

Robo4ce

EXT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Outside a well-maintained suburban middle school, buses and minivans disgorge kids. ZOE, 13, (white, in jeans) rides her bicycle toward the bike rack.

Once her bike's secure, she shoulders her book bag, regards the building, and sighs.

ZOE

Another year, another big whoop.

She takes a step.

NISHA (O.S.)

Watch out!

Zoe leaps back to avoid Nisha, 13, (Indian-American, Philly accent, in leggings) who zips by on a electric-powered Razor-style scooter.

NISHA

Sorry!

Nisha skids to a halt.

NISHA

(continuing)

Are you all right? I'm still getting used to the scooter. Just finished it last night.

Zoe dusts herself off, as stunned by Nisha's effortless extroversion as the near-impact.

ZOE

Don't worry, I'm...

(then)

Did you say you made it?

Nisha's default rate of speech is high. She's not nervous: the words just come that fast.

NISHA

Yeah. Pretty cool, huh? My name's Nisha Bannerjee. This is my first day here. My family moved about three weeks ago from Princeton. My mom teaches particle physics there, but this year she's working with a group in town on ultra-cold neutron storage and my dad consults on cloud storage solutions from wherever.

ZOE

Zoe Miller.

She extends her hand. Nisha shakes it with confidence.

ZOE

(continuing)

This is about my millionth day
here. My mom sells ceramic
figurines to other moms at parties
and my dad owns a hardware store.
And fishes.

Nisha folds up the scooter.

NISHA

I love hardware. What kind of
figurines?

ZOE

(reluctantly)

Puppies and kittens. But she's
branching out into bunnies.

INT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/HALLWAY - DAY

By her locker, Zoe shows Nisha her schedule.

NISHA

Wow! Four classes together! Mom
said I'd find a new BFF my first
day. Well, really she told me to go
find a friend my first day, but she
made it sound like it would be easy
and she was right! All I had to do
was almost run over you!

The pair head down the hall.

ZOE

Imagine what would have happened if
you actually hit me.

NISHA

That would have been awful!

(then)

Wait. That was a joke, wasn't it?

Nisha giggles. Zoe points at a classroom door.

ZOE

(deep breath)

Home room. Ready or not, eighth
grade, here we come.

EXT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/LUNCH AREA - DAY

Zoe and Nisha eat lunch under a tree. Zoe's brown-bagging it. Nisha has an insulated container suitable for the International Space Station.

NISHA

So what sort of extracurricular stuff do you do?

ZOE

(between bites)

Photography club. Botany club. Nothing exciting. I tried out for pom-poms last year, but they told me I didn't have enough spirit.

NISHA

Oh. That's too bad.

ZOE

They were right.

INT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/GYM - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

Zoe is lined up with two dozen other girls, all of whom want to be there more than her. The one in front leaps and twirls. Three smiling moms serve as POM-POM JUDGES, 35-45.

POM-POM JUDGE 1

Thank you, Melissa. Very energetic.

The other girl skips off. The next judge reads a printout.

POM-POM JUDGE 2

Zoe Miller?

Zoe steps up, lifts her arms to form a Y, looks as if she's forgotten what to do next, and finally decides to put one arm down at her waist. The judges' smiles become increasingly brittle.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/LUNCH AREA - DAY

ZOE

Sports are okay, but people make a big deal out of them. Pom-poms, pep rallies? A colossal waste of energy.

NISHA
So why try out?

ZOE
(embarrassed)
My mom was a cheerleader. My dad
was on the football team.

NISHA
(assumes air of maturity)
Ah. Right. The parents want their
child to follow in their footsteps.
All too common.

She takes a bite of something and makes a face.

NISHA
(continuing)
Hold on.

She pulls the top of her high-tech lunch tray up. It's a
solar panel. A mechanical WHIR is followed by a puff of
steam. Zoe stares as Nisha resumes eating.

NISHA
(around food)
My cobbler was getting cold.
(swallows)
At my old school I did Robot
League.

ZOE
Robot League?

Nisha smiles and produces a tablet from her book bag.

NISHA
Robot League.

INSERT - TABLET SCREEN

She brings up a video of her and four other kids clustered
around a small, wheeled robot made of interlocking blocks.
For the right money, they could be Lego, but we'll call them
Bricko for now.

NISHA (V.O.)
(continuing)
We won Best Design at the state
tournament. Andy was an awesome
little robot.

SERIES OF SHOTS - ROBOT JAILBREAK ACTION ON OBSTACLE COURSE

- A) The robot scales a wall.
- B) It grabs a mini-fig of a person in prison orange.
- C) It places the mini-fig in a basket with several others.
- D) It moves a Bricko "poster" out of the way to expose a hole in a Bricko wall.
- E) It attempts to insert a Bricko "key" in a "lock."

NISHA (V.O.)
(continuing)
We had a shot at going to the
national championship until...

The robot's arm pops off and flies out of view.

JERSEY OFFICIAL (O.S.)
AAAAHHH! My eye!

EXT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/LUNCH AREA - DAY

NISHA
I told Sam not to overtorque it,
but does anyone listen to me?

ZOE
Your robot opened a lock?

NISHA
It worked in practice. Interested?

ZOE
I don't know much about robots.

NISHA
Neither did I before I started. But
you're smart. You'll pick it up.

ZOE
Thanks. What grade did you start
in?

NISHA
Pre-K.

GILES, 13, (white, in a Tesla tee-shirt--the scientist, not the car or the rock group) approaches.

GILES
Hey Zoe. Who's your friend?

ZOE

Nisha, meet Giles. Giles owns the largest private collection of Bricko blocks in the state.

GILES

If you go by weight, the country. My dad's the head buyer for We'R'Toys, so he gets all their sets before they're released. After he's done, I get them.

(then)

Welcome to Hopper.

NISHA

Do you just assemble what the instructions tell you to, or do you build your own stuff?

Giles grins. Zoe rolls her eyes.

INT. GILES'S HOUSE/PLAYROOM - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

Giles is on a stepladder, putting the finishing touches on a full-scale replica of the Curiosity Mars rover. The model fills the part of the room not occupied by shelf upon shelf of Brickos, sorted by color and shape.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/LUNCH AREA - DAY

ZOE

He's like the Baron of Bricko.

Nisha turns to Giles, matching his grin.

NISHA

Let's talk.

EXT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Kids board buses and hop in waiting cars after school. Zoe, Giles and Nisha approach the bike rack.

Zoe and Giles ready their bicycles. Nisha deploys her scooter with a pneumatic HISS and sharp CLACK.

NISHA

With just three of us, the coding part worries me.

ZOE

I thought you programmed.

NISHA

My dad says I write spaghetti code.
The best teams have top-notch
coders, but they get snapped up.

Zoe and Giles look at each other.

ZOE/GILES

Will Thomas.

NISHA

Is he a student here?

GILES

He's home-schooled now.

NISHA

Why?

ZOE

Will forgets the little stuff when
he's working on a problem. Like
pants.

NISHA

(makes a face)

Zippering?

GILES

Wearing.

ZOE

He Skypes into some classes at the
high school. Tutors cover the rest.
His older brother Dart helps
too--he's an engineering grad
student at Northwestern.

NISHA

Hmm. What's working with Will like?

ZOE

He's not exactly a people person.

GILES

He writes and sells tablet apps.
Pays for the tutors that way.

NISHA

A lot of kids design mobile games.

GILES

Not games. His best-known app combines your email, texts and social media feeds, then reads them all in the simulated voices of the people who wrote them. Or cartoon characters, your call.

NISHA

GossiPal? Wow. Even I bought that. Makes my mom's texts more fun.

She pulls out a smartphone and opens a saved text message.

NISHA'S MOM (V.O.)

(sounds like SpongeBob)

Neutron turbine jammed, may be late for dinner.

ZOE

Everyone I know bought it. Will has a tidy little college fund saved up, from what I hear.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE/WILL'S BEDROOM - DAY

WILL, 13, (black, slight yet intense, sloppy dresser) stares at three large LCD monitors, each chock-full of computer code. His fingers hammer the keyboard. The Modern Jazz Quartet plays in the background.

ZOE (V.O.)

(continuing)

The only question is whether he'll bother to go to college. Or to leave his house again.

DART (O.S.)

Will! Some of your school friends are here to see you.

After several seconds of continued typing Will looks puzzled and stops. He pauses the music.

WILL

Friends?

INT./EXT. WILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Zoe, Nisha and Giles stand outside. In the door stands DART, 23, (black, collegiate, less intense than his brother).

DART
(yells into house)
Will?
(to the three kids)
He's working on another app. Come
on in.

The three kids enter the front hall.

ZOE
Is he...dressed?

DART
It's your lucky day.
(then)
What brings you three over? As a
rule, Will's old classmates only
show up wearing masks and holding
out bags for candy.

GILES
Know anything about Robot League?

DART
(yes, yes he does)
Founded in 1990 to encourage
children to engage in STEM work
before college. The program has a
partnership with the Bricko company
and uses their BrainLock robotic
sets.
(catches himself)
Yeah, some. Why do-

Will interrupts as he descends the stairs.

WILL
BrainLock sets use a so-called
programming language consisting of
cute little pictograms.

He appraises his visitors coolly.

WILL
(continuing)
Zoe. Giles.
(draws a blank with
Nisha)
New girl.

ZOE
Her name's Nisha.

WILL
If you say so. Why are you here?

DART

They're forming a Robot League team.

ZOE

Nisha was on a team at her old school, so she's starting one here.

WILL

And you'd like me to join?
(to Nisha)
The language also ignores race condition controls in logic gates.

Nisha's rate of speech drops into the normal range during this exchange: Will is a challenge.

NISHA

Admittedly, it's limited.

WILL

Oh, it's fine if all you want to do is run a toy around in a circle.

NISHA

Actually, ours played the clarinet.

WILL

Using compressed air, I assume.

NISHA

Yes. But you're right: it was a toy. Not useful. Unlike GossiPal.

WILL

GossiPal is well-paying fluff. What you describe might have real world applications...

(then)

Which I don't currently have time to explore.

GILES

Tripp McAlister has a team.

Nisha mouths "who?" at Zoe. Zoe raises a delaying hand.

Will is wary, but can't help himself.

WILL

McAlister has a team? I suppose Lori Wu's on it.

GILES

Lori, Carlos Arrigo, Jeb LaRose,
the whole gang.

Will's glance bounces between Giles and Nisha. The
revelation seems to have changed his attitude.

WILL

We'd need a coach. Someone who's
worked with smart, motivated
people.

Dart perks up.

NISHA

Someone who's patient. Willing to
let us make mistakes.

WILL

Speak for yourself.

Dart attempts to get Will's attention. Only Zoe notices.

ZOE

Hey, what about-

NISHA

In any case, it's got to be someone
we're all comfortable with.

WILL

Or someone who can challenge us.

GILES

Preferably both.

Dart's attempts grow more strident.

ZOE

Will, I think your-

WILL

I don't suppose any of the science
teachers are available.

GILES

They're busy with the Physics
Olympiad.

NISHA

What about the woman who runs the
computer lab?

GILES

She does the Coding Carnival
program at the grade schools.

Zoe throws her hands up. Dart taps Will on the shoulder.

DART

I think someone's missing
something.

WILL

Your inhaler's on the kitchen
counter.

Dart slumps, deflated.

ZOE

I think what your brother wants to
say is that he can coach us.

DART

In case you forgot, I was captain
of a champion Robot League team.

He points at a cluster of medals and plaques on the wall.

WILL

(shrugs)

I was three when you started. The
only thing I remember from then is
the day I figured out how to open
childproof caps.

ZOE

(to Dart, hopeful)

You would make a great coach. You
work around smart people.

GILES

And you seem pretty laid-back.

NISHA

And you're obviously patient, since
Will is still alive.

WILL

Good point.

ZOE

You think you can work with us?

Zoe gives Will a sidelong glance. She really means "with
your brother," and Dart knows it.

DART

It can't be worse than going to the E.R. when Will was three. I'm in.

GILES

Tripp's team has been meeting since April, so they have a head start on us.

NISHA

The league doesn't release the obstacle course design until next week. We can catch up.

DART

It all depends on how cohesive they are.

NISHA

And how driven.

DART

(pulls out smartphone)

I'll email your parents so they can register you.

ZOE

We'll need a name. What's the other team called?

GILES

Ton of Bricks.

DART

(abruptly distant)

Coach Kang.

Nisha mouths "Kang?" This time Zoe's got nothing.

Dart gets a haunted look on his face.

DART

(continuing)

The woman's got more trophies in her office than Windows has viruses. She's a harsh taskmaster and a ruthless competitor, but she puts together champion teams.

INT. CORPCO BUILDING/HALLWAY - DAY

People in lab coats with tablets walk past a door: "K. Angreux, Community Outreach." Eerily colored lights swirl and strobe behind its frosted glass.

DART (V.O.)
(continuing)
She was my coach.

Inside the office, COACH KANG, a.k.a. Katherine Angreux, 29, (wound too tight, business suit) stands on a rotating pedestal while lasers scan her.

A 3D printer churns away at the resulting scale model.

TRIPP, 13, (white, good-looking, a little tense) monitors the process on a laptop.

As Dart noted, trophies like the one Nisha's team got (but bigger) line display cabinets. They alternate with photos of Coach Kang shaking hands with Bill Gates, Elon Musk, Neil Degrasse Tyson, et al. In those, and in the team photos we see, the kids are all in the background, obscured.

COACH KANG
That's the last time I do an
interview with Wired magazine.
(mocking)
"Will this team measure up to the
standard the last one set?"
(snorts)
What sort of question is that?

TRIPP
Of course we will.

COACH KANG
It's my standard, not the team's.

TRIPP
Obviously. We follow your lead.

COACH KANG
I only select the best and
brightest, and I mold them into a
professional task force capable of
taking on any challenge.

TRIPP
And I'm proud to be part of that
task force.

COACH KANG
(tenses)
Proud?

TRIPP
Grateful! I meant grateful.

Coach Kang relaxes. A cheerful RING from the laptop catches her attention.

COACH KANG

That should be the list of teams
for the region. Whose necks shall I
tread on this year?

TRIPP

(reading)

Looks like the same losers as last
season. Some Scout troops, a few
school teams...

(then)

...huh. This late addition has a
weird name. Robo-Four-Cee-E. Oh!
Roboforce, except with the number
four. Hey, that's kind of clever.

COACH KANG

That's moronic.

TRIPP

Clever in a moronic way, I mean.

COACH KANG

Where are they from?

TRIPP

My school. I didn't think we had
another team.

COACH KANG

I recruited everyone worthwhile
from Hopper. They shouldn't pose
any threat. Who's their coach?

TRIPP

Someone with weird parents,
evidently. They named him Dart.

Kang spins to face him, making an ALARM sound from the
laptop. The steady, melodic hum of the 3D printer changes to
a stuttering polka rhythm.

COACH KANG

Dart? Dart Thomas?

TRIPP

You know him?

COACH KANG

Yes.

(an old wound reopens)

My greatest disappointment.

INT. CORPCO BUILDING/COACH KANG'S OFFICE - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

Not as many trophies, but still all Kang, all the time.
YOUNGER KANG, 23, sits behind her desk. YOUNGER DART, 17,
stands on the other side. Their dialog is silent. Kang
narrates.

YOUNGER KANG

So when can you start?

COACH KANG (V.O.)

I offered him a job as my personal
assistant, right out of high
school.

YOUNGER DART

I'm sorry, Coach, but I can't
refuse M.I.T.'s offer.

COACH KANG (V.O.)

(disdainful)

He decided to major in mechanical
engineering at M.I.T. instead.

Younger Kang leaps to her feet, incensed.

YOUNGER KANG

I made you what you are! Get out of
my sight!

Younger Dart takes a hit from his inhaler and slinks off.
Younger Kang collapses into her chair: fuming, yet hurt too.

COACH KANG (V.O.)

He said he couldn't turn down a
full scholarship. Ingrate.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. CORPCO BUILDING/COACH KANG'S OFFICE - DAY

TRIPP

A free ride to M.I.T.? Wow.
(catches her look)
Wow, what an idiot.

COACH KANG

So he's back in town with a team of
his own. No matter. I'll remind him
who's top robot here.

TRIPP

Thomas. I wonder...

COACH KANG

What?

TRIPP

If he's any relation to Will Thomas.

COACH KANG

That kid with no pants? It wouldn't surprise me. The whole family is worthless.

TRIPP

Will's pretty smart, with or without pants.

(adds hastily)

Not that you need to worry about them or anything.

COACH KANG

Of course not. Still... I don't take chances. You and Lori investigate them, if only to remind you two how lucky you are.

The 3D printer DINGS to indicate it's done. Tripp reaches in and pulls out the scale model of Kang, which, due to her sudden movement, has two heads. Kang's eyes narrow.

TRIPP

(timidly)

I could cut one off.

EXT./INT. ZOE'S HOUSE - DAY

Zoe steers her bike around the bass boat in the driveway.

Inside the kitchen, hundreds of "collectable" ceramic figures line plate racks, alternating with trophy fish on plaques.

Zoe's mother SARAH, 35, (fit, dresses a little young) paws through the freezer.

Zoe enters, all smiles.

ZOE

Mom! I met a cool new friend today, and she wants me to be on her Robot League team!

SARAH

Mmm? What do you want for dinner,
taco salad or these little spinach
tarts I bought at Merchant Jim's?

ZOE

Taco salad. Her name's Nisha, and
she's really great, and she and me
and Giles and another boy are going
to do Robot League this year!

Sarah wiggles the box of tarts.

SARAH

Sure you don't want the spinach and
cheese thingies? The samples were
yummy.

ZOE

Didn't you decide you were
lactose-intolerant? Anyway, did you
hear any of what I said?

SARAH

You met a new girl and you're doing
something with a couple of boys.

(brightens)

Are you going on a date?

ZOE

No, Mom. Robot League is an
international competition to build,
you know, robots.

SARAH

So it's a nerd thing?

ZOE

It's a high-tech thing.

SARAH

But there are boys involved?

ZOE

Technically, Giles qualifies.

SARAH

Is the other boy this new girl's
boyfriend?

ZOE

Nisha. She doesn't have a boyfriend
that I know of. If she did, it
wouldn't be Will.

SARAH

Will...Will...

(runs through mental
catalog of nerdy kids)

Not the Will who had to leave
school for exposing himself?

ZOE

He had underwear on.

Zoe's father ROB, 36, (a little pudgier than in his glory days as a running back) picks that moment to come in. He wears a bright blue vest with "Helpful Hardware Hombre" splashed across the back.

ROB

What's this about underwear?

SARAH

Zoe wants to be on some sort of
robot team with that boy who forgot
his pants.

ZOE

(not quite desperate)

Will's a little odd, I know, but
he's really smart. And his brother
Dart said he'd coach, and he's an
engineer. And my new friend Nisha
had great videos from her team at
Princeton.

ROB

Slow down!

He reads their moods and decides to divide and conquer.

ROB

(continuing)

Zozo, start on your homework and
I'll discuss this with your mother.

Zoe frets but complies. Rob pulls a beer from the fridge.

SARAH

You're okay with this?

ROB

I know the boy's eccentric, but his
father did pull a framing nail from
my Uncle Marv's brain.

SARAH

Meaning what?

ROB

Meaning he's a smart kid from a smart family. Maybe he's like his dad and prefers scrubs.

Sarah clams up, but remains dubious. Rob opens the beer and takes a swig.

ROB

(continuing))

Maybe Zoe learning to work with other smart kids, quirks and all, isn't a bad idea.

(then)

And you have to admit she's a lot more enthusiastic about this than pom-poms.

SARAH

You always did want a boy.

ROB

What I wanted was a kid who liked making things. Like I did when I was her age. I never showed you my old box of Bricko blocks, did I?

SARAH

The only times I was in your room we were preoccupied.

ROB

Oh yeah...

(smiles, then)

My mom gave them away because I couldn't take them to college. Otherwise I'd probably still have them. I made all sorts of junk out of them. Castles. Jets. Bass boats.

SARAH

All right, all right. I can tell I'm outnumbered.

(then)

If I'd known you had geeky tendencies, would I have still fallen for you?

ROB

You tell me.

He kisses her like they were still in high school. Zoe comes back in the room with a schoolbook in hand, sees them in action, spins around and exits.

ZOE (O.S.)
Warn people when you do that!

ROB
(quietly, to Sarah)
Isn't that what your mom said?

SARAH
I think it was your mom.
(louder, to Zoe)
Your father convinced me building
robots isn't weird.

Zoe runs back into the room and hugs them both.

ZOE
Thanks! You two are the best.

SARAH
Just make Will promise to keep
his...
(catches herself)
Focus on the robots.

Rob snickers. Zoe misses the point.

ZOE
I think he's going to do more of
the programming end of things,
actually.

ROB
(recovers)
When's your first meeting?

ZOE
Coach Thomas said we could get
together next Monday night.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE/DEN - NIGHT

The four kids and Dart mill around. A large flat-screen TV displays the Robot League logo and a timer: three minutes and counting.

ZOE (V.O.)
(continuing)
That's when they announce this
year's challenges.

The brothers' father, DR. THOMAS, 47, (black, in scrubs) comes in with a tray of healthy-ish snacks.

DR. THOMAS

I'm glad you kids are doing this.
Dart got a lot out of his time in
Robot League.

NISHA

(to Dart)

Is it what made you want to be an
engineer?

DART

I'm not sure I'd go that far, but
it helped me figure out things I
was good at.

WILL

That must have taken two or three
minutes.

DR. THOMAS

Will, enough of that.

DART

A little sibling rivalry doesn't
bother me, Dad.

DR. THOMAS

It bothers me. I'm sure it bothers
your mother, too.

A tablet on a sleek wheeled pedestal rolls into the room
like a modern-day chariot. The genial face of MRS. THOMAS,
44, (black, diplomatic corps) is on it.

MRS. THOMAS

(from tablet)

Listen to your father, Will. You
can build yourself up without
tearing down your brother. We're
proud of both of you.

(to Dr. Thomas)

Don't forget to offer our guests
some lemonade.

DR. THOMAS

You know, I believe we're out. I'll
run down to the store and grab
some. Can you watch the kids?

MRS. THOMAS

(from tablet)

Of course.

Dr. Thomas blows the tablet a kiss and leaves.

Giles makes a rotary motion for Zoe: helicopter mom.

MRS. THOMAS
(from tablet)
Don't mind me. I'll just park
myself in the corner until my next
session starts. Pretend I'm not
here.

Dart, behind the tablet, nods at Will, who pulls a small
remote from his pocket and clicks a button. The pedestal
twirls in a tight circle.

MRS. THOMAS
(with Doppler warble)
What's going on...

WILL
What was that, Mom? The wi-fi must
be acting up again.

Dart opens a closet door. The pedestal makes a backwards
beeline into the waiting winter jackets.

MRS. THOMAS
William Soyinka Thomas, you fix
this thing right-

Dart closes the door before she finishes.

DART
Thanks. I'm starting to regret
making that thing for her.

GILES
Where is your mom, anyway?

WILL
Switzerland. Some sort of public
health conference.

NISHA
Shh! They're about to announce this
year's challenge!

DART
I hope it's better than the year we
did robot mail carriers.

INT. ROBOT LEAGUE COMPETITION FIELD - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

A robot with a U.S. Mail aesthetic and tank treads is stuck
on a Bricko picket fence. A Bricko dog has one tread in its
spring-loaded teeth. The robot pulls out a Bricko steak and

launches it behind the dog, hitting a lever that releases the dog's jaws. The robot falls over the fence.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE/DEN - NIGHT

NISHA
(almost giddy)
Five... four...

Giles and Zoe get swept up in her enthusiasm and join in.

NISHA/GILES/ZOE
Three... two... one...

The countdown reaches zero.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - NIGHT

The Robot League logo vanishes. The telegenic faces of ANNOUNCERS #1 and #2, 20-24, appear in its place.

ANNOUNCER #1
Welcome to another exciting year of
Robot League!

ANNOUNCER #2
We know you're all waiting to see
what you're up against, so without
further ado, here's this season's
obstacle course theme!

ANIMATION - FLASHY PROMO PIECE

A Monday Night Football-worthy graphic reads "Will YOUR robot survive..."

ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Will your robot survive...

A slaverling ghoul with gray-green skin and sunken yellow eyes bursts through the words, followed by a host of pals. Flaming letters form in front of the shuffling, MOANING mob.

SUPERIMPOSE: "THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE?"

ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
The Zombie Apocalypse?

END ANIMATION.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE/DEN - NIGHT

NISHA/GILES/ZOE

Cooooo!

WILL

(grudgingly)

It's better than the mail thing.

ANIMATION - SERIES OF SHOTS - ROBOT VS. THE ZOMBIE HORDES

- A) The robot, which looks like a cross between an armored personnel carrier and WALL*E, rolls up a Bricko ramp between lines of Bricko zombie mini-figs.
- B) Turning, the robot faces a crowd of Bricko zombies surrounding a Bricko woman atop a stack of barrels.
- C) The robot extends a telescoping claw up to the woman and grabs her. Then it rotates a pulley into place on a zip-line overhead and slides to safety.

END ANIMATION.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE/DEN - NIGHT

Giles and Zoe are entranced. Nisha, Will and Dart start thinking ahead.

NISHA

Getting the robot to detect that string is going to be a pain.

WILL

Maybe the structure will have a colored brick under it the optical sensor can spot.

DART

Don't get too attached to a strategy yet. We'll need to construct the practice course and see how the pieces work together before we start planning.

An EXPLOSION from the television.

GILES

Did you see that?

DART

Read the disclaimer at the bottom:
no explosions allowed.

GILES

Aww.

Zoe moves near where Giles sits on the sofa.

ZOE

How would you make Brickos do that,
anyway? It's not like they're made
of C-4.

GILES

You know what C-4 is?

ZOE

Hey, I watch "Urban Legendaries."
Some girls like pyrotechnics too.

GILES

(with new respect)
What's your favorite explosion?

ZOE

The cement truck, duh.

GILES

Everyone likes the cement truck. I
kinda liked the coffee creamer
fireball.

ZOE

That was a good one too.

Commonality established, their attention returns to the TV,
where the promo is winding up.

ANIMATION - ROBOT VS. THE ZOMBIE HORDES

The robot rolls across a finish line, knocking severed
Bricko zombie heads out of the way.

END ANIMATION.

GILES

(ebullient)
This is going to be great.

INT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/CLASSROOM - NIGHT

The team and Dart stare at a dozen huge bags of Brickos, which fill two large tables pushed together. A smartboard in the background has pictures of assembled Bricko objects.

GILES

(not so ebullient)

This is going to take a while.

ZOE

I hope someone can find the directions.

NISHA

(holds up a tablet)

They're here.

Nisha passes tablets out.

DART

Putting our practice course together as a group is a great team-building exercise.

WILL

Did Coach Kang make you do it?

DART

(swallows hard)

She had her own approach.

INT. CORPCO BUILDING/CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Younger Kang supervises as Younger Dart, along with three other kids, sits blindfolded at a large conference table.

Interspersed among the half-assembled Bricko objects are mousetraps. Several of the kids are whimpering already.

YOUNGER KANG

You need to be able to visualize the challenge stations at any time, under any condition.

(licks her lips)

Nothing cements a memory like pain.

Younger Dart gingerly feels around for bricks he needs, but there's a mousetrap waiting... his fingers move closer...

END FLASHBACK.

INT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/CLASSROOM - NIGHT

A loud SNAP makes Dart jump. His breathing goes reedy. He pulls out his inhaler.

Even Will, who holds two large Bricko blocks he just clicked together, looks concerned.

WILL
You all right?

Dart nods, puffs, begins to relax.

DART
Just an old memory.

The kids return to their assembly work, semi-convinced.

TRIPP'S P.O.V. - OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL - BINOCULARS MATTE

TRIPP (V.O.)
That's definitely Giles, and I
think that's Zoe Miller. Funny, she
never struck me as the robot type.

EXT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL - NIGHT

Tripp hides in some bushes with LORI, 13, (Chinese-American, midwestern accent). Both are dressed like commandos. Lori is not enthusiastic about this.

LORI
More the pathetic-outsider-who-
never-gets-a-date type.

TRIPP
I don't know. She's kind of pretty.

Lori makes a gagging motion and noise.

TRIPP
(puts binoculars down)
Jealous?

LORI
Like I care who you think's pretty?
Your swelled head is lucky these
bushes don't have thorns to pop it.

Tripp smirks and looks through the binoculars again.

TRIPP
Not sure who the new girl is.

He passes her the binoculars. Lori focuses and zooms.

LORI

Her name's Nisha. Comes from a
high-tech family. She did Robot
League out east. Won some awards.

TRIPP

How do you know that?

LORI

She told me.
(glances at Tripp)
Along with everybody else in
orchestra.

TRIPP

Let's find out what she's telling
her teammates now.

Tripp pulls out a small black box with attached headphones.

LORI

What's that?

TRIPP

Government surplus infrared laser
microphone. I shine the beam
through the windows, it bounces off
the smartboard and picks up the air
vibrations in the room from it.

LORI

Another mysterious acquisition via
Kan...Coach Angreux, I suppose.

TRIPP

Careful. I'd hate for you to slip
like that around Coach.

Tripp aims the laser and dons the headphones. Lori huffs.

LORI

I don't believe I'm doing this.

Lori resumes surveillance.

LORI'S P.O.V. - OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL - BINOCULARS MATTE

Will types on his laptop. Giles and Zoe dutifully snap their
objects together. Nisha holds up a small piece of hers.

NISHA (V.O.)
(filtered)
Is it me or does this look like a
repurposed radar cannon from their
"Attack on the Last Outpost" set?

INT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/CLASSROOM - NIGHT

GILES
Oooh, good catch.

ZOE
What's it supposed to be?

NISHA
(squints at directions)
A zombie detector.

DART
(refers to his tablet)
Part of challenge number four.
Fifteen points for the robot
grabbing it off the lab bench, a
bonus twenty for using it to trap
the zombies in the holding pen in
challenge eight.

ZOE
Looks too small to trap anything.

Dart brings his tablet screen up on the smartboard to show
animation of how the particular challenge works.

DART
Not when you insert it in the
socket by the holding pen. That
drops the floor out from under the
zombie figures inside.

GILES
So the robot has to slide it in
like a puzzle piece?

NISHA
After navigating to the correct
spot. That's always the hardest
part.

ZOE
The robot can see the lines on the
course and follow them, right?

NISHA

If you know how to write the code for it. And line-following won't get you everywhere you need to go on the course.

She walks to Dart, who hands her his tablet. She brings up a view of the mat on which the obstacle course will be placed and starts gesturing to locations on it.

NISHA

(continuing)

Sometimes you need to use an ultrasonic sensor to figure out how close you are to a wall, or a gyroscopic sensor to make a precise turn between challenge objects.

Giles and Zoe stare. Dart smiles. Will's still focussed on his laptop.

NISHA

(continuing, grins)

Then there's the fun stuff.

LORI'S P.O.V. - OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL - BINOCULARS MATTE

Nisha continues speaking. Will attaches some kind of blinking-light gadget to his laptop.

LORI (V.O.)

Boy, can she talk.

EXT. HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL - NIGHT

Lori's still watching through the binoculars. Tripp's eyebrows shoot up.

TRIPP

She just described the Swaboda Swivel.

LORI

(lowers binoculars)

No one else in the region knows about that maneuver but us.

(raises them again)

Their coach used to be on Ton of Bricks. He must have told them.

TRIPP

I don't know--she didn't call it that. I'm sure-

Feedback WHINE through Tripp's headphones makes him wince and yank them off.

TRIPP
(continuing)
AAAH! What the...

Lori chuckles and hands him the binoculars.

LORI
Seems he shared at least one thing
from his experience with them.

TRIPP
What?

He looks through the binoculars.

TRIPP'S P.O.V. - OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL - BINOCULARS MATTE

Will holds the gadget he was fiddling with against the window. The rest of the team flank him. The smartboard reads "Coach Dart said you'd try something like this. Say hi to Kang for us." Dart waves bye-bye and closes the blinds.

LORI
Have fun telling Coach. I've got
field hockey practice before school
in the morning.

She brushes herself off and leaves Tripp, spy gear and all, in the bushes.

TRIPP
Must be nice.

A lightning flash and a peal of THUNDER precede heavy rain. Tripp hunkers down.

INT. HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/CLASSROOM - NIGHT

The team laughs and resumes their work.

WILL
Tripp is so predictable.

NISHA
It would be sad if it weren't so
funny.

ZOE
Too bad he's kind of a jerk. He's
also kind of cute.

Giles looks stricken but quickly recovers. Will smirks. Dart raises an eyebrow. Only Nisha seems sympathetic.

NISHA
(channeling Oprah)
Those are the dangerous ones,
honey.

EXT./INT. WILL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dr. Thomas opens the front door of the house for Dart, who's carrying a large box of assembled Bricko challenge objects. Will slips in before his brother.

DR. THOMAS
How'd the first real meeting go?

WILL
We put together a lot of bricks.
And I may have caused permanent
hearing loss in one of our
competitors.

Dr. Thomas shoots them both a quizzical look.

DART
An eavesdropping incident with
Coach Kang's team.

DR. THOMAS
That woman's been out for your
blood since you turned her offer
down seven years ago.

DART
I'm not some kid she can intimidate
any more.

DR. THOMAS
Are you sure she can't still get
under your skin?

WILL
Dart handled them spying on our
meeting like a pro, Dad. It was
awesome.
(then)
Or as close to awesome as he gets.

Will goes upstairs.

DR. THOMAS
He can't let you come out on top.

Dart and his father head downstairs to the den.

DART

I don't worry about it.

His mother's already there, detaching the tablet from its mobile pedestal.

DART

(continuing)

Mom! When did you get home?

MRS. THOMAS

Just in time, it sounds like. Dart, you know the reason Will rides you so hard.

(waits for his shrug)

He worships you. He always has. But that only makes him more competitive. You set the bar high.

DART

Not too high. If anything, Will's smarter than me.

DR. THOMAS

Maybe. But he's got a chip on his shoulder you never had. Part of that comes from how Coach Angreux treated you.

DART

How would he know that? He was barely out of kindergarten when I quit her team.

MRS. THOMAS

He may not remember details, but the summer before you went to M.I.T. left an impression on him.

DR. THOMAS

Like a meteor crater.

MRS. THOMAS

You'd been unhappy, but driven. All of a sudden you were just unhappy.

She starts upstairs and pauses to kiss Dart's cheek.

MRS. THOMAS

(continuing)

Even little kids notice that sort of thing.

When she leaves Dart picks up one of the Bricko objects from the box--a science lab with mini-figs in lab coats at benches--and turns it in his hands.

DART

When I volunteered to coach the team, I thought I was doing it for Will. Maybe my motives aren't so pure.

(he adjusts a mini-fig)
Maybe the teenage me who got told he'd never be anything without someone else leading the way wants a turn up front.

DR. THOMAS

(puts hand on Dart's shoulder)

Or maybe he wants to show these kids they don't need a leader--only a guide.

INTERCUT WILL'S ROOM/DEN

Will's at his computer. Dave Brubeck's playing.

WILL

(to screen)

So, you like playing games?

INSERT -- WILL'S COMPUTER SCREEN

A splash graphic appears: Will's GossipPal app.
"Administrator Access" flashes.

DR. THOMAS (V.O.)

(continuing)

You can't solve Will's problems.
The best you can do is help him realize he can.

BACK TO SCENE

Will smirks as he starts to work in earnest.

WILL

(to screen)

I've got a game for you.

In the den, Dart returns the Bricko construction to the box.

DART

I'm an engineer, not a miracle worker.

DR. THOMAS
 Your mom's right. He looks up to
 you.
 (then)
 When they asked us to withdraw Will
 from school I was afraid he'd be
 hurt. He wasn't, not so it showed.

DART
 You don't sound very certain.

DR. THOMAS
 He's... a deep one, Dart.

INSERT -- WILL'S COMPUTER SCREEN

Pictures of Tripp, Lori, and the other members of Ton of
 Bricks, obviously taken from social media, surround one of
 Coach Kang.

DR. THOMAS (V.O.)
 (continuing)
 There's no MRI or CAT scan that
 reveals emotional scars.

BACK TO SCENE

Will's fingers dance across the keyboard.

DR. THOMAS (V.O.)
 (continuing)
 I can't do exploratory surgery for
 them.

INSERT -- WILL'S COMPUTER SCREEN

Will drags the pictures onto a template with the title:
 "Surveillance Mode." Several checkboxes, labeled "Emails,"
 "Private Messages," "Texts," etc. fill the space below the
 pictures. Will checks them all.

BACK TO SCENE

Will's face is serene, almost chilling.

DR. THOMAS (V.O.)
 (continuing)
 They surface when they surface.

WILL
 (to screen)
 It's called Peek-a-boo.

One last click.

INSERT -- WILL'S COMPUTER SCREEN

The words "Intercept and Copy" flash atop the pictures and checkboxes.

BACK TO SCENE

Satisfied, Will logs out and shuts off the monitor. He thumbs through a book--"Master Your Bricko Robot"--before tossing it on a stack of similar programming manuals.

INT. CORPCO BUILDING/CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

A nearly identical stack sits on the end of the large table in the middle of the room, around which sit Tripp, Lori, CARLOS (13, Latino, wiry), and JEB (13, white, a big galoot in the making). All wear lab coats and safety glasses. A completed Robot League obstacle course fills most of the table. All of the kids have at least one bandaged finger. Jeb has seven, plus a bandaged ear. Don't ask.

JEB

Please tell me we're moving on to
actual test runs tonight.

Coach Kang, also in a lab coat, pulls an elaborate custom cart bearing the Ton of Bricks robot through the open door. The robot is a nearly cubical, no-nonsense design with three large wheels. Somehow it comes off as threatening.

COACH KANG

Fortunately for your fingertips,
yes. I've run extensive projections
for your initial programming
efforts. You're fifteen percent
more efficient than a football
stadium full of chimps randomly
banging away on keyboards.

The teammates look at each other, suspecting they've been insulted.

JEB

NFL stadium or college stadium?

The other three kids and Kang glare at him.

COACH KANG

Structure, people. Structure. Jeb,
Lori, I want a ten percent
reduction in line count across all
your code blocks by Friday. Email
them to me when you're done.

JEB/LORI
(resigned)
Yes, Coach.

COACH KANG
Carlos, the manipulator assembly is
still wobbly.

CARLOS
The pieces only fit so tight,
Coach. There's variation-

COACH KANG
Do you work for the Bricko company?

CARLOS
(hesitant)
No, Coach.

COACH KANG
Then why are you making excuses for
them? Go through the connectors and
find the tightest fits.

She nods at a large bin of tiny Bricko parts one would
normally expect to bear a sign reading "Guess the number of
pegs and win a new car!"

CARLOS
(weary)
Yes, Coach.

TRIPP
Coach, what are we going to do
about Robo4ce?

COACH KANG
(feigning indignation)
Do? Do? This is Robot League,
Tripp, not some mobster melodrama.
We don't "do" anything about our
opponents except defeat them.

TRIPP
Oh. Well, I just thought--

COACH KANG
That's not why you're here.

Tripp sulks. The others attempt to suppress snickers. Coach
Kang glares at them.

COACH KANG
(continuing)
You have a robot to test.

The kids busy themselves setting up for the night's trial runs. Coach Kang pulls Tripp aside to the hallway.

COACH KANG

(quietly)

I read your report. I agree: the Miller girl is Robo4ce's vulnerable point. You'll take advantage of that.

TRIPP

But you said we wouldn't-

COACH KANG

(thwacks him on the forehead)

"We" aren't doing anything. "You" are going to pump her for information. Your report indicates she finds you attractive.

TRIPP

A lot of girls think that.

COACH KANG

Good.

(As he starts to preen)

The delusional are easy marks.

(pulls an envelope from her lab coat)

If anyone asks, you won these in a contest.

Tripp takes the envelope, unsure.

COACH KANG

We never had this conversation.

She returns to the conference room. He follows, oddly subdued.

INT. HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Dart peers out through closed blinds.

Nisha and Zoe work on the robot.

Giles measures distances on the now-complete obstacle course. A high-tech camera on a tripod points at the course.

GILES

Seventy-five centimeters from the exit of the car wash to the ramp.

Will, at the keyboard, nods.

WILL

Angle?

GILES

Forty degrees. But if the robot's too wide it will bump into the merry-go-round on the left.

WILL

What are the current dimensions on the robot?

Nisha and Zoe look up from their work. In contrast with the slick Ton of Bricks robot, the Robo4ce entry resembles a six-wheeled gorilla with four arms.

ZOE

The arms are extended to deal with the car wash, sooo...

(measures)

Thirty-five centimeters wide by twenty-two long.

NISHA

Rotate the left arm back in by the body and the robot should clear.

Will nods, types, clicks with a flourish. The robot BEEPS.

WILL

Program updated. Ready to test when you are.

Zoe sets the robot in place on the obstacle course. Dart mans the camera. Nisha uses her smartphone as a stopwatch.

NISHA

In three, two, one...go!

Zoe presses a button on the robot. At first it moves with purpose, scooting between the Bricko structures. It extends an arm to push a lever on the Bricko car wash. Doing so spins simulated brushes inside. Zombie parts tumble out.

GILES

Car wash zombies waxed. Fifteen points.

ZOE

What are zombies doing in a car wash, anyway?

NISHA
Don't overthink it.
(then)
Seventy-five seconds remaining.

The robot continues on its course, withdrawing the arm to miss the Bricko merry-go-round. Its destination, just as in the promo animation, is a ramp, atop which a woman mini-fig stands on a stack of barrels, surrounded by zombies.

GILES
Going for the rescue.

ZOE
C'mon, Jumpin' Jenny!

WILL
You named the robot Jumpin' Jenny?

The robot tries to rotate a basket-like structure into place to both knock the barrels over and catch the woman. It's a little off, though, and it sends the figure flying instead.

NISHA
Uh-oh.

Zoe reaches for the robot.

DART
Don't stop it. Let's see what happens.

The mini-fig careens into the merry-go-round, wedging between the central support and the moving part.

NISHA
That's going to be a problem later.

The robot pulls the basket back and spins in place, then zips down the ramp toward the merry-go-round.

ZOE
It skipped to the next subroutine!

NISHA
Or it could be a problem now.

On the merry-go-round Bricko zombies ride Bricko horses. The robot nudges a button. With a pneumatic HISS the merry-go-round starts to turn. The robot extends a thin piece, knocking off zombie heads; unfortunately, the spinning carousel also spits the misplaced mini-fig's head, legs and body in various directions.

GILES

Ten points for starting the
carousel, ten points for dealing
with the zombies on it...

(winces)

...minus twenty-five points for
ripping a human limb from limb.

The robot tries to back up, but the woman's body lodges in a
drive wheel and knocks it off course. It backs into a Bricko
school bus full of Bricko nuns, which promptly rolls into a
Bricko gasoline tanker. A spring-loaded Bricko fireball pops
out of the tanker.

DART

Now you can stop it.

Zoe picks the robot up before it chalks up any more victims.

WILL

I vote we change its name to Dora
the Destroya.

Nisha glares at him. Zoe's on the verge of tears.

ZOE

Sorry. That was my fault.

GILES

(weakly)

At least it was fun to watch?

NISHA

Not helping, Giles.

Dart crouches in front of Zoe so he's her height.

DART

You don't need to apologize.
Failures arise from a combination
of factors, not one person.

(to all)

More importantly, we can't get
better without making mistakes.
Okay?

(to Zoe)

Okay?

Zoe manages a brave smile and nods.

DART

(continuing)

Now let's watch the slo-mo to
pinpoint where things went bad.

The team sighs as he brings the video up on the smart board.

EXT./INT. HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Zoe and Nisha walk from the bike rack toward the school.

ZOE
I didn't know how hard it would be.

NISHA
It wouldn't be fun if it were easy.

ZOE
Can we take a poll on that?

TRIPP (O.S.)
Zoe! Wait up!

Zoe and Nisha turn. Tripp catches them at the doors.

ZOE
Hi, Tripp.

NISHA
Don't you have listening devices to
plant?

TRIPP
(mostly to Zoe)
I wanted to apologize for the other
night. Sometimes the competitive
streak takes over and you find
yourself doing something crazy.
(to Nisha)
You've done Robot League before.
You understand.

NISHA
(flat)
No.

TRIPP
Ahhh, anyway, I got hold of a
couple of these and I thought Zoe
might be interested in one.
(gives envelope to Zoe)
You're an Urban Legendaries fan
too, right?

Zoe's brow furrows as she examines the contents--a colorful
laminated card on a lanyard--then her eyes go wide.

ZOE

Tripp! How did you score backstage passes to their touring show?

TRIPP

An online contest.

NISHA

For what? Being a creep?

Giles walks up before Tripp can respond.

GILES

(chipper, to girls)

Good morning!

(to Tripp)

What are you doing here?

TRIPP

I go to school here.

NISHA

Tripp is sucking up to Zoe in a laughable attempt to apologize for the other night. But it's not going to work, because we can't be bought off so easily. Right, Zoe?

Zoe fondles the pass.

GILES

What's that?

ZOE

A V.I.P. pass to the Urban Legendaries show at the Lyceum.

Giles gulps. He, too, would consider selling them out for a backstage pass to the show. A second later, though, his expression becomes pained.

GILES

(faked breeziness)

Well, have fun on your date.

He departs in a hurry. Zoe looks confused.

ZOE

Date?

(to Tripp)

Are you asking me out?

Tripp's caught off-guard. His smile might be half-genuine.

TRIPP
If you like, sure.

Zoe looks to Nisha for help. No such luck.

NISHA
I have class. You do too.
(archly)
Don't you?

She heads off in a huff. Now it's Zoe's turn to look guilty.

ZOE
I don't know if I should, Tripp.

TRIPP
Just think about it, okay? You can
hold on to the pass for now.

Zoe gazes at her thirty pieces of silver. She spots something.

ZOE
Wait--this is the night before the
tournament!

TRIPP
Sure. I always like to do something
to calm my nerves before a match.
(laughs)
It's not like our teams will still
be frantically preparing, right?

ZOE
No, no. Of course not.
(then)
We're practically ready now.

SERIES OF SHOTS - ROBO4CE GEARING UP FOR THE TOURNAMENT

- A) Dart gestures at a smartboard display with a few robot instructions on it.
- B) Jumpin' Jenny pirouettes across the screen in slow motion, along with barrels, zombies and the woman mini-fig. Giles, Nisha, and Will, in the background, track the robot's arc.
- C) In normal speed, the robot crashes into a Bricko orphanage. The team looks at Zoe, in the starting position. She hides her face.
- D) Giles, Zoe and Nisha work on the robot. Zoe and Giles grab a Bricko piece at the same time. Their hands touch.

They both immediately drop it as if it were a venomous spider. Nisha rolls her eyes.

- E) At his computer in his room, Will reads private messages between Ton of Bricks team members.
- F) Zoe sits at her desk in her bedroom, reading a Bricko robot programming guide. The backstage pass is her bookmark. She runs her fingers over her Precious.
- G) Jumpin' Jenny, the bus full of nuns, the gasoline tanker and the merry-go-round all pirouette across the screen in slow motion as Zoe, Giles and Will watch.
- H) In normal speed, they all look at Nisha, in the starting position, who responds with a weak grin.
- I) Dart waves at the smartboard, which has four times the amount of code and annotation as before.
- J) Giles, Zoe and Nisha at the robot again. This time Nisha sits between Giles and Zoe. Giles sneaks a forlorn glance at Zoe. Zoe notices and looks uncomfortable.
- K) Will reads more private messages between Ton of Bricks team members. He makes notes while munching popcorn.
- L) Zoe's in bed, the programming book next to her, staring at the backstage pass in her hands.
- M) Dart, inhaler in hand, makes exasperated sweeping gestures in front of a chock-full smartboard.
- N) Jumpin' Jenny flies, upside-down, two wheels off, across the screen in slow motion. All four team members watch.
- O) In normal speed, they all look at Dart, in the starting position, who takes a hit from his inhaler.

INT. ZOE'S HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Zoe and her dad wear matching Bass Pro aprons: she's CHOPPING vegetables, he's stir-frying. The pan SIZZLES.

A whole mushroom leaps off the cutting board.

ROB

She shoots, she scores!

(then)

Someone's distracted tonight.

ZOE

Sorry, Dad.

ROB
(pops mushroom in mouth)
About?

Zoe smiles and passes the mushrooms. Carrots are next.

ZOE
You were popular when you were my
age, right?

ROB
I didn't really hit my stride until
my sophomore year, but yeah.

ZOE
(chopping)
Why did you pick Mom?

ROB
Whoa, Zozo sweetie, it wasn't like
there was a police lineup.

ZOE
I know, but I mean...how did you
know you wanted to date her?

She passes the carrots to him and starts on the bok choy.

ROB
I didn't.
(nostalgic)
The boys, myself included, assumed
she was stuck up because she was a
hot cheerleader. As a result she
didn't get asked out much.

ZOE
(stops chopping)
Oh. That's... sad. Weird, but sad.

ROB
One day I rode my bike past her
house after school. She was sitting
on her front steps, crying.

ZOE
(resumes chopping)
I guess tears make it hard to look
stuck up.

ROB
Exactly. I asked if she was all
right, she thanked me for caring,
and the rest is history.

ZOE

How sweet!

(passes bok choy)

Do you remember why she was crying?

ROB

(holds up an onion)

She'd been helping her mom make onion soup. Which is why you and me get to cook on stir-fry night.

(he passes her the onion)

You're not just asking for the fun of it.

ZOE

(chopping again)

No. A boy asked me to go to the Urban Legendaries show with him.

ROB

Do you like this boy?

ZOE

Kind of. He's cute, but he's a little stuck up.

(stops chopping)

I think. After what you said about Mom, I'm confused.

ROB

I can think of one way to find out.

Sarah enters, holding her nose.

SARAH

Can I come in yet?

Rob throws the onions in the pan.

ROB

Sure, it's safe now, dear.

SARAH

What were you two talking about?

Rob tilts his head at Zoe: she gets to say it. Zoe wipes her hands off and hangs up her apron.

ZOE

Boys and onions.

SARAH

Two things guaranteed to make you cry. Where are you going?

ZOE
I need to tell someone I'll go on a
date with them.

Zoe skips out of the kitchen, leaving Sarah bemused.

SARAH
Date?

ROB
With a geeky Bricko boy.

He pops a chunk of carrot in his mouth and crunches down.

INT. GRACE HOPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL/CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Dart's at the camera. Nisha's timing. Giles has a
scoresheet. Will looks on from his laptop. Everyone's ready
for this to be over. Zoe sets the robot on the course.

ZOE
(subdued)
This time for sure. Three, two,
one...go.

She turns the robot on. Jumpin' Jenny shoves the bus full of
nuns well clear of the gasoline tanker.

NISHA
(neutral)
School bus pushed into the scoring
zone.

GILES
Twenty points.

The robot dumps a container of Bricko groceries and weapons
at the orphanage door.

ZOE
(perking up a little)
Food and guns delivered to
orphanage.

GILES
(mirroring Zoe's mood)
Another twenty-five.

The "zombie detector" clicks into place in the holding pen.
The zombies tumble.

NISHA
Wow. That's never worked.

GILES
Thirty-five with the bonus.

ZOE
Go Jenny!

In quick succession, the gas tanker rolls up against the holding pen, popping the fireball; a Bricko drawbridge raises, allowing a Bricko boat to pass while zombies tumble off the pavement; the robot picks up a Bricko lawnmower and, well, mows down a pack of zombies.

ZOE
(full-tilt excited)
The rescue is all that's left!

NISHA
C'mon, no dismemberments!

The robot neatly scoops up the simulated damsel in distress while pushing the barrels on top of the zombies. The basket holding the figure hooks over the zipline. The robot slides down it to a waiting Bricko ambulance.

ZOE
She's in!

The smartphone in Nisha's hand CHIMES.

NISHA
Time!
(to Giles)
What's the total?

Giles double-checks his math.

GILES
Two-hundred-seventy-five.

NISHA
Two-seventy-five?

ZOE
Is that a good score?

NISHA
That's a good score.

The girls hug and jump with glee. Nisha hugs Giles. Giles and Zoe execute a clumsy do-we-hug-no-I-guess-not maneuver.

Will offers a fist, which his brother bumps.

WILL
Thanks for not giving up on us.

DART

And why would I give up on the best
team I've ever coached?

They both laugh. Dart faces the others.

DART

(continuing)

But you four did the work.
Two-seventy-five is a great score.

ZOE

Enough to give us a chance?

GILES

A fighting chance.

NISHA

A solid chance.

Will shifts in his chair. He knows something.

WILL

I think we should shoot for higher.

DART

Why?

WILL

(evasive)

I just think we could do it.

Dart's eyes narrow. Nisha jumps in before he can probe.

NISHA

You know...we could have the robot
snag the basket of kittens on the
way to the ramp. Tacking that on
would be an easy ten points.

ZOE

Time's an issue. We barely
finished.

WILL

I can increase the speed during the
straight movement segments.

GILES

We could shave off...

(does math in head)

...three seconds that way. Should
be enough.

ZOE

But we'd need to test the new
routine before the tournament!

DART

We have four evenings between now
and Saturday. Plenty of time.

NISHA

(glances at Zoe)

Except one of us is busy the night
before.

They all turn towards Zoe.

ZOE

(guilt-ridden)

I got invited to the Urban
Legendaries show Friday night.

DART

Well, that still leaves us three
nights. The changes we're looking
at are pretty trivial.

NISHA

(biting, to Zoe)

Tell them who's taking you.

Zoe looks betrayed.

DART

Is this a date?

GILES

(grumpy)

Sounds like a date to me.

ZOE

(small voice)

Tripp McAlister has V.I.P. passes.

Dart's smile remains in place, but he stiffens.

WILL

In case you missed it, Tripp was
playing "I Spy" with us under the
rhododendrons a few weeks ago.

ZOE

He said this was partly an apology
for that.

NISHA

So where are the passes for the rest of us? Giles would sell a kidney to get one. Tripp's using them as an excuse.

GILES

To get you to go out with him.

WILL

Or to snoop.

DART

(no longer smiling)

All of you: stop. First off, Ton of Bricks is the competition, not the enemy.

WILL

The difference being?

DART

The difference being the rest of the team goes to school with them.

(then)

You could too, if you wanted.

WILL

But they were spying on us!

DART

Yes, they were. I'm not going to pretend Kather... Coach Angreux isn't ruthless. But that's not the only way to play, and that's not the only way to win. I'd rather see the four of you enjoy yourselves learning about robots than collect a mountain of trophies.

NISHA

(edging toward petulant)

Can't we do both?

DART

As it happens, yes.

(to Zoe)

You don't need the team's approval to date anyone, but for what it's worth? I'm cool with it.

ZOE

Thanks, coach.

DART

On one condition: you get an
autographed picture of the Urban
Legendaries for me.

ZOE

Will do.

Dart looks over the team.

DART

Now before we get overconfident,
let's make sure we can reproduce
our results. Set her up again.

They prepare the obstacle course for another run.

GILES

(absently)

Do kidneys grow back?

INT. CORPCO BUILDING/COACH KANG'S OFFICE - DAY

Coach Kang and Tripp look at a computer display.

COACH KANG

Two-hundred-seventy-five gives us a
ninety-seven percent win
probability. We're ready.

TRIPP

I'll pass that along to the other
team members.

(fiddles with smartphone)

Better than last year by a percent.

COACH KANG

On paper. We could squeeze out
another twenty points by pushing
the cell tower back into place, but
that's the one thing we haven't
nailed consistently.

(then)

You need to find out if Robo4ce
will be close enough to make us
work for it.

TRIPP

(hesitant)

I go to meet Zoe Miller in a couple
of hours. If I find out anything-

COACH KANG

If? I didn't call in my chits with
the Explore Channel for "if,"
Tripp.

TRIPP

When I find out, I'll text you
right away.

She wordlessly dismisses him. He looks grim as he leaves.

INT./EXT. LYCEUM THEATRE - NIGHT

Promotional posters for the show festoon the walls. Zoe and
Tripp emerge with bags of tour swag.

ZOE

They must have a truck just for the
paintballs in that finale.

TRIPP

And for the floor scrubber to clean
up afterward.

They laugh. He sits on a bench, and she sidles up next to
him. Despite the larger context, the thirteen-year-old
version of chemistry percolates between them.

TRIPP

(continuing)

What time did your parents say
they'd pick us up?

ZOE

Ten. Hope they're here soon, I have
to be up tomorrow.

(yawns)

I guess we both do.

TRIPP

(senses his opening)

Registration ends at nine on the
nose. You nervous?

ZOE

Nah. Coach Dart says we'll be fine.

TRIPP

Pretty confident for a first year
coach. But he knows what it takes
to contend.

(then)

Think you'll be in the running?

ZOE

I hope so. At least Jumpin' Jenny is consistent. Even with the last bit we added this week.

TRIPP

That's a fun name.

ZOE

What do you call your robot?

TRIPP

Grond, Hammer of the Underworld.

(awkward beat)

Lori's idea. Anyway, you guys will do fine. Wouldn't surprise me if you broke two hundred.

ZOE

(proud)

Something would have to go very wrong for us to score that low.

TRIPP

You are confident. Trying for two-fifty? Ambitious.

Zoe, still grinning, thumbs "higher".

TRIPP

(as she keeps doing it)

Two-sixty? Two-seventy?

(a little unnerved)

Not two-seventy-five?

ZOE

We did two-seventy-five Tuesday. Will talked us into pushing for two-eighty-five.

TRIPP

(forced nonchalance)

That would be an impressive score for any robot.

ZOE

Even Grond?

TRIPP

Isn't that your parents' car?

Rob and Sarah pull up. If their hair's a tad disheveled the kids are oblivious to it. The kids stand up.

SARAH
(lowers window)
Climb in, kids. Sorry we're late.

ROB
(sheepish)
We started talking about our first
date and lost track of time.

TRIPP
(stage-pats his jacket)
Umm, I left my wallet backstage.

ROB
We can wait here for you.

TRIPP
No thanks, I'll, ah, text my mom.
(show of humor)
After all, I don't want people to
think I was keeping Zoe up to
affect her performance tomorrow.

Zoe giggles at the thought. Sarah looks concerned.

SARAH
You sure, Tripp? It's after ten.

TRIPP
I appreciate the offer, but I'll be
fine.
(to Zoe)
Thanks for coming with me. I had a
good time.

ZOE
(squeezes his hand)
Me too. Thanks for inviting me.

On impulse she kisses him on the cheek, then ducks into the
car before he can react.

ZOE
(continuing)
See you tomorrow!

The Millers drive away. Tripp pulls out his smartphone,
hesitates, looks in the direction they went, debates. Fear
beats out young love for now: he sends a text.

INT. CORPCO BUILDING/COACH KANG'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Coach Kang has one of the framed photos from the trophy case
out. Her expression is vulnerable, almost tender.

In the picture she's shaking hands with Steve Jobs, but you can see Dart's face over her shoulder.

Her phone CHIRPS. She sets the photo down and reads the text message.

SUPERIMPOSE: "TRIPP: ROBO4CE AT 285"

Her eyes get big.

SUPERIMPOSE: "TRIPP: THEY KNEW THEY NEEDED TO SCORE THAT TO WIN"

They narrow again. Her gaze flicks over to her computer display.

INSERT - COACH KANG'S DISPLAY

An email chain where Ton of Bricks discusses their score occupies part of the screen.

BACK TO SCENE

She taps her phone once, hard.

EXT. LYCEUM THEATRE - NIGHT

Tripp holds his smartphone as if it were a not-quite-dead fish, waiting for a return text. When it RINGS he almost drops it.

TRIPP
(into phone, uncertain)
Coach?

INTERCUT with Coach Kang's office.

Coach Kang picks up the framed photo again.

COACH KANG
(into phone)
Call the others. Team meeting at six in the morning, here. No emails, no texts, no instant messages. We've been hacked.

TRIPP
(into phone)
Hacked?

COACH KANG
(into phone)
Did I stutter?
(MORE)

COACH KANG (cont'd)
(then)
Does your little ditz have any idea
you were sniffing around?

TRIPP
(into phone)
No.
(then)
She's not a--

COACH KANG
(into phone)
Not that it matters. She'll figure
it out--too late. In any case, nice
job stringing her along, Tripp.

She hangs up.

TRIPP
Yeah. Nice job, Tripp.

Tripp starts calling people, clearly upset.

INT. CORPCO BUILDING/COACH KANG'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Coach Kang's grip on the photo cracks the glass. She punches
in a phone number from memory.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE/DEN - NIGHT

Dart packs a storage tote with items for the morning. He
ticks off items on his tablet as he does so. His smartphone
is between his shoulder and his ear.

DART
(into phone)
Oh, I imagine pulling a tumor off
the auditory nerve can take longer
than expected sometimes. At least
you get to tag out every few hours.
(then)
Don't worry, Dad. I'm just packing
up the last of the stuff for the
tournament now, and Will is in the
shower. See you in the morning.

He starts to put the phone down when it CHIMES. He
recognizes the number and stares for a moment. A deep
breath, then:

DART
(into phone)
Yes?

INTERCUT with Coach Kang's office.

COACH KANG
(into phone)
You know who this is.

DART
(into phone)
I do. What do you want?

COACH KANG
(into phone)
You, in my office at Corpco, in
twenty minutes. Otherwise I go
straight to the Feds.

DART
(into phone)
What on Earth are you talking
about?

COACH KANG
(into phone)
Don't play dumb. And don't be late.

She hangs up.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE/DEN - NIGHT

Dart glances around at the equipment, as if seeing it all
for the first--or maybe last--time.

He runs upstairs to his bedroom to grab his car keys.

He almost plows into Will in the upstairs hall as his
brother emerges from the bathroom in a grungy robe and
pajama pants.

WILL
Watch it!
(then)
Where are you heading? I thought
you were packing for tomorrow.

DART
(turns, doesn't stop)
Finish up for me. The checklist's
next to the totes in the den.

He's down the stairs and out of view in a second.

WILL
 (calls after)
 Like I can read your handwriting?

DART (O.S.)
 It's a spreadsheet on the tablet!

The front door SLAMS. Will's grumbly, but after a moment he looks uneasy. He walks into his bedroom and turns on his monitor. His fingers tap with machine-gun intensity.

INSERT - WILL'S COMPUTER SCREEN

The familiar GossipPal screen displays. Will pops open and scans several windows before the text log comes up. The last exchange between Tripp and Coach Kang, from a few minutes before, is visible.

WILL
 Oh, no.
 (jumps up)
 Dart!
 (top of his lungs)
 DART!

He runs down the stairs and throws open the door just in time to see a car's taillights go around the corner.

He runs back up to his bedroom, where he tosses programming books and manga off his bed until his smartphone surfaces. He texts furiously for a moment, taps the Send button hard, and waits, his eyes locked on the screen.

WILL
 (to self)
 Come on, answer.

A musical PING from behind him somewhere jerks his head around. He runs into Dart's bedroom, where Dart's smartphone lies cattywumpus on an area rug. It PINGS again.

Will slumps against the doorframe, helpless.

INT. CORPCO BUILDING/COACH KANG'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Coach Kang stares out the window. The team photo she held before lies on her desk.

DART (O.S.)
 Katherine.

She turns to face him. He stands in the doorway glowering, breathing heavier than is probably wise.

COACH KANG

D'artagnan.

(turns to face him)

I didn't think you had it in you.

DART

(a step forward)

I'm here. Would you mind explaining why, beyond crazy threats? Last I checked starting a Robot League team wasn't a Federal offense.

She sits and gestures to the chair on the other side of her desk. Dart remains standing.

COACH KANG

Don't be a child.

(waits as he relents)

Do you know what my day job is these days?

DART

Other than making teenagers miserable?

COACH KANG

Actually, the community outreach with Robot League is seasonal. The rest of the year I work with Corpco's Remote Sensing Unit. We make equipment for a number of government... clients.

DART

I'm sure it looks great on your resume. I'm waiting for an answer.

COACH KANG

The National Security Agency takes a dim view of people hacking into their contractors' email.

DART

(indignant denial)

Ha-

(realizes what Will did)

Hacking.

(jaw tight)

Serious accusations. Right up there with using what I presume is borrowed spy gear.

COACH KANG

Except our situations aren't the same, are they? If you go to the authorities, Tripp McAlister gets a stern talking to about the ethics of Robot League. On the other hand, if I go to my pals in the N.S.A., your brother gets charged with cyberterrorism.

DART

Will has nothing to do with this.

COACH KANG

D'artagnan, please. After years of working with teenagers I know honest befuddlement when I see it. You still can't lie to save your life. Or your brother's.

DART

Maybe I took an acting class.

COACH KANG

And maybe I volunteer for Doctors without Borders.

DART

Siccing the Feds on a thirteen-year old boy for snooping on your team's conversations is a little over the top even for you.

COACH KANG

I'd prefer it not come to that.

DART

(trying to stay cool)

I told Will to do it. I'll swear to that in court.

COACH KANG

Admirable, taking the fall for your kid brother.

(stands)

You might even pull it off--not that it would make any difference to your parents which of their sons went to jail.

DART

They'd understand.

COACH KANG
(nods, solicitous)
They're good people. They might.
(then)
Would your kids? Would Will?

Dart wavers. She pounces, getting into his face.

COACH KANG
(continuing)
How do you think he'll react?
Knowing he's responsible for
destroying his brother's life? What
sort of man do you think he'll
become while you're in prison
instead of him?
(smells blood)
Or you can save everyone a lot of
pain.

DART
What do you want?

COACH KANG
All you have to do is make sure
your team doesn't win tomorrow.
They can come heart-achingly close
if you like. Even win a little
face-saving trophy or two. But I go
to nationals.

DART
Just like always.

COACH KANG
(finger to his chest)
Just. Like. Always. And no one has
to go on trial.
(then)
Who knows? Maybe I'll take on your
kids next year. They're at least as
good as my current lot, and they
could certainly benefit from my
guidance.

Dart goes rigid for a moment, but then relaxes. Kang just made his decision for him.

DART
I'll tell you what kind of man
Will's going to be.
(MORE)

DART (cont'd)
(he stands, looming over
her now)
The kind who knows his brother
loves him. See, the difference
between you and me is that I trust
my kids, even when they screw up.
(turns to go)
I'll see you in the morning,
Katherine. May the best team win.

As he leaves Coach Kang flushes with rage. She turns this way and that, as if looking for something to throw, until her eyes lock on her desk phone. Glaring at the door Dart walked through, she punches in a three-digit number.

COACH KANG
(cooly, into phone)
Security? Angreux. The man you let
in earlier to see me? He took a USB
thumb drive from my office.
(then)
Don't let him out of the garage.
And contact the police.

A triumphant half-sneer twists her face as she hangs up.

COACH KANG
Let's see you coach from jail.

INT. CORPCO BUILDING/PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Dart walks to his car, his breathing uneven. As he climbs in a security vehicle zips up behind to trap it. SECURITY GUARD 1, 38 (black, tense) and SECURITY GUARD 2, 22 (white, twitchy) emerge, hands on their weapons.

DART
What the...

Probably violating standard procedure, the security guards both stand about fifteen feet from the driver-side door.

SECURITY GUARD 1
Mr. Thomas! Keep your hands where
we can see them and exit the
vehicle.

SECURITY GUARD 2
You heard him! Out of the car!

Dart edges out, hands extended. He starts to WHEEZE.

DART

Take... it... easy... fellas...

Security Guard 2 gets even more nervous at Dart's wheezing.

SECURITY GUARD 2

Stop making that noise!

DART

(frantic for air)

Need... my...

Dart trails off, his air supply choked. He slaps at his jacket pockets for his inhaler.

Security Guard 2, in full panic, draws his pistol. Security Guard 1 doesn't. He's seen asthma attacks before.

SECURITY GUARD 2

He's got a gun!

SECURITY GUARD 1

(reaches toward partner)

Wait-

INT. HOSPITAL/HALLWAY - NIGHT

A SHOT blends into the SLAM of a door being thrown open by Dr. Thomas, in scrubs. An ORDERLY, 30s, tries to keep up with him.

DR. THOMAS

He's my son! Why wasn't I told?

ORDERLY

E.R. admitting didn't know you were in surgery, doctor. Your cell phone's off. They tried your home number, but got voice mail.

They enter the emergency room, which is full of curtained-off treatment areas. The orderly gestures at one.

DR. THOMAS

Great, so one son shows up in the E.R. and my other son is unaccounted-

He pushes the curtain aside.

Will, still in bathrobe and pajama pants, sits by Dart. The latter is marginally conscious and has a respirator, but seems to be free of bullet holes.

DR. THOMAS

Will-

WILL

Dart's going to be all right, Dad.

(then)

The nurse should be back soon if
you want to talk shop with someone.

Dr. Thomas glances at the monitors to confirm Dart's not on
death's door, then focuses on his younger son.

DR. THOMAS

What happened?

(Will opens his mouth)

Wait--hold that thought. I need to
get hold of your mother.

(glares at smartphone)

I can never get any bars down here.

(points at Will)

Don't move.

Dr. Thomas heads for the outside door. Dart stirs.

DART

Was that Dad?

WILL

Yeah. You probably shouldn't talk.

DART

(lifts respirator off)

Nice try, but I can see my oxygen
saturation number. How'd you get
here?

WILL

Your old bicycle. I got to Corpco
just in time to see them load you
into the ambulance.

DART

I don't remember that.

WILL

You were blue-lips-out of it. Lucky
for you one of the rent-a-cops had
asthma as a kid, or...

(then)

Evidently Zoe blabbed to McAlister.

DART

Don't you dare blame her. You
started this. And you got caught.

WILL
(stricken)
Yeah. Guess I did. I had no idea
things would get so crazy.
(then)
Sorry.

DART
Apology accepted, doofus.
(then)
You don't know Kang like I do. What
were you thinking? She works with
the N.S.A.! They don't exactly
appreciate competition when it
comes to surveillance.

WILL
Surveillance? I was just monitoring
my app's functions. People agree to
that when they download it.

DART
Wait--people agree to have their
communications spied on in your
app's End User License Agreement?

WILL
It's thirty-eight pages long. No
one ever reads it.

DART
Did you try to decrypt any of
Kang's work emails?

WILL
None of her fancy stuff went to
team members, so no.

DART
Steal any of the team's code?

WILL
They couldn't optimize a trip to
the bathroom. No, I just wanted to
see how they were doing.

DART
It's still grounds for
disqualification.
(then)
Moot point anyway. They're not
going to let me out of here until
tomorrow afternoon at the earliest.
And I have to register the team in
the morning for you to compete.

The BEEPS of monitors are the only sound for a moment.

WILL
So...what exactly does registration
entail?

Eyes still on Will, Dart puts the respirator back on and
sucks in some oxygen.

EXT./INT. COLLEGE SPORTS COMPLEX - DAY

Robot League team members and coaches in colorful "uniforms"
stream into the doors, schlepping boxes of equipment.

Once in the lobby they converge at the Registration Desk.

Zoe, Giles and Nisha stand off to the side, glum. The totes
Dart packed and an invisible barrier of recrimination
separate Zoe from the other two.

GILES
(checks phone)
It's almost nine.

NISHA
I imagine Will's being careful. I
would be too.
(sidelong glance at Zoe)
Enough's gone wrong already.

Zoe would like to crawl in one of the storage totes. Giles's
phone DINGS.

GILES
(reading from phone)
He says get in line. He'll be here
in thirty seconds.

The three of them drag the totes to the Registration Desk,
where a female TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL, 40s, smiles at them.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL
Team name?

NISHA
Robo4ce. With a four.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL
I'll need your waivers and your
coach's affidavit.
(glances around them)
Is your coach still outside?

DART (O.S.)
I'm right here.

The tablet-chariot and a fatigued-looking Will join the team members at the desk. Dart's face fills the tablet screen.

Will carries a large manila envelope and Jumpin' Jenny. He pulls a driver's license and a form out of the envelope.

DART
(from tablet)
There's my photo ID and affidavit.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL
(nonplussed)
You need to sign the affidavit,
Mister...
(checks form and I.D.)
Thomas.

DART
(from tablet)
I know. Will?

Will sets Jumpin' Jenny down on the form. He puts a pen in one of the robot's manipulators.

INT. HOSPITAL/DART'S ROOM - DAY

Dart, in pajamas, has the matching tablet on his tray table, atop a small keyboard with an attached joystick. He holds up a stylus so the official can see it, then scribbles something on the tablet.

INT. COLLEGE SPORTS COMPLEX/LOBBY - DAY

Jumpin' Jenny whirs. The manipulator reproduces Dart's signature on the affidavit.

The official looks confused for a moment, then impressed. She hands Nisha a packet of Important Stuff.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL
If you're this inventive on the
course, you'll do well today.

NISHA
Thanks.
(to tablet)
You ready, Coach?

DART
 (from tablet)
 Just don't forget I'm not very good
 at opening doors right now.

The team gathers their belongings.

They don't see Jeb and Carlos watching them from the other side of the vestibule, dumbfounded. The pair scurry through another set of doors as Robo4ce makes its way into the gym.

INT. GYM/DOORWAY - DAY

In the pit area, which takes up three-fourths of the gym floor, sixty teams swarm sixty folding tables, each working on their own robot. The tables feature decor that connects to team names or the year's theme; zombies are prominent.

Beyond, three competition courses await below huge decorative banners featuring heroes of STEM: Tesla, Ada Lovelace, Alan Turing.

A number of large projection TV screens provide close-ups of the courses alternating with the Robot League logo and video of past highlights (robots doing cool things, kids cheering) and lowlights (Bricko blocks flying, kids covering their faces). Thrumming techno music provides compelling, if annoying, background noise.

Robo4ce and their remote coach-on-wheels enter.

NISHA
 Welcome to the big leagues.

WILL
 (distressed)
 The big leagues are louder than I expected.

NISHA
 (holds out a small box)
 Thought you might want these.

WILL
 (takes earplugs from box)
 Thanks.

As Will slips the earplugs in, the team takes tentative steps into the gym. Giles checks the packet, then points.

GILES
 There's our table. We're in the Tesla division.

The team schleps their gear into the pits. The tablet-chariot follows.

INT. GYM/TON OF BRICKS TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY

The Ton of Bricks table is--unlike the others--concealed within an ominous black marquee tent. "No Admittance" signs decorate its exterior.

Carlos and Jeb rush inside, where Coach Kang, Tripp and Lori watch a computer simulation of Grond's performance. The robot itself sits in the same custom cart seen in the Corpco conference room.

CARLOS
(breathless)
They're here. Robo4ce is here.

COACH KANG
(taken aback)
That's impossible.

JEB
We saw them register. Their robot signed them in.

COACH KANG
Their robot signed?

Jeb and Carlos nod in unison. Coach Kang processes the revelation. Tripp looks uneasy.

TRIPP
Was Zoe with them?

CARLOS
Yeah. She looked kinda bummed.

JEB
The others acted like they were mad at her.

LORI
(at Tripp)
My, my, wonder why?

Tripp bites his lip.

COACH KANG
I'll go check with the officials.
There's a rule about the coach
being physically present.
(then)
Or there will be.

She takes two steps toward the door. Tripp snaps.

TRIPP

No.

COACH KANG

(freezes, flat)

What?

TRIPP

I said no. I don't want them tossed out on some lame-o technicality. This is the first time in years a team has really challenged Ton of Bricks.

Coach Kang stares. Lori, pleasantly shocked at Tripp's sudden acquisition of vertebrae, jumps in.

LORI

I'm with Tripp. If we don't have a chance of losing, what's the point?

Carlos and Jeb nod approval. Kang is livid.

COACH KANG

What's the point? What's the point? I'll tell you what the point is. This is our tournament. Every trophy and every picture in my office is a renewal of our deed of ownership. I don't come here to lose.

TRIPP

(light bulb moment)

You're afraid of losing.

(gestures at teammates)

We're not. Sure, losing would bite. We'd prefer to win. But getting our only real competitor kicked out isn't winning. And it's not fair for you to get us involved in whatever personal issues you have with their coach.

COACH KANG

(icy)

Maybe if you feel that way you should find another team. There's the door. We can go on without you.

LORI

I think you have that backwards,
Coach. If Tripp's off the team, I'm
gone too.

(to the others)

Jeb? Carlos?

The boys say nothing but line up behind Lori. Kang's head swivels between them and the defiant Tripp. The balance of power has shifted. She attempts to change tack.

COACH KANG

Wait, wait. You made your point. I
need you as much as you need me.

TRIPP

More.

COACH KANG

Really? And where would you be
without me?

LORI

You know, I was all-conference in
field hockey last year. Now I'm
second string. Carlos would love to
play trombone more.

CARLOS

I almost got into jazz band.

LORI

Jeb gave up ballroom dance for
this.

JEB

We were starting the Merengue.

(wistful)

My partner still won't speak to me.

LORI

The only one of us that doesn't
have other activities is Tripp, and
he's the one who said "no" in the
first place.

TRIPP

If it's not real, I'm not
interested.

Coach Kang "smiles." You can almost hear tendons stretch.

COACH KANG

Fine. We'll do it your way.

A loud feedback WHINE presages an announcement.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL (O.S.)
Attention, please. The coach's
meeting begins in five minutes. All
coaches please report to the press
gallery.

COACH KANG
That's my cue.
(then)
Assuming I'm still your coach.

Tripp glances at Lori, then nods. Coach Kang steps outside the tent.

A few coaches and kids at nearby tables sneak glances at her, having heard her outburst through the walls of the tent. She glares back. They avert their eyes. Seething, she stomps off.

In the tent the team takes a deep collective breath, then:

TRIPP
All right. Jeb, load out your code
for the tower lift from source
control. Lori, get the schematics
of the physical configuration.

JEB
(at his laptop)
On it.

LORI
(at her laptop)
I'll grab the notes we made the
last time we tried the tower too.

TRIPP
Good. Carlos, given how spotty our
success was, expect to do some last
minute fixes.
(makes to leave)
I'll be right back.

CARLOS
Where are you going?

TRIPP
There's something only I can fix.

INT. GYM/ROBO4CE TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY

Giles and Zoe set up the team banner. Will pulls his laptop from his backpack. Nisha checks the team's schedule, taped to the table. Dart's tablet-chariot stays out of the way.

NISHA

Our first round is at nine-fifty.

ZOE

And the second?

NISHA

(without looking at Zoe)

One-thirty. At least we'll have time to do fine-tuning.

GILES

If it needs it.

Nisha checks over Jumpin' Jenny.

NISHA

No matter how much you practice, something always goes wrong. Differences in lighting confuse the color sensors, or they make the tables out of plastic instead of wood and the ultrasonic sensor can't detect walls.

ZOE

Will's got the calibration routines in place to cover that stuff.

(then)

Right, Will?

Will, earplugs in place, remains oblivious to his teammate's question. He's already busy on the laptop.

ZOE

(louder)

Right, Will?

WILL

Sorry, I was loading calibration routines, I didn't hear you.

ZOE

Never mind. What can I do to help?

GILES

(snide)

Why don't you ask Tripp?

Nisha smirks at that. Dart's tablet-chariot wheels into their midst. Even from his limited vantage he's seen enough.

DART
 (from tablet)
 People, Zoe is your teammate.
 (to Giles)
 All she did last night was brag a
 little. Justifiably.

NISHA
 And you ended up in the hospital.

The tablet spins in place to face her.

DART
 (from tablet)
 Not because of her.
 (then)
 If you let Robot League get between
 you and your best friend, your
 priorities are whacked.

The same loud feedback WHINE as before presages the same announcement.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL (O.S.)
 Attention, please. The coach's
 meeting begins in five minutes. All
 coaches please report to the press
 gallery.

DART
 (from tablet)
 I have to go. In the meantime, I
 suggest you four work things out...
 if you want a chance to win.

The tablet starts to roll away. It stops and turns.

DART
 (from tablet)
 Um, can someone push the elevator
 buttons for me?

ZOE
 I will.
 (then)
 It's probably the most useful thing
 I can do right now.

Zoe and Dart walk/roll away. Giles and Nisha exchange sheepish glances. Will looks up, puzzled, and pulls an earplug out.

WILL
Where'd they go?

INT. COLLEGE SPORTS COMPLEX/LOBBY - DAY

Zoe pushes the up button and stares at the elevator door, forlorn. Dart's tablet-chariot rolls up next to her.

INT. HOSPITAL/DART'S ROOM - DAY

Dart sees Zoe's emotional state even through the tablet. He taps his fingers on the tray table, working on what to say.

INTERCUT with sports complex lobby.

DART
(into tablet)
They'll come around.

ZOE
I don't blame them for being upset.
(then)
It's not the team, really. I feel so stupid. I thought he was really interested in me.

DART
(into tablet)
He's probably terrified of Coach Kang. I was at his age.
(then)
You know, if someone offered me a V.I.P. pass to the Urban Legendaries, I'd jump at it too.

ZOE
Anyone? Even Coach Kang?

DART
(into tablet)
Okay, anyone not responsible for me almost getting shot.

INT. COLLEGE SPORTS COMPLEX/LOBBY - DAY

The elevator doors open. Dart's tablet rolls in. Zoe reaches in to push the button for the gallery level.

ZOE
(manages a smile)
You want me to ride up with you?

DART
 (from tablet)
 Thanks. I've got it from here.
 (laughs)
 Though if you don't see me in ten minutes, come upstairs and push the button there. And at the risk of repeating myself: it's not your fault.

The doors close.

TRIPP (O.S.)
 He's right, you know.

Zoe whirls around to face Tripp.

TRIPP
 (continuing)
 It's my fault.

ZOE
 You, you... weasel!

TRIPP
 (tail between legs)
 Yeah. I let my coach use me to get at your coach, and you kinda got stuck in the middle. I'm sorry. I feel awful.

ZOE
 (still angry)
 You should. Dart almost got shot because of your crazy coach.

TRIPP
 (shaken)
 Shot?

ZOE
 Shot. As it stands he had an asthma attack. He's in the hospital.

TRIPP
 (subdued)
 That explains the tablet setup.
 (then)
 Which is really slick, for what it's worth.

ZOE
 (sarcastic)
 I'll let Will know you approve.

She spins on her heels to go.

TRIPP

Zoe...

ZOE

What now?

TRIPP

Kang wanted to get you thrown out
of the tournament. We told her
we'll beat you fair and square, or
not at all.

Zoe starts to say something and stops, confused.

TRIPP

(continuing)

I won't ask you or your friends to
forgive me. I don't deserve it. But
for the record? Up until the part
where I turned into a weasel, I
really did enjoy being at the show
with you last night.

(before she can respond)

Good luck today.

It's Tripp's turn to leave Zoe standing there, conflicted.

INT. COLLEGE SPORTS COMPLEX/PRESS GALLERY - DAY

The elevator doors open. Dart's tablet rolls out into a
glassed-in balcony overlooking the gym floor, where coaches
from the teams mill about with referees and other officials.

Kang, already present, sees the tablet and scowls.

The same official that registered Robo4ce joins them.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL

Good morning everyone.

(to the tablet, amused)

It is morning where you are, isn't
it Mr. Thomas?

DART

(from tablet)

Hey, I'm just over at Memorial. Now
when my mom's using this rig, the
International Date Line comes into
play.

The coaches, geeks all, grin at that.

Coach Kang starts a bit when the hospital is mentioned.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL
(distributes handout)
So, for those of you who are new,
here's a quick guide to the day's
events. For those of you returning
to us, the format's the same as
last year: two scoring runs for
each team.

As the others review the handout, Kang's attention is drawn toward Dart's face on the tablet. When the tablet-chariot spins in her direction, she looks away.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL
(continuing)
As always, the team with the
highest-scoring run of the day
advances to the national
tournament. Any questions?
(when no one responds)
Time for some robot mayhem.

All begin to file down the stairs. Kang's at the back of the line. As she's about to go, Dart's tablet-chariot rolls up and cuts her off.

DART
(from tablet)
Katherine.

Kang glowers until the last person walks out of earshot.

COACH KANG
If you think being laid up will get
you any sympathy--

A piercing SCREECH of white noise from the tablet cuts her off. She winces.

INT. HOSPITAL/DART'S ROOM - DAY

DART
Will added that little feature in
case I needed to talk to you.
(then)
I have to remember to uninstall it
before my mom uses this again.
Anyway, guess who came to visit me
this morning in my room?

INTERCUT with sports complex press gallery.

Coach Kang shrugs, non-committal.

DART

(to tablet, continuing)

The head of Corpco security. Before he apologized for one of his men putting a bullet hole in my fender, he said they'd searched my car and my clothes for a thumb drive they'd been told I had.

(archly)

Evidently you were mistaken about me taking it.

The tablet rolls forward a foot. Kang steps back.

COACH KANG

Imagine that.

DART

(to tablet)

I talked to Will. He can prove he never touched your work email, and his app's license allowed him to look at everything else.

The tablet rolls forward again. Kang backs into the stair railing.

DART

(continuing)

So: do we both need to talk to the officials about unsportsmanlike conduct? Or are we done here?

COACH KANG

(with effort)

We're done.

The tablet backs off.

DART

Good. I'll see you downstairs.

The tablet-chariot wheels past her toward the elevator. A paroxysm of rage, self-loathing and even guilt swirls on Kang's face. Her foot shoots out in front of one of the wheels, blocking it. The tablet-chariot pivots and dips.

In his hospital bed, Dart reflexively flinches and puts his hands up.

The face of the tablet smashes into the corner of the stair rail. It pops, flashes, and dies.

Coach Kang looks down at the stricken device. She nudges it with her foot, a la Vader and Obi-wan's empty robes.

COACH KANG
No, Mister I-trust-my-kids. You
won't.

Kang hurries down the stairs.

The elevator doors open. Zoe steps out. She sees the broken tablet. Her face falls.

INT. HOSPITAL/DART'S ROOM - DAY

Dart peeks through his arms, frowns, taps his tablet screen. He's distraught--but then a smile creeps across his face.

DART
(to himself)
Thank you, Katherine.

He starts to type.

INT. GYM/ROBO4CE TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY

Jumpin' Jenny moves back and forth over a multicolored test mat. Nisha and Will observe the results on the laptop. Giles, checklist in hand, glances around the gym.

NISHA
Looks good. Jenny can even tell
dark green from black in this
light.

Will scowls and starts to take an earplug out. Nisha waves him off and makes a thumbs-up sign.

GILES
That's all the sensors calibrated.
(then)
Our first run is in seven minutes.
Shouldn't Zoe and the Coach be back
by now? How slow is the elevator
here, anyway?

NISHA
Here she...oh, no.

Zoe arrives in tears, ruined tablet-chariot in her arms like a fallen warrior. This time Will does take out his earplugs.

GILES
What happened?

ZOE
I found it like this by the
elevator.

WILL
(closes his eyes)
Kang.

NISHA
Did you see her up there?

ZOE
No. Everyone was gone.

GILES
I bet she waited until they were
alone.

NISHA
We need him! Can we connect with
one of our phones? Or through your
laptop?

WILL
No. It's a custom app with secure
encryption, not just Skype with a
joystick. I mean, I could rig
something, but then I won't have
time to adjust Jenny's code.

Four ringtones sound at once. The four kids all read the
same incoming text on their phones.

SUPERIMPOSE: "DART: AT THIS POINT YOU 4 DON'T NEED ME"

Their phones immediately sound again.

SUPERIMPOSE: "BUT YOU DO NEED EACH OTHER"

The teammates glance up from their phones at each other,
anxious. Their phones again signal. The four read more.

SUPERIMPOSE: "I TOLD KANG I TRUSTED MY KIDS"

Another chorus of phone sounds.

SUPERIMPOSE: "GO PROVE ME RIGHT"

The fear in their expressions yields to resolve.

INT. HOSPITAL/DART'S ROOM - DAY

Dart turns off the tablet and lies back in his bed. Dr.
Thomas comes in.

DR. THOMAS

I'm about to head to the event. You
sure look relaxed.

DART

I'm just doing what you suggested:
guiding, not leading.

INT. GYM/COMPETITION AREA - DAY

Robo4ce approaches their assigned competition table. Two
other teams do the same. All are nervous and excited.

The crowd in the stands, which includes an
uncomfortable-looking Sarah, is almost as pumped.

BELINDA, 18, and MAX, 19, face a cameraman near the
officials' table. Both have TV news microphones. For all
their enthusiasm, neither will ever need to fret over a
sportscasting career. Their images show on the big screens.

MAX

Welcome to the exciting start of
another Robot League season!

BELINDA

I'm Belinda, and I'll be reporting
from course-side today.

MAX

And I'm Max, at the control center.
The first round is about to begin
and there's electricity in the air,
not to mention the robots.

Their table's REFEREE, 40s, motions Robo4ce forward. Zoe
places Jenny in the start zone of the course.

REFEREE

You're familiar with the rules?

ZOE

Touch the robot once it leaves the
start zone or leave a Bricko piece
on the course and it's a ten point
penalty. If the robot breaks a
challenge object, you can't score
points off that challenge.

REFEREE

(nods, satisfied)

You got it. Are you ready?

NISHA

We're ready.

WILL

Wait.

He pulls out a small remote and clicks a button. The pounding techno music abruptly switches to "Kind of Blue" period Miles Davis. The ref gives Will a sidelong look.

WILL

Now we're ready.

The ref shrugs, then raises a hand high. The other two referees at the other tables do likewise.

The overhead screens now show views of each obstacle course.

BELINDA (V.O.)

There's the signal.

MAX (V.O.)

And here's the countdown!

Timers appear on the projection screens above the tables.
3..2..1..a HORN sounds.

Three young hands, including Zoe's, press three power buttons. The teams (and their cheering sections) urge their robots on. The enthusiasm starts to rub off on Sarah.

The robots, Jumpin' Jenny included, move onto the identical obstacle courses. One robot plows into the Bricko car wash.

BELINDA (V.O.)

The Crowbot team makes an
unscheduled stop at the car wash.

MAX (V.O.)

At least their restart will be
clean.

Another robot interacts with the merry-go-round, but gets stuck on it and goes in circles.

BELINDA (V.O.)

Now the Gearloose robot is in
trouble on the carousel.

MAX (V.O.)

Did they buy a ticket for that
ride?

BELINDA (V.O.)
Meanwhile, over at the Tesla table,
Robo4ce's Jumpin' Jenny is tearing
up the course!

Barreling across the mat, Jenny easily snags the kitten
basket and heads for the rescue ramp--but one of the two
kittens falls out as Jenny ziplines to the finish.

Zoe winces but otherwise keeps her cool.

Jenny ends her run. The BUZZER sounds.

The referee ticks off items on a score sheet, then shows it
to Nisha.

REFEREE
I show two-hundred-seventy-five
points and a ten point sprawl
penalty. Two-hundred-sixty-five.

NISHA
That's what I saw too. Thank you.

Belinda and a cameraman swoop in. Belinda shoves the mic in
Nisha's face.

BELINDA
Great first round score, but I'm
sure you knew that. Do you think
you'll be able to fix that one
glitch in time?

Nisha nods mutely. Zoe, seeing her freeze, takes the mic.

ZOE
Bet on it, Belinda.

Giles scoops up Jumpin' Jenny. The team starts to walk away.
The referee clears his throat and gives Will an expectant
look. Will clicks his remote and the techno beat is back.

INT. GYM/TON OF BRICKS TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY

The team and Coach Kang watch the overhead screens.

LORI
If they get the kittens, they'll be
at two-eighty-five.

CARLOS
We'd need to raise the cell tower
to beat them.

JEB

The spin to put the tower into
place works now. But...

TRIPP

But what?

CARLOS

It puts a lot of strain on the arm.

LORI

If the arm pops off during the
spin, we lose the twenty tower
points and we take a sprawl
penalty.

TRIPP

(ponders, then)

Our second-round run follows
theirs. We could wait and see if we
need the tower.

(looks at Kang)

Coach?

COACH KANG

You actually have a use for me now?
(then)

Amazingly, Tripp is right. Don't
take risks if you don't have to.

JEB

(nods, clicks mouse)

The tower spin is out.

LORI

(puts Grond on its cart)

And we're up.

They head for the competition area.

INT. GYM/ROBO4CE TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY

Giles plugs Jumpin' Jenny in. Nisha sticks her tongue out.

NISHA

I forgot how much I hate
microphones.

ZOE

Why would a kitten fall out here
and not in practice?

Zoe pulls their practice basket of kittens out of a tote and
fits it into Jenny's manipulator.

GILES

Can we take the jump off the ramp
slower?

WILL

We're too tight on time.

(then)

I could pull the basket in closer
to the body before Jenny jumps off.

GILES

That would tilt the basket.

Zoe manually moves the robot through the maneuver.

ZOE

(mostly to herself)

What changed, Jenny?

WILL

Dart didn't put the high-speed
camera on his packing list.

(sighs)

We could sure use it right now.

Zoe turns the robot in her hands, totally focused.

NISHA

(points at big screen)

Ton of Bricks is up.

Will, Giles and Nisha watch as Tripp readies Grond.

BELINDA (V.O.)

Our returning champions, Ton of
Bricks, are making their first
appearance of the day, with their
robot Grond. They look confident.

MAX (V.O.)

If you'd gone to nationals six
times, you'd be confident too.

BELINDA (V.O.)

The refs are ready...

The HORN sounds. The robots get to work, especially the
odds-on favorite.

NISHA

Boy, the Ton of Bricks robot
doesn't waste any movement.

GILES

It has to be efficient. It's bigger
than Jenny, so it's slower.

Zoe's still concentrating on Jenny. She closes her eyes.

ANIMATION - INSIDE ZOE'S HEAD

Jenny's on the ramp, grabbing the damsel, knocking zombies
aside, snagging the zipline. A Jenny-sized Zoe observes.

ZOE

Something's different.

Zoe circles around to focus on the basket of kittens.

ZOE

(continuing)

The ramp is the same. The basket is
the same. The robot is the same.

Jenny rolls off the ramp. The line sags a bit under Jenny's
weight, then rebounds. The bounce makes a Bricko kitten fly.

ZOE

(continuing)

That's it.

INT. GYM/ROBO4CE TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Zoe opens her eyes.

On the overhead screen, the Ton of Bricks robot crosses the
finish line with several seconds to spare.

BELINDA (V.O.)

Wow! A flawless run from Ton of
Bricks!

MAX (V.O.)

They score two-hundred-seventy-five
points and take the lead!

Overhead, standings display. Robo4ce's score drops to second
place. Nisha, Giles and Will fight panic.

WILL

We could just drop the basket move.
We'd avoid the ten point penalty.

GILES

That still only ties us.

NISHA
Better than being behind.

ZOE
(stands)
Don't make a decision until I get
back.

Zoe strides toward the competition area. The other three
look at each other. Nisha runs after Zoe.

INT. GYM/COMPETITION AREA - DAY - CONTINUOUS

As the referees reset the course for the next round of
teams, Zoe approaches the officials. Nisha joins her.

NISHA
What are you doing?

ZOE
The zipline is bouncier than the
one that came with our practice
course.

NISHA
What? They should all be the same.

The two arrive at the table. Max notices them.

MAX
Good morning, ladies. What's up?

ZOE
I have a question about how the
courses were assembled.

MAX
Ask away.

ZOE
Did you use the zipline that came
with the kit?

MAX
Yes, of course.
(then)
Hold on. The zipline for the Tesla
table snapped when we put tension
on it. We had to replace it with
identical line.
(rummages in a toolkit)
Here. Standard fourteen-pound test.

ZOE
(inspects spool)
Thanks.

Zoe returns the spool. She and Nisha head back to the pits.

NISHA
So if it's not the line-

ZOE
It is the line. My dad fishes. A lot. Just because it's rated the same doesn't mean it's identical.

NISHA
Okay, it's the line. What can we do? You heard Will. We can't go any slower and still beat the buzzer.

ZOE
I need to check the rules.

INT. GYM/ROBO4CE TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Will and Giles are arguing as Zoe and Nisha arrive.

Zoe picks up a tablet and searches through the rules.

WILL
We don't have any leeway.

GILES
All we'd lose is a half-second.

WILL
If we don't cross the line by the buzzer we lose our whole score.

ZOE
(finds it)
We don't slow down on the jump. We speed up.

GILES/NISHA
What?

GILES
Then we'd be sure to bounce the kitten out.

ZOE
I know.
(MORE)

ZOE (cont'd)
(points to rule 47.A.3)
But we don't have to carry the
kitten into the scoring zone. It
just has to get there.

NISHA
So... we go faster... and the
kitten still bounces out, but
closer to the finish line...

ZOE
And tumbles into the scoring zone.

WILL
Poor kitty.

ZOE
Hey, they land on their feet.

GILES
What's the motor at when Jenny
jumps?

WILL
Forty percent.

ZOE
Go to eighty. More than that and
the wheels might spin.

Will glances at Nisha for confirmation. She chuckles.

NISHA
It's like my mom always says before
she fires up the Large Hadron
Collider: go big or go home.

Will starts typing and clicking.

INT. GYM/COMPETITION AREA - DAY

Cool jazz plays. The three refs have their hands in the air.

BELINDA (V.O.)
Time for round two!

The HORN sounds. The robots do better than last time.

MAX (V.O.)
Looks like the teams worked out
some kinks between heats, Belinda.

BELINDA (V.O.)
Sure does, Max. The Crowbots have
cleared the car wash and the lab,
and are trying to save the bus.

The Bricko bus o'nuns rolls into the scoring zone.

BELINDA (V.O.)
Meanwhile, Gearloose seems to have
mastered the merry-go-round.

MAX (V.O.)
Guess they have a shot at that
brass ring after all.

The Gearloose bot neatly slices zombie heads off the riders.

MAX (V.O.)
The big question is whether Robo4ce
can improve on their great first
run.

BELINDA (V.O.)
And we're about to find out.

Jumpin' Jenny hits the rescue ramp, kitten basket in, um,
claw. This time the robot leaps off at a much higher speed.
Jenny catches air in slow motion.

The overhead display timer shows one-point-five seconds.

Zoe's hands are clenched fists under her chin.

Nisha, Giles and even Will urge Jenny on.

Sarah, in the stands, is in full pom-pom cheer mode.

On the course, Jenny snags the zipline, dips, bounces.

The timer shows one-point-one seconds.

Ton of Bricks watches the overhead display, tense.

On the course, the kitten bounces out of the basket.

Point-seven-seconds.

Zoe holds her breath, wide-eyed.

Nisha, Giles and Will are on the cusp of joy and terror.

On the course, Jenny skids into the scoring zone.

Point-three seconds.

Kang prepares to sneer.

On the course, the kitten tumbles over the line.

The timer hits zero. The BUZZER sounds.

Zoe and her teammates high-five each other.

Sarah whoops, pumps her fist, and hugs strangers.

Kang's expression sours. Ton of Bricks sags.

BELINDA (V.O.)
An unbelievable finish for Jumpin'
Jenny and Robo4ce!

MAX (V.O.)
The refs are totalling the
scores...

Robo4ce's referee shows the score sheet to Nisha.

REFEREE
I show two-hundred-eighty-five,
with no penalties.

NISHA
(trembling)
Agreed.

The overhead standings flip: Robo4ce leads now.

INT. GYM/TON OF BRICKS TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY

Tripp turns to Kang.

TRIPP
We put the tower move in.

Coach Kang nods. Jeb starts typing.

INT. GYM/ROBO4CE TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY

Robo4ce returns to their table, jubilant.

ZOE
I wish Dart could have seen our
run.

GILES
There's always the video.

ZOE

It's not the same.

NISHA

I wish I could have seen the look
on Kang's face when the kitten slid
into the scoring zone.

WILL

(points upward)

Ton of Bricks is about to do their
second run.

The team gazes at the big screen.

BELINDA

(on big screen)

Robo4ce is putting serious pressure
on Ton of Bricks, Max.

MAX

(on big screen)

Are the champs up to the challenge?

ZOE

What do you think they'll add?

NISHA

I bet they try to put up the cell
tower at the end of their run. They
have time.

The HORN starts the round. As before, Grond executes its
maneuvers efficiently.

GILES

I gotta admit, they know what
they're doing.

WILL

Their code is so suboptimal.

NISHA

Can't tell that from here.

The Ton of Bricks robot rolls over to where a Bricko cell
phone tower leans on the wall of the course, "broken" at a
hinge near its base.

MAX (V.O.)

What's this new move, Belinda?

BELINDA (V.O.)

They're going for the cell tower!

ZOE
 (to Nisha)
 Looks like you were right.

The robot puts a manipulator arm under the tower and spins one-hundred-eighty degrees in place, flipping the tower vertical.

BELINDA (V.O.)
 The tower is up!

NISHA
 (winces)
 Slick.

The tower stays up. The robot rolls for the finish...but the manipulator arm drags, limp.

MAX (V.O.)
 Belinda, their robot appears damaged.

GILES
 Look!

Before the robot crosses the line, the arm falls off.

BELINDA (V.O.)
 Oooh! That broken arm for Ton of Bricks is going to hurt.

MAX (V.O.)
 Usually it's the zombies who leave limbs behind.

The BUZZER ends the run.

NISHA
 Adding the tower...

WILL
 And subtracting the sprawl penalty...

MAX
 (on big screen)
 We have a tie!

The Robo4ce kids look at each other: what now?

BELINDA
 (on big screen)
 Max, I'm not even sure what happens next!

MAX
 (on big screen)
 The officials are checking the
 rulebook...

The Tournament Official appears on the overhead screen.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL
 In forty-five minutes, there will
 be a head-to-head tie-breaker
 round. If the score is tied again,
 the robot that completes the run
 fastest wins.

Around the Robo4ce table, the kids absorb the situation.

ZOE
 So do we change anything? Try to go
 even faster on the straight parts?

WILL
 We might skid. Lose more time
 correcting than we gain.

NISHA
 Will's right. I say we make the
 exact same run. Their robot is
 bigger. Let them try to speed up.

GILES
 (points at big screen)
 Maybe it doesn't matter.

On the screen, the camera follows Ton of Bricks as they head
 back to the pits.

BELINDA (V.O.)
 Max, it looks as if a Bricko piece
 may have broken on that last run.
 From the mood of the team, I don't
 think they have a replacement.
 Let's see if we can get a state-

Coach Kang covers the lens with her hand.

COACH KANG
 (on big screen)
 Back off, Belinda.

Giles shakes his head. Nisha grins.

GILES
 It must be an oddball piece if they
 don't have a spare.

NISHA
If they can't fix the robot, we'll
win by default!

Will scowls but stays silent. Zoe looks at the broken tablet
for a long moment. She pulls Nisha aside.

ZOE
You know what Coach Dart would say.

Nisha waves her hands, as if to head off the idea.

NISHA
Whoa, whoa. You're not actually
suggesting we help them, are you?

Zoe's expression says "yes."

NISHA
(continuing)
After what their coach did to Dart?
What McAlister did to you? Why?

ZOE
Because even if Tripp's a weasel,
he and the others stopped Kang from
getting us kicked out.
(as that registers)
Besides, do you want to win because
we made a better robot, or because
we got lucky and didn't use a
defective Bricko?

Nisha squeezes her eyes shut and grits her teeth.

NISHA
I am so going to hate myself later.

ZOE
No you won't.

Nisha's grimace softens. She faces Giles.

NISHA
You brought spare Brickos, right?

GILES
They're out in the parking lot...
Wait. No. You can't be serious.
(sees expressions on Zoe
and Nisha's faces)
Okay, you're serious.

NISHA
Come with me.

INT. GYM/TON OF BRICKS TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY

Ton of Bricks mopes around Grond. Nisha arrives, followed by a reluctant Giles.

NISHA
What piece broke?

The team stares at her as if she spoke Urdu--which she might, but not right now. Kang opens her mouth to tell her to leave, but Tripp holds up a hand to shush his coach.

Carlos shows Nisha a gear with several stripped teeth.

NISHA
(to Giles)
Recognize it?

GILES
Thirty-millimeter diameter pinion gear. Handy little things. The robot kit only has three. I bet you used all of them, just like us.

CARLOS
Yeah.

GILES
Only other source for them are the windmills in the "Don Quixote vs. The Giants" set.

NISHA
Do you have any here?

GILES
(sighs)
This way.

Giles and Carlos trot toward the doors.

Kang and the rest of Ton of Bricks stare, unbelieving, at Nisha.

TRIPP
Why are you doing this?

NISHA
Because Zoe reminded me what Robot League is about, and it's not winning at any cost. Even against you guys.

Kang smirks but stays silent.

Tripp inspects his shoes, then looks back up.

TRIPP

Thank you.

NISHA

If Zoe were speaking to you I'd
tell you to thank her.

Nisha walks away.

COACH KANG

(under her breath)

Idiots.

EXT. COLLEGE SPORTS COMPLEX/PARKING LOT - DAY

Giles and Carlos approach what appears to be a race car trailer. It bears the "We'R'Toys" logo.

GILES

My dad had to fly to a meeting in
Guangzhou this afternoon, but he
left this here in case we needed
it. I think he feels bad about
being away today.

CARLOS

He left you a trailer?

GILES

Sorta.

Giles puts his hand up to a scanner mounted on the back of the trailer. The doors unlock with a HISS.

Lights flicker on inside. Floor-to-roof storage cabinets, color and shape-coded, line the walls. Giles strides to one of the thousand drawers, rummages around, and pulls out the twin to the broken piece.

GILES

There you go.

Carlos nods, at a loss for words. He takes the gear...

INT. GYM/TON OF BRICKS TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY

...and pops it into place on Grond.

CARLOS

It's ready.

JEB
Just a moment...
(types)
All right. I ramped up the motor
power where I could.

TRIPP
How much time did we shave off?

LORI
My math says two point two seconds.

JEB
It's not a lot. We don't know how
much time they'll cut.

TRIPP
It will have to do.

INT. GYM/COMPETITION AREA - DAY

The stands are packed. The other teams are sticking around.

Rob, blue vest and all, slips in next to Sarah. Dr. Thomas, in scrubs, arrives and sits with them. He holds up two phones--Mrs. Thomas's face is on one, Dart's the other.

Two of the competition tables have been put on a large raised dais, next to each other, with a referee for each. Max and Belinda stand in front of them.

MAX
The tension is high for this
unprecedented tiebreaker.

BELINDA
In the spirit of Robot League
sportsmanship, Robo4ce got the Ton
of Bricks robot running again.

MAX
Soon we'll find out if they'll have
a reason to regret it.

BELINDA
Here come the teams!

The two teams walk up ramps flanking the dais. The crowd cheers. Zoe and Tripp step forward. After a hesitation--from guilt on his part, uncertainty on hers--they shake hands.

ZOE
Good luck, McAlister.

TRIPP
You too, Miller.

Zoe puts Jumpin' Jenny in place. Tripp takes the repaired Grond from its cart and does the same.

The refs raise their hands.

CROWD
Three! Two! One!

The HORN sounds.

Max and Belinda prepare to bloviate. Will pulls his remote out and clicks it. The two announcers tap their suddenly dead mics, puzzled.

Jumpin' Jenny goes through her paces just like the last time. Grond moves in faster bursts.

GILES
(to Nisha)
They cranked up the power.

Nisha nods, biting her lip.

Jumpin' Jenny shoves the tanker into the penned zombies.

Zoe hops up and down.

Grond pushes the bus of nuns to safety.

Tripp does a double fist-pump.

Jumpin' Jenny goes after zombies with the mower.

Rob, Sarah and Dr. Thomas cheer.

Grond spins the merry-go-round.

Kang smirks.

Jenny grabs the kitten basket and heads for the ramp.

ZOE
Go, Jenny, go!

Grond moves the tower into place, now clearly in the lead.

TRIPP
C'mon, c'mon...

Grond has to make one last sharp turn around the orphanage.

Jenny's on the ramp.

Grond corners too fast. It goes up on two wheels, teeters...
The crowd inhales.

TRIPP

No!

Over it goes.

CROWD

Ooooh...

Grond tumbles and stops a few inches short of the scoring zone.

Ton of Bricks avert their collective eyes.

Jenny and the kitten slide independently into their scoring zone a second later, just before the BUZZER.

Zoe squeals. The rest of the team squeals. Rob, Sarah and Dr. Thomas squeal.

INT. HOSPITAL/DART'S ROOM - DAY

Dart, looking at his tablet, squeals. The nurse shushes him.

EXT. PALACE OF VERSAILLES - NIGHT

Mrs. Thomas, looking at her phone, squeals. A gendarme shushes her.

INT. GYM/COMPETITION AREA - DAY

The Tournament Official has a box of medals ready.

Kang steps in her way.

COACH KANG

Just a minute. I want to file a protest.

TRIPP

Ah, Coach...

COACH KANG

Not now, Tripp.
(to tournament official)
Robo4ce spied on us for weeks.

TRIPP

Coach...

COACH KANG

Not now, Tripp.

(to tournament official)

They even knew exactly what our score would be.

TRIPP

(holds up smartphone)

That's because I tweeted it yesterday.

Kang and the Tournament Official both look at his phone.

INSERT--TRIPP'S TWITTER ACCOUNT ON PHONE

A goofy picture of Tripp, the handle @Trippingonbricko, and the text "275 tomorrow! In your face, Robo4ce!" display next to an timestamp from the previous day.

BACK TO SCENE

The official quirks a brow at Kang. Kang oozes malice at Tripp.

COACH KANG

You can kiss that summer job
grouting my tile goodbye, loser.

Kang scoops up Grond from the table.

COACH KANG

(continuing)

All of you. Losers. Wastes of my time.

GILES

Hey, my Bricko piece is in that!

COACH KANG

You want your Bricko back? Fine.

(pulls on Grond's arm)

Here's your... precious...
little...

Grond activates and grabs Kang's nose with its other claw. She slaps at it and tries to back away, falling ass over teakettle onto the robot's cart, which rolls down the ramp and out the gym door.

SFX: Seven-ten split

GILES

Eh, keep it.

He notices the rest of the team has lined up and follows suit. They beam as they get their medals.

The crowd applauds. Rob, Sarah, and Dr. Thomas are misty.

Tripp and his teammates, disappointed, but more civil with their coach out of the picture, offer congratulations before departing.

Tripp lingers. Zoe hangs back a little.

WILL
So--you backdated the timestamp on
your tweet.

TRIPP
(a little sheepish)
Yeah.

WILL
Sweet.
(then)
Hey--you want to come over and try
to redirect a Snapchat feed
sometime?

TRIPP
Sure. Text me.

Dr. Thomas makes his way through the crowd. He nods at Will.

WILL
Time to pick up Dart.

NISHA
Give him a hug from us.

ZOE
And have him set up a debriefing
meeting when he's up to it.

WILL
(grins at role reversal)
Sure thing. Seeya.

Will heads out. Tripp sidles up to Zoe.

TRIPP
I don't know what to tell you,
other than you're the coolest girl
I've ever met.

ZOE
That's a good start.

TRIPP

I'm not likely to get V.I.P. passes to anything again, but if you want to go see a movie or something it's on me.

ZOE

I appreciate the offer, Tripp, but I'm going to have to decline.

Giles, in the background, looks hopeful. He's got a chance!

ZOE

(continuing)

With school, and the nationals coming, I don't need a boyfriend right now. Too distracting.

Somewhere nearby a balloon POPS. Giles slumps.

TRIPP

(chin-up disappointed)

Very sensible of you.

NISHA

You know...we could use another experienced person next year. If you can talk Giles into it.

Giles looks pained, but takes a deep breath and nods.

GILES

We've got so much in common.

TRIPP

(smiles, grateful)

I would love to.

He gives a little salute to the team and heads for the pits.

Nisha hugs Zoe.

NISHA

You did good, rookie. Thanks for reminding me why we're here.

ZOE

Hey, you gave me the chance.

NISHA

I can spot 'em, huh?

She winks.

Rob and Sarah push through the crowd and envelop Zoe.

ROB

Zozo, you won! I can't believe you won!

SARAH

I can. C'mon, let's go grab a pizza and celebrate.

ZOE

Just a second.

(sends a text)

Okay.

The Millers depart.

NISHA

You want to go get some ice cream?

GILES

Sure.

(then)

Wait. Are you only asking because you feel sorry for me?

NISHA

Pretty much.

GILES

Just checking. Let's go.

The two of them walk toward the door.

INT. GYM/TON OF BRICKS TEAM TABLE IN PIT AREA - DAY

A wistful Tripp hoists his backpack. His phone DINGS. He pulls it out.

SUPERIMPOSE: "ZOE: ASK ME AGAIN AFTER NATIONALS"

Tripp grins, relieved, and heads for home.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. WILL'S HOUSE/WILL'S BEDROOM - DAY - (STING)

Will and Tripp sprawl on the floor, fiddling with smartphones. Will chuckles.

WILL

And I thought I put some dubious stuff in my license agreement.

Listen to this:

(MORE)

WILL (cont'd)

(reads)

"You agree to grant us a non-transferable option to claim, for now and for ever more, your immortal soul, within five working days of receiving written notification."

TRIPP

Which app is that?

WILL

The new streaming YourTunes.

SFX: Doorbell

TRIPP

(shakes head)

Grown-ups.

MRS. THOMAS (O.S.)

Will! That agent from the N.S.A. is back!

WILL

(annoyed, not afraid)

Aw, man.

(yells back)

For the last time, tell him I can't work for them. I'm going back to Hopper next semester.

TRIPP

You'd think he'd get the hint.

WILL

I know.

MRS. THOMAS (O.S.)

He says you can do a summer internship with the Equation Group. Or part-time contract work.

TRIPP

I don't think he's going away.

WILL

(sighs)

I'd better go talk to him.

Will trundles out of the room.

FADE TO BLACK