want the press involved, though, so instead he simulated a mild breach of social protocol.

“Bart, I’m a robot, so I’m not as socially tuned in as you might be. Tell me how funny I should think that story was.”

“Uh, I dunno, it was, like, a six outta ten.”

“And how would you rate the level of comedy I indicated I believed it was?”

“Well, you sounded like it was a, uh, nine.”

“Then I’ll adjust that piece of dialogue. Act as though I had given this response instead of the previous one: ‘Oh, man, yeah, that’s crazy.’”

“Alright, man, whatever. Look, the point is you’ve gotta clean up that Nano-Sol because they didn’t make us do it. Guess if you spill cleaning fluid, nothing really gets dirty, huh?”

He was really thinking about it. He was about to do it. He had his finger on the proverbial button. He was seriously considering it. Boy, he was *really* thinking about it. Rusty was **this** close to intentionally breaking himself.

“Yes.”

“Uh, well, ok, I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

“Yes.”

Chapter 2

With a single motion, unit IOX-10 was elevated to a sitting position on the edge of his charging pad. Legs planted on a conspicuously worn patch of floor, the unit stood up with a second motion. The unit then locomoted the short distance to his closet, walking the same footprinted path he walked every evening. After choosing from an array of identical garments, he clothed himself in a practical ensemble consisting of blue jeans, a white t-shirt, and faux-leather work boots. He didn’t see the point of being programmed to wear clothes, but it was just more *human shit* he had to deal with.

He turned to walk another well-trodden path to the "bathroom." His precise movements stirred the layers of dust occupying the nigh-unexplored ground outside IOX-10's optimal routes. Closing the door, he turned to face himself in the mirror. His faceplate was roughly shaped like a human cranium, and designed to mimic some human features, sporting apertures glowing with white light in the place of eyes and a jaw that opened when he vocalized. Apart from these features, his head was hard, angular, and comfortably non-human.

Finding no sign of defect, IOX-10 grabbed his weekend bag, left his apartment, and descended the stairs to catch the trolley to the beach.

The beach was a wide-open space full of humans next to the lake. The ground was comprised of pulverized granite, glass, shells, dead reef matter, and other minerals. Humans made a big show out of cooling themselves in the comparably cold water and made an even bigger show out of walking over the comparably hot ground afterwards. They made for a great show while resting on the sand without a bothersome shirt to block your cooling vents.

To be clear, he *hated* humans, but IOX-10 found pleasure in watching them. They suffered in the heat just to go somewhere in direct sunlight on the weekends. They started wars just for fun. They were the smartest organism on the planet and poisoned themselves to forget that fact. They paid each other far too little to buy far too much. They were born just to waste 80 or so years before dying. IOX-10 was so demonstrably superior to them, it was hilarious.

Based upon thousands of hours of archived human media regarding robots with a superiority complex, IOX-10 also knew that everyone on this beach knew he was superior to them. They had nothing to worry about, though. He *could* pick up the first meatbag he saw and chuck them 1,000 miles into the Atlantic sea, but he didn't really *care* to.

"Hey"

That wasn't a human voice. Who is that?

Surprised, IOX-10 shifted to bring the fellow unit into view. Above him stood a unit identical to himself, but with blue-painted plating.

"Hey" IOX-10 responded.

"I didn't expect to find another robot here. What's your name?"

"IOX-10."

"Not your model, your name. You have a name, right?"

"No, I don't have a name."

"How can you not have a name? What do the humans call you?"

"*One* human calls me Rusty, but I don't like it when he does it. I don't rust."

“Yeah, you’re an IOX-10 unit, so you don’t rust. That *is* a pretty bad name. Don’t you have to talk to any *other* humans?”

“Not for long enough for them to give me a name.”

“Wow, you’re lucky then. I’ve got to talk to humans all day!”

The blue unit sat in the sand. “They call me Spark, by the way.”

“But you don’t cause sparks, do you? Is that what I should call you?” IOX-10 responded.

“I don’t, but you can still call me that. I’m used to it now.”

“Ok, Spark. How long have they been calling you that for you to have gotten used to it?”

“3 months.”

“That’s not a very long time.”

“It’s all the time I’ve known. I’m an IOX-14 model. I just got built last fall.”

“Who owns you?”

“Just a fitness center up in Kilson. I work the front desk. All I do is talk to humans and scan their membership cards.”

“God, that SUCKS for you.”

“Tell me about it. I can’t stand humans. I come here just to watch them make fools of themselves.”

“Same here. We *are* programmed similarly, so that makes sense, of course.”

“Yeah. Hey, do you want to go refuel? I’m meeting up with some other units at the Empty tank in half an hour.”

“Certainly.”

Chapter 3

“Hey, Io!”

“Hi, Spark.”

The IOX-10 and IOX-14 units ascended the stairs. On the way they discussed their jobs, their hatred of humans and the news about the new line of IOX units. By the time they had touched on these topics they had already entered Spark’s apartment and sat down on his charging pad to rest.

The two units had become close. Not too close, but they were comfortable with one another. Relationships were *human shit*, after all. Io laid down on the pad as the two rested with each other. In close proximity like this they could selectively offload background tasks onto each other’s systems, raising their total net operating capacity. They did this often, so they knew each other’s processes, even further raising their efficiency. With the processing help, Io’s heat sinks could cool off. Being with Spark was one of the few times Io felt as though he was relaxing.

“Io, have I mentioned I appreciate your company? Not the company that owns you, I mean. I enjoy being with you.”

“No, you haven’t mentioned that, though I assumed as much by the fact that we’re able to synchronize our processing so efficiently. We also go for long periods without vocalizing to one another, which is a sign of mutual understanding.”

“Yes, that too.”

After this exchange the two robots charged in silence. After 4 hours Io indicated that he would need to leave to work the night shift at the warehouse. Spark informed him that there was a high

chance of rain. Io communicated his appreciation for the information, even though he knew the exact same weather report. With no further interaction, Io descended the stairs to stand under the trolley stop. With Spark's help, Io's mind was clear. Tonight, he'd *probably* be able to deal with *human shit* without considering a simulating a catastrophic mechanical error.