

CHARLES ENTERTAINMENT CHEESE

Written by

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INT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

RICK MADDOW (late 50s, with city miles and an eight o'clock shadow underscoring sleepless blue eyes) sits in a police cruiser, nursing a blue and white Greek printed cup of coffee. Heavy sheets of rain blur the neon lights and garish advertisements outside the car's tinted windows.

Next to him sits an advanced humanoid police robot named NED whose scratchy radio voice rattles off crimes from dispatch.

NED

321 in progress at the corner of
Oracle and Musk avenue. Monetary
value of property - negligible.
Disregard. Three potential
casualties reported. Assessment:
officer intervention not required
at this time.

Rick shakes his head at the callousness of his "partner". He unscrews a top of his dented flask, hiding it from Ned's camera, and tops off the coffee. He gives it a stir with his finger, then flicks it off.

NED (CONT'D)

187-C reported at 4355-A South
Bezos block. Officer requested:
Detective Rick Maddow.

Rick startles at his name, spills the coffee on his chest.

RICK

Shit! Ah, hell.

He dabs at the coffee with his ratty tie, but that spill isn't going anywhere. Ned's voice switches from the scratchy dispatch voice to a smooth, human voice with a vaguely European accent.

NED

Rick Maddow, I believe your
presence has been requested.

RICK

Yeah, yeah. I heard it.
(under his breath)
Ya overgrown tin can.

NED

We have discussed this, Rick
Maddow. All NED units are made of a
durable carbon fiber polymer. Not
tin.

Rick rolls his eyes.

RICK
You couldn't pay me to care.

He waves his hand for the holographic UI display and the car's electric engine revs up, barely making a noise. Rick sighs, shaking his head in disgust.

RICK
(to himself)
Fuck, I miss real cars.
(to Ned)
And stop using my name so much. It
creeps me out.

Rick flicks the siren on and pulls the car out into the stream of traffic inching through the heavy downpour.

NED (V.O.)
My apologies, Rick Maddow. My
intention was not to irritate you...
(beat)
...Rick Maddow.

Rick Maddow growls as he drives the police cruiser past a glowing, floating billboard for "Clone-A-Pet: Have a Spare Best Friend!"

EXT. CHUCK E. CHEESE - DAY

The police cruiser pulls up to a fluorescently lit kid's birthday place. This place is way past its heyday - grime on the windows, sputtering signage, and peeling ads for "the best pizza in town."

There are two other police cruisers parked outside, their red and blue lights dancing across the wet pavement. Yellow police tape flutters in the wind as a crowd of onlookers tries to get a better look of what's going on inside.

Rick sighs heavily. He finishes his coffee as he steps out, tossing the crinkled cup into the gutter.

NED
Need I remind you that littering is
a Class D misdemeanor that carries
a 75 credit fine?

RICK
Add it to my tab.

Rick pushes past the gathered crowd craning to get a look inside, lifts the police tape but lets it fall in front of Ned. Rick walks inside without a second glance back.

INT. CHUCK E. CHEESE - CONTINUOUS

Rick squints, his senses assaulted by the cacophony of sensory inputs.

RICK
Jesus fuck.

Music blares from arcade machines - futuristic ones that have VR headsets and haptic interfaces which sell sex, drugs & violence with kaleidoscopic displays of primary colors. It's a goddamn nightmare.

Before he takes another step inside, a LITTLE BOY (7) lets out a horrified SCREAM.

Rick's hand goes for his weapon, holstered at his side, but he stops the moment he locks eyes with the group of children huddled in the corner.

They're clearly the remnants of a birthday party gone awry. Some kids are still wearing party hats, some have cake on their faces.

But some also have blood spattered across the front of their shirts. To a one, they're all gripping their PARENTS tightly and they all have the same look on their face - HORROR.

And that horror is directed 100% at Rick Maddow. The little boy continues screaming in panic and the rest of the kids join in, their parents shielding them.

RICK (CONT'D)
Ok...

OFFICER JONAS (28) comes up to Rick, his own Ned unit, NED 2, a few steps behind him. Rick's Ned has made his way through the front door.

NED
You seem to have upset the
children, Rick. What did you do?

RICK
(defensive)
Don't start. I literally just
walked in. Jonas, what the hell is
this?

Jonas tries to keep it professional, but a little smirk sneaks out at Ned's joke.

NED 2

Do you want to tell him or should I?

JONAS

Probably better if you see for yourself.

Rick and Jonas walk through the arcade, their two Ned companions a few steps behind.

Rick notices streaks of blood splattered across the walls...and also the ceiling. But there's something else there, too - a dark black liquid with a sheen to it, almost like car oil.

JONAS (CONT'D)

(walk and talk)

Got a call at 3:15pm, just your normal kid party dust up. The way these gremlins are hopped up on that ultra-refined sugar crack, we usually see at least a couple of broken fingers, gouged eyes. The Neds usually mop up, no officers required.

RICK

The rust buckets? For children's party?

NED

We are right here, Rick.

NED 2

That is some real technophobic shit, man.

Rick gives Jonas a "get a load of these assholes" look.

JONAS

There's already so many other crimes happening in the city that this sort of low-level dispute doesn't even register. Neds do the job just fine and people seem to like their bedside manner.

RICK

(mock offense)

I'm great with people.

NED
Unrelated, how are Maureen and
Jenny doing?

NED 2
Who are they?

NED
His first and second ex-wives.

NED 2
(knowingly)
Ooooh.

Rick stops in his tracks, finger pointed at Ned's face plate.

RICK
What are we doing?

NEDS
(simultaneously)
Banter.

RICK
Knock it off.

NED 2
Stop being a technophobic prick.

Rick glares at his Ned.

NED
He said it, not me.

Rick growls and turns back to Officer Jonas.

RICK
I hate these things.

JONAS
They can hear you, you know. They
have adaptive emotional matrixes.

Annoyed, Rick grumbles at Officer Jonas to keep walking. The blood stains on the carpet become more frequent. They side step to avoid a dark puddle.

RICK
Jesus. Remember when the worst that
could happen at a kids birthday
party was barfing in the ball pit?

JONAS
This... this isn't that.

Officer Jonas pulls aside the plastic sheet that's covering main part of the crime scene. They step inside.

RICK

What in the actual living fuck...?

Directly in front of them is the main stage. The band of animatronic mascots that would normally be robotically playing stilted kid music are frozen in place, mid-performance, mouths hanging open. The drummer robot is missing an arm. They're a Jackson Pollock of blood.

In front of the stage, is a body. A dead one. Next to the body is a giant rat mascot heat, drench in blood. He's naked from the waste down, but somehow still wearing the giant oversized sneakers from the costume. Ironically, the dead guy's chest is full of bullet holes, like Swiss cheese.

Rick, Jonas and the Neds approach, but the corpse's face remains obscured.

JONAS

Holo-footage shows this guy snapped out of nowhere, during cake. Ripped his pants off, but took the time to put his shoes back on before climbing on stage and...well, "performing" on the animatronics. Automated security deployed standard measures and well...

He cocks his head toward the dead body.

JONAS (CONT'D)

There you go.

Rick grunts. He notes the machine guns mounted next to the security cameras on the ceiling.

RICK

Sounds like your typical tweaker brain melt. Why'd my name go out over the radio?

Jonas returns a confused look.

OFFICER JONAS

Over the...radio?

RICK

(annoyed)

The radio. Jesus, I'm not *that* old. Over the dispatch. On the fucking toasters.

He thumbs at the Neds. Ned places a hand on Ned 2's elbow to keep from taking a swing at Rick.

OFFICER JONAS

Ah. Got it. Well, that's where it gets weird.

RICK

You're telling me a pantsless six foot rat humping a bunch of ancient robots isn't "weird"?

They come around to the other side of the body to reveal the face.

RICK

Goddamnit.

It's Rick. Or his face at least. Same hangdog look in his eyes, only they're glassy and lifeless.

NED

This would explain why the kids reacted the way they did.

Rick rubs his stubble. This was not on his bingo card today. He takes a pen from his pocket and pushes the corpse's face up. No mistaking it - that's Rick's face.

RICK

What am I even looking at here?

Ned comes over and imitates his partner's crouch. He scans the corpse's face.

NED

FaceID scan is a 98% match. This is you.

RICK

Obviously not. I'm not dead.

Ned 2 stands off to the side, arms crossed.

NED 2

I think I like that version better.

Rick ignores him. He inspects the bullet holes, sticking a pen inside. He pulls it out and a long black, oily liquid trails from the wound. Officer Jonas tries to stop him.

OFFICER JONAS

Whoa whoa, forensics hasn't gotten here yet. You can't -

He's cut off by the sight of Rick whipping out a switch blade and carving a line between the bullet holes across the corpse's chest. He peels back the skin to reveal a MESH OF FIBER OPTIC FILAMENTS that mimic the shape of muscle tissue.

OFFICER JONAS

Oh my God...

Rick turns to glare at the Neds.

NED

Rick Maddow, your facial expression indicates that you are confused, angry, and potentially accusatory.

Rick stands up and points a finger at Ned's chest.

RICK

Your goddamn right I'm angry! Why is my face on a goddamn toaster?

NED 2

That's it.

Ned 2 grabs Rick by the shirt collar and lifts him bodily in the air.

RICK

Hey!

Rick grabs a pneumatic cable in Ned 2's neck and yanks it out, showering sparks everywhere. The robot collapses in a heap.

JONAS

Jesus, man! That's my partner! He's expensive!

Rick rubs his neck, coughing. He pulls his weapon and points it at Ned, his eyes wild. Jonas' hand goes to his weapon, Ned clocks it and puts his hands out, trying to calm everyone down.

NED

Detective. Officer. Please. Stand down. We can figure this out.

RICK

Back the fuck up, Ned.

Ned holds his position, keeping his hands out.

NED

Rick. Look at me, Rick. Listen to my voice. I'm not your enemy here.

Rick keeps his weapon trained on Ned. He's panicked.

RICK

Why's my face on that...*thing*, Ned?

NED

I don't know. There are any number of possible reasons. But the only way we're going to find out is if you holster your weapon.

Rick shakes his head.

RICK

Why should I trust you? All you AI are just trying to replace us.

As proof, he points at the corpse with his face, its chest components exposed.

NED

Rick Maddow, you are a miserable sad sack of a human being with poor hygiene, a failing track record with women, in a city riddled with vice and crime. You treat me like an appliance while you poison your body with alcohol.

Rick is frozen in place, confused by where Ned's going.

NED

But you are also good at your job. I have learned more about law enforcement from you than from any database. You are a good cop, Rick Maddow.

Rick softens. His weapon wavers.

NED

That said, the world doesn't need more than one of you. You are indeed, a colossal Olympic level prick.

Rick actually laughs. He lowers his weapons and puts it away.

RICK
Alright. OK. I'm sorry...I just.
Yeah.

Jonas takes his hand off his weapon, takes a deep breath of relief.

Rick stands over the corpse with his face on it, brow furrowed, gears turning, thinking of the implications of what it all means.

Rick turns to Jonas.

RICK
Sorry about your Ned unit. He's an asshole, but I'm sure they can fix him.

He motions to his Ned to follow.

RICK
C'mon, Ned. We got some work to do.

NED
Yes we do, Rick Maddow.

A beat.

RICK
Stop using my name so much. It still creeps me out.

They exit through the plastic, leaving Jonas standing over the corpse and the collapsed body of his Ned unit.

From behind the plastic [OFF SCREEN]the children scream again as Rick exits the building.