

ROCKET SUMMER

By
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Based on allegedly true events.

WGA: 1138703

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EXT. COUNTY RACE TRACK - NIGHT

A dozen muddy low-rent stock cars ROAR around a dirt track under blaring lights, BANGING and CRASHING aggressively as the weekend warriors BATTLE for the lead.

The local crowd SCREAMS its approval.

A ratty car with a Skull and Crossbones on the side is driven by MIKE FARMER, nineteen, linebacker big, tough guy, looks like pissing him off would be both easy and dangerous.

He's BUMPED by another DRIVER. The man LAUGHS as he passes.

Mike smiles quietly, GRINDS gears, SLAMS the accelerator. The engine ROARS. Pressure gauges REDLINE.

A cat and mouse game, the man and Mike BUMP and PUSH at high speed; the crowd CHEERS. Mike pulls ahead, BATTERING the other car in the process.

Suddenly, his car SPUTTERS and LURCHES; the engine struggles, losing speed. Pressure gauges all DROP to ZERO.

MIKE

Aw, FU--

BLAM! The man SLAMS Mike from behind, throwing him SPINNING onto the infield and into the hay bales.

In the stopped car, Mike POUNDS the wheel in frustration.

EXT. COUNTY RACE PITS - NIGHT

The tow truck brings in Mike's car. Mike steps off the running board as the truck comes to a stop. He's eagerly greeted by two smaller scrappy looking kids.

MIKE

What the hell was that, Dwayne? She seized like a pig!

Pissed, he shoves his helmet at DWAYNE (18), who eagerly swaps him for a sweat-stained NASCAR cap. Mike pulls the cap on as JESUS (18) helps him into a beat-up leather NASCAR jacket. Jesus hands him a beer.

JESUS

Dude! That was so awesome! You almost had 'im!

Mike watches as Dwayne helps the TOW TRUCK DRIVER un-hitch.

MIKE

"Almost" don't get me no \$500 first place.

JESUS

Yeah, well, still, it was cool.

Mike pops the hood. Smoke billows out. He groans.

MIKE

Geeze, Dwayne, who taught you how to use a wrench?

He turns, bumps into DAVE FARMER who, at fifteen, is a gawky kid with a wide toothy smile, an unruly mop of hair and goggles draped around his neck. Dave's not slow, but he's... unique.

MIKE (CONT'D)

What th' --

DAVE

That was awesome, Mike! Till the end, anyways.

He eagerly holds out a wrench.

MIKE

"That was awesome, Mike". I lost, Captain Oblivious.

He swats Dwayne with his hat.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Thanks to this idiot!

Dave offers up the wrench.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Get lost, Davey. Man work to do.

DAVE

I can help, Mike --

MIKE

G'wan home, ya dumbass, before Dad comes to!

Dwayne and Jesus LAUGH. Dave's face falls. He sets the wrench aside, dons an old motorcycle helmet painted with hot rod flames, starts a tiny mini bike, and motors away.

EXT. DAVE'S HOUSE – DAY

Bright blue sky, hot sun, a ratty old farmhouse on a gravel road. Car parts and chickens dot the dry front lawn. CRASH! - glass BREAKS inside, a MAN and WOMAN ARGUING.

Dave exits the front door, leans on it, his back to the FIGHT. In spite of the heat he's in an oversized trench coat, his helmet, and the army goggles draped around his neck.

He looks off to the nearest house, nearly a mile away. From behind the distant house a thin vapor trail rises into the air, scribing a white line into the blue sky.

Dave smiles, dons his goggles, and steps into the heat.

EXT. CHARLIE'S FRONT YARD – DAY

LACEY DUMONT is seventeen, a pretty girl with tom-boy accessibility, like Sandra Bullock must have looked in High School. She's in a lawn chair in a 60's style fringe leather coat, plunking an old guitar, softly singing a folk song to PUCK the dog. She stops, scribbles lyrics in a notebook.

CHARLIE PETERSON rounds the side of the house, sits near Lacey. At barely eighteen he's a bookish boy and kind of sad on the inside; a bit of a late bloomer with self-esteem issues.

He holds a model rocket, and he's folding the parachute into the nose cone.

CHARLIE
I signaled Davey.

LACEY
MmmHmm.

CHARLIE
Used a "B". Prob'ly got near 800 feet.

He watches her jot in the notebook. He is clearly smitten.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
What' cha doi n' ?

LACEY
Wri ti n' .

CHARLIE
' Bout what?

She sets aside the book.

LACEY
So what's this big surprise?

CHARLIE
Somethin' me and Davey found.

LACEY
It's not another dead armadillo, is it? That's just gross.

CHARLIE
C'mon, Lace, we were ten!

LACEY
The first time.

CHARLIE
It's way cooler than that.

LACEY
It better be.

A cloud of dust approaches.

CHARLIE
Here comes King Davey.

Dave pulls up on the mini-bike, dismounts, removes his goggles, his dusty face clean around the eyes. He kneels, tussles Puck's ears.

DAVE
Hey, Puck. How ya doi n' , boy? You guys ready?

CHARLIE
Just about.

Dave trots toward the side yard, arms out like a plane.

DAVE
Ten! Ni ne! Ei ght! ...

He slows, banks, flies back to the others.

DAVE (CONT'D)
C'mon!

LACEY
His Dad's still home.

Dave drops his arms, sits, removes his helmet.

DAVE

You sure he won't miss 'em?

CHARLIE

He doesn't even know they're there.

DAVE

You sure?

LACEY

What are you guys talking about?

ERNIE PETERSON steps out the front door. He's fiftyish, a well-groomed blue collar guy, in crisp, clean working man's clothes. There's something vaguely ex-military about him; reserved, proper, maybe a little inaccessible.

ERNIE

Charlie, I'm running late. Heading over to the Baker's... checking the pump. Come on along, give a hand.

LACEY

Hey, Mr. Peterson.

ERNIE

Lacey. Charlie?

CHARLIE

The guys are here, Dad. You don't need me, do ya?

Ernie resigns with a sigh, gets into his truck.

ERNIE

A little work never did a man any harm, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I know.

ERNIE

You don't have to work with me. But I want you to find something this summer, or I'll find it for you. Understand?

(To Dave)

David. How are things at home?

DAVE

Perfectomundo.

ERNIE

You're all right? How's your Mother?

DAVE
She's fine.

ERNIE
Okay. You say hello to her for me.

DAVE
Yessir.

LACEY
Bye, Mr. Peterson.

Ernie observes Charlie and Lacey. There is something in the way Charlie stands near her.

ERNIE
You kids behave yourselves.

He pulls away. Dave turns and runs to the side yard.

DAVE
Blast off!

EXT./INT. STORAGE SHED – DAY

The side yard is a massive collection of farm equipment, old lumber, a row of tool sheds all padlocked. They approach a shed; Charlie produces a screwdriver.

CHARLIE
All right, lady and gentleman.

He POPS a panel up, lifts it out and sets it aside.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Welcome to the rest of your summer.

They squeeze inside. Among the tools and junk sits a military crate about five feet long.

LACEY
What is this?

CHARLIE
You'll see.

DAVE
You'll see. You'll see.

Charlie SNAPS the lid open. He FLIPS a blanket back.

CHARLIE
Voilà!

Dave WHISTLES a wolf call. Lacey peers into the box.

LACEY
What the heck is that?

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – DAY

Ernie and a police truck approach from opposite directions. The SHERIFF flags Ernie down... they stop abreast, windows down. The Sheriff's got fishing flies in his hat.

SHERIFF BAKER
Ernie.

ERNIE
Tom.

SHERIFF BAKER
Thinkin' of headin' out to Ball's
Ferry tomorrow, get my line wet.
Sound good?

ERNIE
Thanks, no.

Sheriff Baker is disappointed; there's an old friendship
being neglected.

SHERIFF BAKER
Some other time then. Hey, I wanted
to ask after Charlie.

ERNIE
What now?

SHERIFF BAKER
Seen one of his rockets again the
other day, from down the road. He's
still doin' that?

ERNIE
Huh. Not that I know of. But I've
been working.

SHERIFF BAKER
You know how I feel about those
things, Ernie. They can be
dangerous, this time of year,
landin' in a dry field.

ERNIE
I'll talk with him, Tom.

SHERIFF BAKER

I don't need no excitement 'round here, that's all. You understand.

ERNIE

You and me both, Tom. You and me both.

They drive apart.

INT. STORAGE SHED - DAY

The kids stare into the crate. Beneath the blanket, a four foot long steel cylinder ten inches in diameter with a funnel affair on one end.

CHARLIE

This is a JATO.

LACEY

A What-0?

Dave strokes the cylinder tenderly.

DAVE

It's a rocket, man. We got us a rocket!

LACEY

No way. It's not a rocket. Where would you get a rocket?

CHARLIE

We found 'em on Thursday. There's three. We figure my Dad musta' got 'em at an auction, over at The Base, years ago. Prob'ly never even opened the crates.

DAVE

He hardly ever comes out here... you know, any more.

An awkward silence, apologetic glances to Charlie.

LACEY

So, how do you know what they are? They aren't even marked.

DAVE

His Dad's got all kinds of Military books in the house.

(reciting)

(MORE)

DAVE (cont'd)

"JATO is an acronym for Jet Assisted Take Off. These rockets are used to boost aircraft during takeoff on short runways."

CHARLIE

Like on a Carrier.

DAVE

We got us a rocket, man. A rocket!

(He sings and dances)

We got us a rocket, we got us a rocket! Ooh, ooh, yah, yah, we got us a rocket!

LACEY

Okay. So what are you going to do with them?

DAVE

We're buildin' a car.

LACEY

A car.

DAVE

We're buildin' a rocket car, man! Zero to a hundred in six seconds!

He makes a whooshing noise, swoops his hand through the air.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Rocket Man!

LACEY

Are you serious?

CHARLIE

Well, sure, why not? We have the rocket. We just need to build the car.

DAVE

And we have a car. The old Firebird, out at Castle Rock. Plus we have a lawn chair.

LACEY

A lawn chair? Why do you need a lawn chair?

DAVE

The Firebird doesn't have any seats, man.

LACEY

You'll need more than a lawn chair.

CHARLIE

Dave's gonna grab tools and stuff from his Dad's shop.

LACEY

Your Dad will kill you, Davey.

DAVE

Pffft. What else is new.

LACEY

You guys are crazy.

CHARLIE

What's so crazy?

LACEY

Charlie, come on. Your Dad isn't supposed to have rockets. When he buys old stuff from the Army, if he finds anything like this in there, he has to return it. Remember those pistols he found in the footlocker? And they didn't even have firing pins. Remember? He has to notify them, and return it. Everybody knows that. If he doesn't, it's like a Federal Offense. He'll go to jail.

CHARLIE

Return 'em to who? The Base is closed now.

DAVE

Besides, we're buildin' the car down at Castle Rock. Nobody'll ever know.

LACEY

What do you know about building cars?

Charlie and Dave look at each other, slightly perplexed.

LACEY (CONT'D)

And how are you gonna get 'em there? That's ten miles outta' town, Charlie. Who do you know who drives a truck?

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

A roadrunner whirling lazily spins its legs on top of a cheerful wooden mailbox.

The ROAR of a V8 with dual exhaust.

CRASH! The mailbox explodes into splintered pieces.

Mike at the wheel of an old hot rod pickup ROARS away, black primer, an eight ball painted on the door, fuzzy dice swinging from the rear view. No hood, the hopped-up engine visible.

Dwayne and Jesus in the bed, whooping and hollering, wielding baseball bats.

THUNK. The roadrunner lands in the dirt.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Mike and his friends cruise Main Street in the pickup.

Alice is a very small town long bypassed by the Interstate. Empty store fronts, railroad tracks, an old theater.

Outside the hardware store stands a weathered thirty-foot cement armadillo; it's seen better days. A sign says "Home of the World's Second Largest and Most Complete Armadillo Museum". The armadillo's right arm is raised in a salute.

MARGARET TWO FEATHERS (60's), stands in the shade of the armadillo. She tilts her worn cowboy hat back, gives Mike and the boys a quiet wave. The boys just stare back.

INT. DINER - DAY

Vintage 50's decor, untouched by time. Behind the counter, MERCY DUMONT, a pretty forty-five in a classic waitress uniform, reads the paper.

Sheriff Baker sits at the counter, tying flies. The bell on the door JINGLES as Mike enters.

MERCY
Mornin' Michael.

MIKE
Can I get three coffees?

MERCY

Sure, hon'.

The Sheriff indicates the truck out the window, Jesus and Dwayne goofing in the back.

SHERIFF BAKER

What're you boys up to?

MIKE

Errands.

SHERIFF BAKER

What kind of errands?

MIKE

My Dad needs nails.

SHERIFF BAKER

Takes three of you to buy nails?

Mercy hands Mike his coffees.

MERCY

Here you go, hon'.

MIKE

Thanks.

He puts a handful of change on the counter, turns to leave.

MERCY

Say hi to your Momma, Mike. You tell her she should drop by sometime, watch Wheel.

MIKE

She don't get out much no more.

SHERIFF BAKER

Mike?

Mike stops in the doorway, waits. The Sheriff speaks without looking up from his work.

SHERIFF BAKER (CONT'D)

I hear Mrs. Flanagan had some trouble with her mailbox. You know anything about that?

MIKE

No sir.

SHERIFF BAKER
I didn't think so. You'd let me
know if you heard anything, though,
right?

MIKE
'Course.

Mike exits. The Sheriff pushes his cup toward Mercy.

SHERIFF BAKER
Seed don't fall far from the tree.

MERCY
Seed can't grow without a little
sunshine.

EXT. DINER – DAY

Mike hands out coffees.

DWAYNE
What took you so long?

JESUS
He's flirtin' with the Sheriff.

Mike punches Jesus' leg. Jesus SQUEALS.

MIKE
Shut up.

He looks up and down the empty Main Street.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Small freakin' town.

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM – DAY

Pictures on the mantle: Charlie and his MOM at school events, picnics, Charlie with plaques and awards. They're so happy. Ernie is in no pictures. In the most recent, High School Graduation - No Mom. Charlie looks very alone.

Two recliners face the television – one a large brown vinyl chair, one a floral fabric with doilies. The side table holds a dusty assortment of prescription bottles.

Lacey sits in the vinyl chair, Puck at her feet; Dave is perched on the edge of a hassock eating a bowl of Cap'n Crunch with Crunch Berries.

Lacey eyes a dusty basket of yarn on the floral chair, inspects a prescription bottle. It's sad and a little creepy.

DAVE

(eating as he talks)

Ow. It cuts the roof of my mouth, man. Crap! Remember when they made just Crunch Berries? A whole box of just Crunch Berries? That was awesome. Crunch Berries don't cut your mouth. (pause) 'Course, neither does Frankenberry. Hmm. Crunch Berry, FrankenBerry. Both are made from berries, and neither cuts your mouth. Coincidence? I think not... Clearly, it is the pure berry goodness I seek.

Charlie enters.

CHARLIE

I thought you said he was comin' back soon? My Dad's gonna be home any time.

DAVE

He will be. He has to take my Dad to the shop when he wakes up.

Lacey is brushing her hair.

LACEY

You really think he'll help?

CHARLIE

I'm not so sure this is a good idea. We can't trust him. We'll figger somethin' else out.

DAVE

He's a creep. But he's my creep. He'll do it.

Lacey excitedly jumps up from the chair, heads to the door.

LACEY

I think I hear him!

Lacey and Charlie step out onto the porch; Puck follows. Dave greedily drinks the milk from the bowl, dribbling on his chest, sets the bowl on the floor, runs out into:

EXT. CHARLIE'S FRONT YARD - DAY

The RUMBLE of dual exhaust, MUSIC blasting. Dave runs to the middle of the road, WAVING. Mike SLIDES to a stop, narrowly missing Dave.

MIKE
Jesus! Idiot! What?

DAVE
We wanna ask you somethin'.

MIKE
No.

DAVE
C'mon. It'll just take a minute. I need your help with somethin'.

MIKE
Why would I wanna help you?

He puts the truck into gear, rolls forward. Dave is desperate to stop him.

DAVE
I'll give you money.

Mike stops.

MIKE
How much you got?

Dave frantically empties his pockets. Rubber bands, shiny rocks, change.

DAVE
A dollar. And a quarter. And...

Lacey holds forth a neatly folded bill with a smile.

LACEY
Twenty bucks.

Charlie doesn't like this development.

CHARLIE
Never mind.

Mike puts the truck in PARK, shuts it down, climbs out the window. He approaches Charlie.

MIKE

What's your problem, Charlie Horse?

He grabs Charlie in a half-nelson, rubs his knuckles on his head. Charlie struggles. Mike nearly lifts him off the ground. It's playful, but it's not. He's a little scary.

MIKE (CONT'D)

My help not good enough for ya?

Laughing, he releases Charlie, who scrambles away, fuming, straightens his glasses. Mike looks at Lacey, still holding the twenty.

MIKE (CONT'D)

All right. Five minutes.

EXT. STORAGE SHED - DAY

The box is outside. Mike inspects the rockets.

MIKE

You guys are insane.

DAVE

Pretty cool, right?

MIKE

Even I'm not that stupid.

CHARLIE

What's that supposed to mean?

MIKE

They'll prob'ly just blow up.

(indicates Charlie)
Even with Mister Wizard's help.

CHARLIE

Oh, they'll work. Why wouldn't they work? The Army builds this stuff to last forever.

DAVE

Like food. And jeeps.

MIKE

What do you guys know about cars, anyway?

LACEY

That's what I said.