

THE CHRONO-MAN

Written by

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COLD OPEN

INT. MEDIA FACTORY - DAY

A WALL CLOCK ticks above a hectic factory. Fresh-printed POSTERS shoot down a CONVEYER BELT to land in a STACK. BOLD PRINT reads "ROYAL PARADE 2670: CELEBRATING 10 WONDERFUL YEARS OF EMPEROR PARKON" below a photo of smiling, waving EMPEROR PARKON (55), a thick-chested despot.

A FORK-LIFT lifts the stack, drives past rows of MALNOURISHED WORKERS trimming the posters with LARGE PAPER CUTTERS. At other ASSEMBLY LINES, workers make BANNERS, BUTTONS, and FLAGS bearing PARKON'S IMAGE.

At a DESK facing them, RUGER MARQUESS (24), a skinny, bright-eyed man with a young boyish face, has his nose buried in a BOOK titled "KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP".

RUGER
Strong eye contact...

Ruger stands, faces the MIRROR behind him. He tries to make a stern face, but looks like a goofy kid. He pats down his black curly hair, but it will not stay in place.

RUGER (CONT'D)
Come on. "I speak to you today-"
(pause, in deeper voice)
"I speak to you today-"

In the reflection, Ruger sees WORKER 1, at the paper-cutting line, slice his FINGER OFF, fall to the ground, screaming. His co-workers struggle to ignore him and continue working.

Two of the many SOLDIERS lining the walls drag him away.

WORKER 1
Wait, please! No! I can still
work! I can still work!

They throw him to the ground by the wall. SOLDIER 1 aims a pistol between his eyes, cocks it.

SOLDIER 1
You know the rules. Those who
serve no function for society have
no place in it.

RUGER
Wait!

Ruger rushes over, stands between them, shielding Worker 1.

SOLDIER 2
Step aside or I'll do you both!

RUGER
It's just a finger. We can find another job for him.

SOLDIER 1
He said, step aside, kid.

RUGER
I'm not kid! I'm the floor manager here and I say he can still work!

SOLDIER 2
Well I am an Imperial guard. Are you disobeying my direct order?

HARKER (55), the balding boss of the factory, jogs over.

HARKER
God-damn it, Ruger. Get away!

RUGER
But, Mr. Harker, he can still-

HARKER
(gestures to himself)
That's a call for the C.E.O. to make, not the Floor Manager.

Harker pulls Ruger out of the way.

SOLDIER 2
So, what will it be, "Mr. C.E.O."?

Harker looks away. Soldier 2 smirks, shoots Worker 1, dead.

RUGER
No!

HARKER
Quiet, Val! I mean it! Cool your jets or you're fired.

Ruger stops fighting, seethes, locks eyes with the soldiers, who laugh as they drag the corpse away.

SOLDIER 1
You ought to listen to him, kid. Don't want to lose your function, after all.

RUGER
You Bastards-

HARKER
Not another word. Come, let's get
some air.

Harker walks off towards the ELEVATOR. Ruger follows.

EXT. MEDIA FACTORY - ROOFTOP - DAY

Ruger and Harker exit onto the roof. DARK CLOUDS cover the sky, hiding the tips of the SKYSCRAPERS in this DENSE CITY. Harker opens a SILVER CIGARETTE CASE, offers one to Ruger.

RUGER
No thanks, I'm trying to quit.

HARKER
You sure? I made them myself. You
have any idea how hard it is to
grow tobacco in an apartment?

RUGER
Yeah, but I still think those
things will kill you.

HARKER
Suit yourself.

Harker lights one, pockets the case, crosses with Ruger to the railing, leans on it, looks out over the city.

HARKER (CONT'D)
You can't keep doing this, Val.

RUGER
It was the right thing to do.

HARKER
Was it? With our declining
resources and overpopulation-

RUGER
I've read the propaganda. Please,
don't tell me you actually believe
what we hock down there!

HARKER
I believe in picking my battles.
If you keep erupting over every
small injustice, you'll end up
getting us both caught.

RUGER

They don't suspect a thing.

HARKER

Now, that's a dangerous assumption. Everyone's a suspect for something.

RUGER

You getting cold feet, Hark?

HARKER

Maybe I am. The insurgency is going to fail. You must see that.

RUGER

No! You're forgetting, we have the people on our side. Once we take out Parkon, they'll realize we can fight back. Not everyone is like those soldiers. Some remember how it was.

HARKER

You're always saying how much better things were under Grombaire, but you were just a boy. Believe me, it wasn't that different.

RUGER

At least we could say and do what we wanted! At least we could walk down the street without fear! I believe those days can come again. I believe that's a future worth fighting for!

HARKER

The only future I'm interested in is one where I'm alive to care for my wife and kids.

RUGER

Look at our city, Hark. Look what Parkon's done to it. Do you really want your kids to grow up in this Hell-hole?

Ruger gestures out over the dark, futuristic city.

EXT. EDENSDALE - CITY STREETS - DAY

Across the city, PROPAGANDA POSTERS OF Parkon hang from buildings. SEARCHLIGHTS and CAMERAS scan the sidewalks as PEDESTRIANS hurry along in a MONOTONOUS MASS.

A VAN filled with INSURGENTS, rebellious workers in tattered clothes, careens down the street, pursued by SOLDIERS in an ARMY JEEP, firing GUNS at each other.

INSURGENT 1

For freedom!

A SOLDIER raises an RPG, blows up the van. They stop, step out to inspect the wreckage. A soldier spits on the insurgent's charred corpses.

SOLDIER 3

Damn insurgents.

EXT. PROPAGANDA FACTORY - ROOFTOP - DAY

Harker rips his gaze away from the fiery carnage, below.

HARKER

As long as they get to grow up at all, it's fine with me.

RUGER

Then, why did you agree to help me?

HARKER

You've always been good with words, Val, that's the main reason I hired you. But, I should have never let you talk me into this. I'm begging you. Get out, now, while you can. You're not like the rest of the workers. You're not malnourished or destitute. You've got an imperial language degree, for God's sake! Guys like us don't have to fight the system. We should be part of it.

RUGER

You know I can't do that.

HARKER

Look, I kept my promise. I snuck your insurgent code into the daily bulletin, against my better judgement, but if you keep drawing attention to yourself-

RUGER

I can't just sit by and do nothing. Not after what they did to my parents. Not anymore.

HARKER

Then, you're fired.

RUGER

What? But, Hark!

HARKER

I'm sorry. We're still friends, Ruger, but I'm too old for all this talk of resistance and change. It's just not worth the risk.

Harker stubs out his cigarette, walks back to the door.

RUGER

Fine. But, you can't just ignore this forever, you know. Change is coming. One way or another!

Harker pauses in the DOORWAY, looks back at Ruger.

HARKER

Time will tell, Ruger... Time will tell.

Harker exits. Ruger turns back to the railing, sighs, stares at the city as a LIGHT RAIN falls.

EXT. EDENSDALE - COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

ZOOM OUT from Ruger to reveal that the CITY is surrounded by a MASSIVE WALL topped by BARBED WIRE and GUARD TOWERS. Surrounding it is nothing but barren, black soil, covered in ash, stretching all the way to a DISTANT MOUNTAIN RANGE. Unbroken gray clouds cover the Earth.

INSERT TITLE: "THE CHRONO-MAN".

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. PROPAGANDA FACTORY - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Ruger EMPTIES his LOCKER into his BACKPACK, filling it up with mostly BOOKS. He zips it closed, crosses to the door, faces an ACCESS PANEL which SCANS HIS PUPIL. A profile, along with his PICTURE, appears on it.

COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)

Identified: Marquess, Ruger J.

The door OPENS. Ruger presses a few buttons, a smaller CHAT BOX within the panel appears, showing PETE (18), a young man.

PETE

Hey, Val. Heard you got canned?

RUGER

Yeah well, I'm too good for this place, anyway.

PETE

That's the spirit. You coming to the nourishment hub, later? The 3-bean casserole is pretty damn scrumptious.

RUGER

I'll let you know, Pete.

Ruger turns off the screen, exits.

EXT. EDENSDALE - CITY STREETS - DAY

Ruger walks down the streets, his BOOTS splashing in garbage-filled PUDDLES. He writes on CRUMPLED PAPER- "PRETTY DAMN SCRUMPTIOUS", then circles the letters, crarkong a code.

RUGER

Scrumptious. That's eleven letters, then damn, so that's four-

Ruger pauses when he notices an ARMY VAN parked outside of a BUILDING where SOLDIERS drag a CITIZEN (30s) and his son, JAMES (11) onto the street. His WIFE (30s) follows them.

WIFE

Wait! They didn't mean it!

Soldier 3 slaps her to the ground.

SOLDIER 3

We've got it on tape, ma'am. You know what happens to those who speak ill of his majesty.

WIFE

But they were joking! It was just a harmless joke!

Soldier 4 kicks her in the gut.

SOLDIER 4

Hope you had a good laugh, then. But, don't worry, we won't kill your husband. We're taking him to the imperial prison for a life of hard labor! He looks pretty spry, maybe he'll last a few years.

WIFE

My boy. Please, don't take my little James!

SOLDIER 3

You should be proud, he's young enough to enlist! We'll raise him good, I promise. I was about his age when I joined. Best day of my life!

The soldiers laugh as they shove them in the back of the van. The weeping mother chases it as it drives away.

Ruger scowls to himself, keeps walking, stops at a building labeled "WAREHOUSE #1146". He holds up the paper, where he has scribbled the number "1146" as the solution to the code.

He crumples the paper, drops it down a STORM-DRAIN, as he jogs into an alley, kneels down, searching for something.

Hinds the letter "i" scrawled on the WALL. Ruger smiles as he delivers a SECRET KNOCK on it. A HIDDEN PANEL slides open, revealing STAIRS. He enters.

INT. SECRET BASE - NIGHT

Ruger enters a CRAMPED ROOM filled with insurgents gathered around a table covered in MAPS and CHARTS. There are few scrawny intellectual types, like Ruger, but they are mostly grizzled, muscled, career factory workers. FRANK (34), the bear-like leader, lectures.

FRANK

That's why this mission depends on the utmost secrecy!

Frank notices Ruger, hovering on the stairs, too intimidated to interrupt the lecture.

RUGER

There's our code-master! Glad you could join us!

The room APPLAUDS. Ruger grins, crosses to take a seat across from Frank, between Pete and ALICE (45), a muscular tattooed woman. She lays down a TABLET showing an article titled "DAILY BULLITEN".

ALICE

Brilliant code, as always. How did you ever slip it in under your boss' nose?

RUGER

Oh, I have my ways.

PETE

Now, every insurgent in the city is sure to be there!

ALICE

You did good, rookie.

FRANK

Yeah, congrats, squirt. Maybe you are good for something, after all.

RUGER

I told you I could do it! I'm strong enough to lead, Frank. Give me one of the platoons, tomorrow.

Frank laughs, stands, gestures to the room.

FRANK

Alright then, who's ready to follow our resident book-worm into battle!

The room LAUGHS at this. Ruger blushes, sinks into his seat.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Sorry, "Mr. College Grad". Best stick to your strengths.

Frank taps the TABLET. Ruger stands with sudden anger.

RUGER

There's nothing wrong with being educated. I know more about military history than the lot of you put together!

FRANK

"Knowing a lot" does not make you a good leader. But don't worry, tomorrow you might just be able to make some history of your own.

Franks stares at Ruger till his knees shake and he sits down.

PETE

I can't believe it. Tomorrow, it's really happening! We're finally going to take this city back!

ALICE

Calm down. After we eliminate Parkon, it's still a long fight through the palace before we can capture the throne room.

FRANK

Exactly, so let's go over everything, again.

RUGER

Fine with me. Nothing is more important than getting this right.

EXT. EDENSDALE - RUGER'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Ruger walks up to his APARTMENT BUILDING, scans his retina to enter. He notices a SHADY MAN watching from the SIDEWALK, who hurries off. Concerned, Ruger enters the building.

INT. RUGER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ruger enters to find CELIA (25), his professionally dressed, blonde girlfriend, sitting CROSS-ARMED on the couch.

CELIA

You met with the insurgency again, didn't you?

RUGER

Celia! Not so loud.