

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A single highway cuts through the landscape. All around is fog and overcast, grey skies. The tops of bushes and tall grass penetrate the fog. There is no sign of life on the highway but one. SAM, 18, country boy, dirty blue jumpsuit, tinkers with a powered suit inside the cockpit. Prodigal Son is written next to the hatch on the torso. The suit sits in a kneeling position.

SAM

All right, let's give that a try.

Suit starts up. HUM, WHIR, LOUD FART. A cloud of black smoke bursts out of the exhaust vents on the back.

SAM (CONT'D)

God, damn it.

Sam gets out of the cockpit, onto the lap and onto the road. Starts walking. TRUCK HORN. Sam turns around. MIKE, 60, balding, mustache, beard, homely face sits in the cabin.

MIKE

Where ya headed?

SAM

Anywhere that's not here.

MIKE

That's where I'm going. Let me pop the crane and I'll get your suit. Hop in.

Sam nods, opens the door, gets in.

INT. CABIN - DAY

The cabin is well maintained. Very few crumbs and dirt. No dust on the dashboard. The leather seats old, but intact.

MIKE

Mike.

Mike offers Sam a handshake. Sam takes it.

SAM

Sam.

Same buckles up. Mike taps a clear console on the dashboard. MECHANICAL WHINE, METALLIC THUD, MECHANICAL WHINE, HEAVY THUD. Mike pops the clutch and drives down the freeway.

SAM (CONT'D)

Thanks for the ride, Mike. The Son doesn't do so well when it's raining. Or humid. Or ever, really.

MIKE

Don't mention it. Where can I drop ya off? Home?

SAM

Anywhere except home.

MIKE

Trouble?

SAM

You might say that.

Mike nods.

MIKE

Your parents find your porn stash?

Sam laughs.

SAM

No, that's got a three layer-encryption on it. My Dad thinks he's going to get me to take over the nerf ranch once he retires.

MIKE

What, you don't like nerf Burgers?

Sam looks at Mike.

SAM

Do I look like a nerf herder to you?

Mike shakes his head, smiles.

SAM (CONT'D)

That powered suit you loaded up? I made that. Scavenged all the parts, put it together, painted it and named it.

Sam holds his hands up to the heater.

SAM (CONT'D)

And it's not the only one. I made a quad legged power loader, with no A.I. to assist, and got it working.

Sam pulls out his phone and shows Mike an holographic image.

SAM (CONT'D)

What did Dad do? He sold it to a scrap dealer. I said I hope a meteor crashes and kills everything but him.

MIKE

Yeah, I about said the same to my Pappy when last I saw him. Shame I didn't get the chance to tell him sorry before he died.

Sam's jaw falls open.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I don't suppose you've got your permit for that powered suit? It's got a micro-fusion reactor.

The truck jumps. An object falls off the dashboard. Sam picks it up.

MIKE (CONT'D)

You need a class 3 license to drive it in an urban area. If we get to Von Braun and you don't have it on you, I'm gonna have to take you in.

Sam looks at the badge. He gulps, sweat covers his forehead.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Legal issues aside, you really like tinkering and making these things, huh?

SAM

Yeah... I guess I always have been. I was always reading how-to sites and making stuff outta local scrap. I love it.

Sam pulls out his phone.

SAM (CONT'D)

Would you believe that The Son has a movable frame? You wouldn't think so right? Most are monocoque.

The phone displays a hologram of two different suits.

SAM (CONT'D)

The only reason The Son broke down is crap parts. If he had let me get real parts for it, it could've made all the way to Von Braun and back.

MIKE

You sound like you're pretty good at this. Did you ever tell your Pappy that's what you want to do?

SAM

Why bother? All he thinks about is nerf herding, and raising me to do it when he dies.

MIKE

Maybe if you just tell him, respectfully, he'll understand. There is a market for these things.

Sam frowns, lowers his head.

MIKE (CONT'D)

If my boy sounded as excited as you about something, I'd be pleased as punch. So long as he loves it.

Sam nods, looks out the window.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Mike's truck pulls up next to a lonely, rusty solar charging station. Mike gets out, opens a panel behind the door and plugs heavy cable from the truck into the charger. Sam gets out, paces in circles, hands in his pockets.

SAM

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

A truck with a drone carrier trailer pulls into the station. Smoke rises from the underside. Sam stops, looks at the truck. Walks to the driver, converses with him, walks back to Mike.

SAM (CONT'D)

Hey Mike, do you have any pressing business in Von Braun?

MIKE

Can't say that I do.

SAM

I made a deal with that trucker. I
fix the leak in the reactor shield,
and he gives me a manure drone.

Mike looks around the front of his car.

MIKE

What's the drone for?

SAM

Something to get me out of doing his
dirty work.

Mike gives him a look, frowns, tilts his head.

MIKE

What is this, Sam? You think
getting a crapper drone is gonna
fix things with your Pappy?

SAM

No, but one thing is for sure: he
hates doing it. And I'm never doing
it again either.

MIKE

So this is?

SAM

A peace offering. If I bring this
back, I might be able to patch
things up and get Dad to listen.

Mike nods, unplugs the cables from the charger.

MIKE

So, he's gonna deliver the drone to
your Pappy's farm?

SAM

Not exactly. He's going in the
opposite direction, so I need a
favor from you. Would you please
turn around?