

Planned Obsolescence

by

Ruth Gaukrodger

(An extract from a feature-length screenplay)

EXT. THE YORKSHIRE MOORS. DAY.

The sun rises over the moors and illuminates the tracts of heather. A slow train edges over the horizon. It's a picture of tranquility.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE THREE. DAY.

CCTV cameras swivel on the ceiling of the train. A crowd of TOURISTS gather by the windows to look at the moors.

From the speakers:

PRISHA (O.S)

The Yorkshire Moors Botanical Park spans over 1,750km. More than 80% of its plants are organic, making it an area of truly natural beauty.

There are some murmurs of appreciation from the tourists.

PRISHA (O.S) (CONTINUED)

The area was first awarded protected status in 2045, and now serves as home to many species of British flora and fauna.

INT. DRIVER'S CABIN. DAY.

The cabin is crammed with screens showing live CCTV feeds. PETE (52, the driver) gazes out the window. Next to him, PRISHA (28, in oily overalls) hunches over the dashboard.

PRISHA

Turning up the bird song in 4, 3,  
2, 1.

Prisha pushes a lever.

EXT. THE YORKSHIRE MOORS. DAY.

Hidden in a clump of heather is a speaker. It plays the dawn chorus.

INT. DRIVER'S CABIN. DAY.

We hear the crescendo of the morning bird song from outside.

PRISHA

Let's have some atmospheric fog.

Prisha flicks a switch and watches CCTV feed number 8.

CLOSE ON THE FEED: It shows a rock on the moors, which begins to pump out fog.

INT./ EXT. CARRIAGE THREE/ YORKSHIRE MOORS. DAY.

The tourists watch as swirls of fog appear outside.

PRISHA (O.S)  
Wind, fog, rain and bright clear  
days are all part of spring weather  
in the Botanical Park.

The tourists ogle the panoramic view.

INT. DRIVER'S CABIN. DAY.

PRISHA  
Today's foggy, because it's 40%  
more likely to prompt positive  
reviews and increase revenue.

Pete gives Prisha a disapproving look.

PRISHA  
Don't worry, the intercom's off.  
I've got a new effect. Watch this.

Prisha presses another button on the dash board.

INT. CARRIAGE THREE. DAY.

The carriage windows open. Small spouts on the window rims emit purple gas.

PRISHA (O.S)  
The wild Heather of the moors has a  
famous floral smell. If you lean  
close to the windows, you may be  
able to make out the distinct  
but subtle fragrance.

The tourists crowd the open windows and inhale the air.

INT. DRIVER'S CABIN. DAY.

PETE  
Heather doesn't have a smell.

PRISHA  
They don't know that.

Prisha gestures at the CCTV feed from carriage three. The tourists have their faces jammed up to the open windows.

PRISHA

They love it. I'm a sensory artist,  
Pete. What can I say? The ends  
justify the means.

EXT. YORKSHIRE MOORS RAILWAY STATION. DAY.

The train pulls into the station. A swarm of tourists alight and head towards a tourist office. A sign advertises prices:

FULL DAY HIKING: £80,000.

HALF DAY HIKING: £50,000.

CHILDREN HIKING: £30,000.

On the platform are three teenagers in school uniforms (CASSIUS, JOEL and DANIEL). Cassius is striking – he's large, tanned and has white blond hair. The boys board the train.

INT. DRIVER'S CABIN. DAY.

Pete checks the dashboard of the train while Prisha swings in her chair.

PRISHA

That was probably my best  
performance yet.

PETE

I'm not sure. I think your  
enhancements may be damaging the  
authenticity of the tour.

A small screen next to the dashboard switches on and the face of a perky-looking man (ALEX, 30) appears.

ALEX

Good morning, Prisha! I hope  
today's tour went well.

PRISHA

What do you want, Alex?

ALEX

I couldn't help but notice that the  
feed from camera 6 is down. Please  
make sure you're regularly  
inspecting all train equipment. We  
need that CCTV feed back pronto.

Prisha gets out of her chair and picks up a toolbox.

ALEX

Before you go, let's have a quick convo about last month's online reviews. Have you had a chance to look at them?

PRISHA

No. I try not to, as a rule.

ALEX

No matter. Let me read you some.

Prisha groans and resumes her seat.

ALEX

This is from Paula Crag, age 46, review rating: 3 out of 10. "Rubbish. The tour guide was ad-libbing for most of the journey. At one point, she claimed that 6 species of wild bear inhabit the Yorkshire moors."

PRISHA

Head office told me that they were going to reintroduce them.

ALEX

"When I questioned her authority, she called me a lard-ass dunce."

PRISHA

You hired me as a technician, not a tour guide.

ALEX

Government cuts mean we can't afford to hire both a guide and a technician. We all have to multitask. I'm overseeing five different local projects.

PRISHA

It's not my fault that tech training doesn't cover tour guide basics.

ALEX

How do you think you could have

improved this woman's experience?

The train starts to move. Prisha stands, picks up her tool box and gives Alex an exaggerated shrug.

PRISHA

Gee, Alex, I just don't know!  
Anyway, I should probably go and  
fix that camera.

ALEX

Please be polite to the general  
public – passengers and tourists  
alike. If you get any more negative  
reviews you'll be demoted.

Prisha leaves.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE THREE. DAY.

Prisha looks up at the CCTV camera – a loose wire protrudes from its side. She mounts a seat, produces a wireless soldering iron and begins to fix the camera. She faces away from Joel, Daniel and Cassius, who sit further down the carriage. Joel and Daniel are absorbed in Cassius' spiel.

CASSIUS

In Tristan we had androids for  
everything. You didn't even have to  
wipe your own arse.

JOEL

That sounds amazing.

CASSIUS

Most families had one to  
themselves. They were basically  
slaves.

Prisha's jaw clenches in irritation at the discussion.

DANIEL

I would love an android-servant.  
Imagine never having to do your own  
homework again.

CASSIUS

I guess that's one use for them. We  
had sex-droids. They lived in the  
red light district. Only £500 a  
pop.

Prisha's lost her patience. She turns to the boys.

PPRISHA

You can't have sex androids.  
They're built with sex-drive  
inhibitors so perverts can't  
persuade them to have intercourse.

The boys look taken aback. They waver in their response.

JOEL

Wow, Cassius – she's calling you a  
pervert and a liar.

CASSIUS

There are over-rides for the  
inhibitors. Twat.

PRISHA

No there aren't. The over-rides are  
physically implanted.

Cassius eyes Prisha's overalls and her messy hair. Daniel and Joel  
grin – nervous and expectant.

CASSIUS

What makes you the expert?

PRISHA

Several years of training with the  
government's android production and  
improvement unit.

CASSIUS

I bet the government never told you  
about the over-rides because they  
were worried you'd get distracted.

The boys laugh raucously. Prisha is unfazed.

PRISHA

There are no over rides. Even if  
there were, it's unlikely that  
androids would have a burning  
desire to sleep with an obese 16  
year old.

JOEL

I think you hurt her feelings.

Joel and Daniel are still laughing – but Cassius isn't. The train  
comes to a stop.

CASSIUS

Come on, boys.

Cassius stands, takes out a phone from his pocket and begins to type. The teenagers exit the train.

INT. DRIVER'S CABIN. DAY.

Alex is on screen, reading from a piece of paper. Prisha sits before him. Next to her, Pete monitors the train.

ALEX

"The engineer called me obese"  
Rating: 0 out of 10.

PRISHA

Why do we let kids post reviews  
online? They undermine the system.

ALEX

It's a public forum, Prisha, you  
can't restrict who posts. You  
want to be a technician again?  
Now you are. You're being demoted  
to a local techie.

PRISHA

What? Come on, Alex. I'm really good  
at the tours. Don't make me work amongst  
the biomass again.

ALEX

Look at this as an opportunity for  
you to improve your people skills.

PRISHA

They don't need to be improved.

ALEX

There's a replacement technician  
boarding at the next station.  
You'll need to vacate the train  
there.

PRISHA

I thought we were friends, Alex.

Alex smirks.



ALEX

I'll make you a deal. If you can do just three local tech jobs in two days, and average a six star rating, you can come back to the train.

PRISHA

In two days? Easy.

ALEX

Your first job is at the boarding school. You'll have to change trains at the next station. Report back to me at the end of the assignment.

Alex's screen goes blank. He's gone for a moment and then returns.

ALEX

Don't forget to reset Pete for the replacement technician.

Prisha kneels behind Pete and pushes a switch in the back of his chair. His eyes roll into his head and a red light shines from behind them. Prisha rolls up Pete's sleeve to reveal a barcode. She pulls out a scanner from her pocket and passes it over his arm. It beeps in recognition.

PRISHA

Reset droid 4382609.

Prisha switches Pete back on. He emits a low humming sound.

PRISHA

Sorry about that, Pete. Resets always seem kind of impolite.

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Ruth Gaukrodger, 24, was born in Doncaster, South Yorkshire. She has a first class degree in Philosophy and English Literature, and writes stage and screen plays about philosophy, transhumanism and the environment.