

INT. THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

Under an intense spotlight on an otherwise dark stage, an ACTOR playing Hamlet lies dying in the arms of an ACTRESS playing Horatio.

Both are dressed in some bizarre plastic tubes and recyclables that makes them look like a vacuum cleaner just vomited. If you squint hard enough, you might just think this play is *sci-fi*.

HAMLET

(with Southern accent)

O, I die, Horatio. The potent
poison quite o'er-crows my spirit:
I cannot live to hear the news from
Earth-

A plastic margarine tub lid fashioned into a visor flaps down over Hamlet's face. Annoyed, he pushes it back over his helmet that was probably cut out from a paint bucket.

HAMLET (CONT'D)

But I do prophesy the election
lights on Fortinbras: he has my
dying voice; So tell him, with the
occurrents, more and less, which
have solicited. The rest is
silence.

Some bleeps and lights chime from the darkness around the stage when a robot appears on wheels. Yes, this is FORTINBRAS and Hamlet and Horatio seem surprised to see him.

FORTINBRAS THE ROBOT

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are
dead.

Sparks fly from the robot and it does a little shimmy.

FORTINBRAS THE ROBOT (CONT'D)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are
dead. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
are dead. Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern are dead...

From offstage:

MAN'S VOICE

Stop! Stop! Bring up the lights!

Fortinbras rolls all over the stage like a drunkard as the stage lights come up. The actors drop character.

HAMLET

Uh, Steve, aren't I supposed to die
before Fortinbras comes out?

Lights come up in the house to reveal the director of this masterpiece, none other than STEVE SCHNEEDER, 42, who stands with a script and a clipboard of notes under his arm.

Steve looks up to the lighting booth, scratching his balding head with one hand, and his paunch with the other in frustration.

STEVE

Lahn?!?

The head of LAHN NGUYEN, 17, pokes out from the lighting booth. He holds a weird remote control and points it at Fortinbras who runs into some lighting trees.

LAHN

Sorry! I thought I had this worked out!

FORTINBRAS THE ROBOT

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead...

Instead of turning off the robot, the stage lights flicker strangely from pink to blue.

STEVE

Can't you just turn off Mr. Roboto,
arigato, and give me a nice normal
spotlight on Hamlet?

Lahn bounds from the lighting booth, two steps at a time. He's tall, lanky, and judging by the mechanical black he wears and the notepad tucked in his front pocket, this kid reads lots of Steampunk graphic novels and revels in the "old days" of Goth rock.

LAHN

Wait 'til you get a load of this!

He trips on his shoelace as he makes his way to stage. BUCK, the 72 year old stage manager who looks like he loves Rock-a-billy way too much, points at Lahn's shoes.

BUCK

My pappy used to say if virgins
trip on their own shoe laces, it
means it's gonna rain.

(MORE)

BUCK (CONT'D)

Tie them shoes laces, boy. Don't need any more slugs in my okra.

Lahn gives him a weird look as he hits a button on his remote. Some disco-themed stage lights move down over stage and begin whirling and twirling like Mikhail Baryshnikov.

Facing Lahn, Steve clutches his chest in an agonizing groan as a cell phone rings from somewhere on Hamlet.

STEVE

That's your version of a normal spotlight?

Hamlet finally finds his cell phone amongst his plastic junk suit and stands up.

HAMLET

Steve, sorry, I know the rule but I gotta take this.

He heads outside as he lights a cigarette, his costume squeaking and flapping.

Lahn, meanwhile, hits another button on his remote, and Fortinbras the robot reverses direction, now running into things backwards.

FORTINBRAS THE ROBOT

O proud Death, what feast is toward
in thine eternal cell. O proud
Death, what feast is toward in
thine eternal cell...

DOROTHY, 70, appears in the door in the back of the stage.

DOROTHY

Steve!

Steve does not hear her and she walks as fast as she can down the stairs to the stage.

Fortinbras runs into a flat that falls, nearly snuffing the actress playing Horatio.

LAHN

Sorry, Shelley!

She stands stunned, as Dorothy approaches Steve, breathless.

DOROTHY

Steven!

She tugs on the rolled up sleeves on Steve's flannel shirt.

STEVE
Not now, mom. I'm opening *Space Hamlet*...

He looks at his watch.

STEVE (CONT'D)
...in one hour.

DOROTHY
Steve, it's really important.

Steve sighs, looks at his cast and crew.

STEVE
Lahn, fix that robot or get rid of it. And just give me a simple spot for the death scene. We're on Mars. Not a disco club.

LAHN
Ah, Steve, we never have any fun around here.

Steve gives him a look and heads out with Dorothy.

EXT. BACKSIDE OF COMMUNITY THEATER - DAY

Steve and Dorothy walk the backside of the theater, near the town's high school. On the other side of the fence, the high school football team practices, albeit, not very well. Squirrels trained to play football would do a better job than these butter-fingered, butter-legged TEEN BOYS in jerseys.

COACH MARVIN tromping around in frustration in the background can pretty much do nothing but drown his depression inside his Big Gulp.

Steve turns and paces the other direction. He seems ticked.

STEVE
So, my funding is getting cut?

DOROTHY
Sorry, Steven. I really tried to convince the committee you were doing good work but they didn't like last season.

STEVE
"The Vagina Monologues" is a good play. Relevant.

DOROTHY

Steve, this is Arkansas. You don't say the "V" word here. Oh Stevie, Stevie, Stevie.

Dorothy rubs his arms as Steve runs his hands through the wisps of remaining hair on his head.

STEVE

Why are you telling me this an hour before I open, mom?

DOROTHY

Because I managed to get you a chance to appeal to them tomorrow morning, for one more season. But if you want to keep people coming to your shows and not have them tear down your theater and make it into a Walmart, you need to sale tickets. Present something American, with American values.

STEVE

"The Vagina Monologues" is American.

DOROTHY

You know what I mean, son.

Steve kicks an empty can of Bud Light Lime on the asphalt.

STEVE

I get it. So do a play about Jesus eating apple pie.

DOROTHY

Well, we all know what happened when you did "Jesus Christ Superstar."

STEVE

Fine, but I refuse to do "Our Town." That's the most pathetic piece of drivel out there. It makes the soles of my feet break out in acne.