



BOOST

Robert Norton

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By Robert Norton

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The Chase

I'm waiting at a stoplight, driving a stolen car, and a cop pulls up behind me. Fuck.

I'm in a Honda S2000 and this is [REDACTED], a shitty suburb of [REDACTED] where heaps of Hondas are stolen, so I know he's going to run the plates. And it's not like he's got anything else to do. It's two o'clock in the morning and there is no one else on the road. It's a mandatory five years if you're pulled over driving a stolen car. This is not going to happen. Not tonight. I roll down the tinted windows so I can crawl out of the car if he pins me against something.

Green. I slowly go through the gears, keeping the RPMS low so the VTEC doesn't kick in: first, second, third. Now I'm doing exactly the speed limit and I check out the cop in the rearview mirror. I grew up in this town and have done a lot of stupid shit, so I know most of the cops, but I don't recognize this one. All I can see is the glow of the computer screen reflecting off his glasses. It might be the latex gloves I'm wearing, but my hands are sweating.

I turn onto [REDACTED] Avenue because it's the perfect place for a drag race, a wide open four lane street. The cop follows. The S2000 has a standard F20C motor, but it has been tricked out with a supercharger, control unit, race header, individual throttle bodies, and dual mufflers – easily enough to dust a patrol car in a straight sprint. So how did I end up in this particularly dank

ride? I've got buddies and contacts working in every performance shop in the [REDACTED], so when a nice car is built, they send me the address where I can pick it up. And I've got another buddy that works at a dealership, so he can cut me a key if I can get him the VIN number. Car alarms and low jack are never a problem.

The patrol car falls back a few car lengths and I actually smile. It's possible that the owner of the car, a pro baller that plays for the local team, hasn't even noticed that it's missing yet. I slow down so the traffic light changes to yellow just as I roll through. The cop has fallen back too far. He'll have to blow through a red light to keep up and that's means he's after me. He slows as he approaches the light and then he turns right.

Damn. That was close.

I roll up the windows, plug my iPod into the stereo and blast some Wu-Tang Clan as I continue down [REDACTED] Avenue, heading towards one of our garages. My team takes and chops about thirty cars a month, all Hondas, and I clear almost two grand a week. In high school, I was friends with Mario, the guy in charge. We would drop big motors into Civic hatchbacks and get into street races up in [REDACTED] where the laws aren't as strict. We wanted faster cars, so we started selling drugs: pot, cocaine, meth, anything we could get our hands on. That's when shit got raw. Mario sold some fake E to some Mexican gangsters and got shot in the stomach. While he drove himself to the hospital, Russell, another friend but a total badass, put some holes in the Mexicans with an old AK-47 that he bought at a gun show. That thing didn't

even shoot straight. I've been in lots fights and even been stabbed, but I'm not into killing people, so I moved to Colorado and got a job at a ski resort so I could snowboard everyday. That was years ago. But then my mom got sick about five months ago, so I moved back home to help her out. Now I'm back in the shit.

The next light changes to red so I stop at the intersection. And as I'm sitting there enjoying a track off Ghostface Killah's Supreme Clientele, a patrol car skids to a stop in front of me. They knew the whole time. I drove right into a trap. The cop jumps out of his car and points a shotgun at me, and he's standing so close to my bumper that if I move forward he'll pull the trigger and say he felt threatened. I look behind me and see that another patrol car is swooping around and trying to box me in. Fuck this. This is not going to happen. Not tonight.

I'm wearing a beanie pulled low and a pair of ski goggles that are so dark I can barely see the road, but I know they can't identify me. I smile at the cop pointing the 12-gauge at my head, slam the car into reverse, and then get back into first before they can stop me. Pussy! I knew he wouldn't shoot.

Now I'm flying, redlining every gear at nine thousand RPMs and the VTEC motor is screaming so loud that I can't hear the stereo. The clutch is tight like a switch, third, fourth, fifth gear, and soon I'm blasting through intersections, hoping nobody else is coming. This is fucking amazing.

I cover a couple miles before glancing in the rearview mirror. I can barely see the flashing lights of the cops so I check the speedometer. 157

mph. Not bad. Years ago, I was clocked doing 162. Mario, Russell, and I had just dropped a Type-R motor (B18C5, no turbo) into my 93' Civic hatchback and were niking down I- [REDACTED] just to see how fast it would go.

“Hey, I think that was a cop,” Russell said and pointed at an unmarked car hiding under the overpass by the [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. We had ripped out the backseat to cut weight, so he was sitting on an inflatable pool mattress that looked like a magical seahorse.

I floored it and drove another six or seven miles, pulled the emergency brake so the brake lights wouldn't go off, and then took an exit. And as we waited for the light at the bottom of the ramp to change, the cop, who took the exit on a lucky hunch, pulled up right behind us. I should have taken off because there is no way he would have gotten lucky twice in one night, but I pulled over. And of course he was all smiles because he had just set the state record for the highest speed clocked and apprehended. He asked to see the Type-R motor while we waited for the tow truck to drag my car away and even overlooked the eighth of weed he found on us. Mario and Russell were free to go, but I spent the night in jail. I was in all the papers the next day and maybe it was my charm and goofy smile, but the media loved me. I was on television a few times and they even asked me for a quote, like I was the local street racing expert, when my speed record was broken a few weeks later by some fourteen year old punk doing 167 in his daddy's Nissan Z. So I'm kind of famous around here and sometimes people still recognize me at the grocery store.

I decide I'm far enough ahead of the cops, so I take a ninety degree turn onto a residential street doing at least a hundred, and the sway bars, six piston brake calipers, and sticky high-performance tires keep the car on the road. I know this area well, so I'm rallying around corners and bombing through stop signs without even slowing down. I've got to get away. I'm done if this chase lasts more than a few minutes. I need to circle back around, ditch the car a few blocks from my ex-girlfriend's apartment, and run to her place. That's my only chance. I jerk the steering wheel to make the next corner and a couple fingers on the latex gloves rip off.

"Wipe down the steering wheel. Wipe down the steering wheel," I yell over the howling engine and blasting stereo, trying to make sure I remember. I can feel my fingers gripping the wheel and I know I'm leaving at least a few partial prints. "And grab the iPod. Wipe down the wheel and grab the iPod."

I dive into the next turn and don't feel it coming. The crash happens fast. I'm doing at least eighty and power sliding around a tight corner when suddenly I'm out of control. The car slams into the curb and is bucked into the air. It sails over the sidewalk, plows through a row of bushes, and lands in the front lawn of a huge split-level home. And once the car is back on the ground, it spins around and smashes into the cement front stairs of the house. The car bends in half around the concrete steps and the carbon fiber hood and doors shatter into pieces. It's probably the adrenaline, but I jump out and start running. When I'm halfway down the block, I look over my shoulder and see the porch light of the house I just crashed into flick on.

“Sorry about the lawn,” I shout.

The police sirens are still far off, but they’re getting closer and coming from every direction. I jump a fence and start running through backyards. Every dog in the neighborhood is already barking thanks to the sirens, so I know which yards to avoid as I keep hopping fences and blazing through hedges. I know the cops will bring dogs, so I jump on top of a shed, leap into a nearby tree like a fucking squirrel, and then climb along a branch and drop onto a house. And like a ninja, I quietly traverse the roof and drop back down to the ground. I laugh out loud because I think I saw that in a movie.

A cop car races down a nearby street, so I ollie over a few more fences going in the opposite direction and suddenly I’m in an overgrown tree farm choked with twenty foot tall spruce trees. They’re so tight together that their branches are woven together and tangled up like they’re strangling each other. I use my arms to protect my face and dive in, forcing my way through. The limbs start scratching the lenses of my goggles, cutting my neck and hands, and tearing my brand new Technine sweatsuit, but I keep pushing through because there is no way I’m going to get caught. Fuck that. Not tonight.

Maybe it’s the smell of the pitch, but blasting through the trees reminds me of my summer job. I’m a firefighter for the Forest Service, and I’m supposed to report for duty in a few days. If I can just get away tonight, I’ll go to work and disappear into the woods while this whole thing blows over. Stealing cars is just a side gig, something I fell into while my mom’s cancer slowly killed her. My dad wasn’t stepping up and taking care of my younger

sisters, so I needed cash. But that's just an excuse. He's caring for them now and I'm still jacking cars. It's probably the adrenaline. My mom was a great lady and taught me how to live. Don't get me wrong. She wouldn't approve of stealing cars, but it helps me forget about her.

I finally break through the trees and come out in a grassy field. I'm bleeding all over, but I know there is no way the cops are going to follow me through that shit. My goggles are foggy and scratched and it's so dark I can't see anything, so I dig a hole in the mud and toss them in along with the beanie and latex gloves. Hide the evidence. That's when I realize I forgot to wipe down the steering wheel.

"Fuck!"

And I forgot my iPod, which I'm sure has prints on it.

"Fuck!"

I start running again.

I run for maybe a mile or two. I'm in pretty good shape, but my legs get heavy and even though I'm sucking in huge chunks of air, I feel like I'm suffocating. Sweat is pouring off the top of my head and leaking into the cuts on my face. I throw up into my mouth and spit it out as I come across a gravel road. I don't know where it goes, but I follow it. I have no idea where I am. I'm just running. The road crosses some railroad tracks so I follow them, arms pumping and feet slapping off the railroad ties. Last summer when I was fighting a fire, a huge five-point elk leapt out of a blaze and ran right past me.

His back was smoking and he had these wild eyes, and he came so close to me that I could smell his burning skin. I probably look just like him.

The railroad tracks lead me to a large street and I try to jump a dry ditch, but I don't make it. I crash into the other side of the gap and fall in. I sit in the tall grass at the bottom of the ditch and catch my breath. I don't hear anything, not even a police siren, so I take out my phone. It's 2:45 AM. I've been running for forty five minutes.

Normally I'd call Russell in these situations because he's always got my back, but he's in ██████████ County waiting to be transferred to ██████████ ██████████, a jail in ██████████. He pulled his AK on some Abercrombie and Fitch wearing cocksuckers in a Taco Bell parking lot and a cop drove by at just the right time. So I call Mario, but he says he won't give me a ride. The chase is all over the news and ██████████ is swarming with cops. I act mad and hang up, but I don't blame him. He doesn't own a car that isn't stolen and every cop in town would love to bust him.

I call my ex-girlfriend, Destiny, well, her real name is Tiffany. She's a stripper I met at the ██████████ Club. I had just sold a truckload of car parts to a crazy Russian up in ██████████ for \$15,000, so I was rolling like a baller. I had so many dollar bills that I stacked them up on the stage like a house of cards and she came over and flattened it with her juicy, ripe booty. \$800 later she was at my place screaming so loud that the neighbors were pounding on the wall. Sure she was a freak, but she was also a good girl with a nice smile, and I wanted to save her from this fucked up town. During the day she worked as a

professional hula dancer, doing shows at retirement centers and elementary schools, and she dreamed of going to Hawaii. I thought about dropping everything and taking her there, but then she cheated on me and I haven't seen her since.

Her phone rings and I imagine her reading my name on the screen and then going back to work, giving another lap dance. Her voicemail clicks on and I realize I'm on my own. I take off my sweatshirt because it's shredded and covered in pitch. I leave it in the ditch and then climb out and start walking down the side of the street. I'm on a wide, paved road that runs between factories and warehouses. I can see the river down the hill and the lights of the paper mill reflecting off the black water, so I must be somewhere in [REDACTED]. A semi-truck rushes past and then gets on the compression brakes.

I can't just walk home. The cops will be looking for someone on foot. I need to find somewhere to hide, but all I see are buildings wrapped in chain link fences and razor wire. And I can't just crawl back into the ditch because it's not deep enough to hide me all night. I keep walking along the shoulder of the road with my head down as the trucks sail past, and that's when I'm struck from behind. I didn't even hear the car coming.

The bumper smashes into the back of my knees and I'm flung up onto the hood. The force of the collision knocks the wind out of me, so I'm still gasping for air when a flashlight shines into my eyes.

"Why'd you jump out in front of me?" a man yells. "You could've been

killed.”

Fuck you! You swerved to hit me, I try to say but nothing comes out. I still can't breathe and I'm dazed and hurt. My head is resting on his windshield like it's a pillow and I put my hands up to block out the light, but the flashlight smashes me in the temple.

“Sorry about that. I dropped my flashlight. Well, let me get you to the hospital.”

He pulls me off the hood and wrestles to the ground. I feel a couple of my ribs break as he sits on my back and twists my arm. The handcuffs bite into my wrist. It's a cop.

“What the fuck! Get off of me you fat piece of shit,” I try to shout, but it comes out like a little bitch squeal.

He yanks me to my feet and throws me into the side of his patrol car. My head bounces off the fender and all I can see is white, like the flashlight is shining in my eyes again, but then the white becomes individual stars floating in front of my face. I sit down and try to get my shit together as the world spins.

“Marcus [REDACTED], convicted street racer and suspected car thief. Funny coming across you out here tonight,” he says. Like I said, I know almost every cop in this town and they know me. I've even heard rumors that my picture is up on the wall of the police station. The cop picks me up again, tosses me into the backseat of his car, and then slams the door. He settles into

the front seat with a loud sigh, says something into his radio, and then peels out in the gravel as he pulls back onto the road. It takes a few blocks before I regain my composure.

“What the fuck piggy. Why’d you hit me? That’s police brutality, Officer Pillsbury Doughboy. I’m going to take your badge and mount it on my car like a hood ornament.”

“My name is Officer [REDACTED], badge # [REDACTED]. Go ahead and file a complaint, but right now you need to calm down,” he says. I can tell the fat comments are getting to him because the roll of flesh on the back of his neck is glowing red.

“I’d be calm if you hadn’t smashed me with your car, Fatty.”

“Marcus, let me clear things up for you. You jumped out in front of me. That’s what’s going into my report,” he says. “Now let’s get you to the hospital.”

“Fuck you. I don’t care what you put in your report. I’m still going to get your badge. You haven’t told me why I’m under arrest and you never read me my rights. And I don’t feel safe back here. I’m not even buckled in.”

“I said calm down. I’m not arresting you. I’m giving you a ride to the hospital unless you have something to confess. Now sit back and mellow out.”

“If you’re just giving me a ride, let me out. I’ll get myself to the hospital.”

“I don’t know. You’re pretty busted up. I don’t think that would be the responsible thing to do.”

I would have kept arguing, but the adrenaline was wearing off and the pain was setting in. Besides the broken rib or two that felt like someone was stabbing my eyeballs each time I breathed, my right knee was swelling up and my temple was bleeding onto my t-shirt.

“Alright Fatty, take me to the hospital. Then you can explain why I’m so fucked up,” I say as I lay down. The steady hum of the engine is strangely comforting and I start to drift off. I try to fight it since I know sleeping is the worse thing you can do after a head injury, but dying in the backseat of this fucker’s car would be sweet revenge.

The Escape

When I wake up, we're triple parked in front of a bank and the clock on the dashboard reads 3:30 AM. There's another patrol car parked next to us and Fatty and some generic, clean cut guy that looks like he was squeezed out of some government cop factory are standing around and trying to figure out what to do with me. They're talking quietly, so I can only make out pieces of what they're saying, but I can understand enough.

"We can't take him to the station looking like that," the generic cop says and points in my direction. I close my eyes and pretend that I'm still out. My face is sticky with dried blood. "████████████████████, superstar basketball player, just had his car stolen, taken on a high-speed chase through ██████████, and crashed into a house. Every TV channel in the metro area has a news van parked at the station just waiting to get footage of us bringing him in. And remember how much the media loved this guy when we busted him for speeding a couple years ago. There is no way you want him in front of a camera right now."

"He jumped out in front of me," Fatty says, but I can tell the other cop knows he's lying. "And if I hadn't hit that skinny bitch we'd still be out there chasing him. This isn't a big deal. He just drove a car into a house. We can beat the shit out of him and blame it on the accident. Who's going to believe him? He's got a record. I'll take him over to the hospital and get him cleaned up while we wait for forensics to go over the car. And once they're done,

everyone will know this guy is guilty and nobody will care what he looks like.”

“Forensics already went through the car. They did a rush job since this is such a high-profile case, but they didn’t find anything. The prints on the steering wheel were smeared and the iPod was clean,” the generic cop says and I can’t keep myself from smiling. They’ve got nothing on me. “I was only ten feet away from him when I drew my gun. I can finger him, but he was wearing a disguise. I doubt that’s enough to get a search warrant for his house, and I bet his place is filled with stolen car parts and his computer is synched with the iPod. But right now we’ve got nothing. We can hold him overnight for questioning, but I doubt he’ll talk.”

“Maybe we tell him that we got his fingerprints on the iPod,” Fatty says with a big shit eating grin. “I bet he’ll sell out the rest of the organization to save himself and we’ll look like heroes.”

“Fuck you assholes. I’m not saying shit. Now take me to a hospital Officer Fatty,” I yell. They both turn around, flashing the same stupid, slack-jawed expression, and I’m smiling like a porn star with a pile of cocaine. That pisses off Fatty, badge # [REDACTED], and he storms over. The generic one tries to stop him, but the fat man just shakes him off.

“I’ll wipe that fucking smile off your face,” Fatty says as he flings open the door and punches me in the shoulder so hard that my arm goes numb. “Go ahead. Keep talking funny guy. You got any more jokes?”

“Fuck you. Get your sausage fingers off me. You could be three feet

taller and you'd still be fat, you big-boned motherfucker!" I spit in his face and that makes him angry.

"Stop resisting. Stop resisting," he shouts and starts hitting my chest, arms, and legs.

I'm so messed up that I can't defend myself. He cracks my swollen knee with his fist and searing pain shoots up my leg and almost causes me to pass out. Jesus, that hurt? I jump to the other side of the car, get on my back, and boot him in the face with my one good foot and leg. He goes flying backwards and falls onto his fat ass in the middle of the parking lot.

"Fuck you. I'd beat the shit out of you if I wasn't wearing these handcuffs. Now take me to the hospital," I say and pull the door closed with my foot. Then I sit up and try to look like an impatient girlfriend waiting to be taken home from a shitty party.

Fatty is angry as hell and looks like he's about to roll me again, but this time generic Johnny Cop stops him. They whisper back and forth, but I know exactly what they're saying. They have nothing and I know it. And if they take me in, they'll have to drag my bleeding, screaming body past the reporters. I decide to play my final card.

"What are you going to do, beat a confession out of me? There's a camera on the bank behind us," I yell and gesture towards the security camera that is pointed our way.

They both look that way out of the corner of their eyes and then share a

glance. I smile again because now they're up to their eyeballs in shit. Without saying a word, Johnny Cop slides behind the wheel of Fatty's car and adjusts the seat and mirrors.

"I was the one you almost ran over. I should have shot you when I had the chance," he says and starts the car. Fatty flips me off as we pull out of the parking lot and I stick my tongue out at him.

I have no idea where we're headed, maybe the hospital, but I can't stay awake. I pass out again and don't wake up until Johnny Cop pulls into a gravel parking lot. There's nothing around but trash and condom wrappers.

"We find a lot of dead bodies out here. One more might not be much of a story," he says.

"You don't scare me. And I thought you were going to take me to the hospital," I say, but I'm actually scared. He's got a rubber face and plastic eyes and I can't read him. He could beat the hell out of me and leave me here. No one would know. He can tell that I'm scared and he savors the moment for a while, staring at me with his cold eyes.

"Fuck you," I say.

"I should have shot you when I had the chance," he says again, and I can hear the resignation in his voice so I know I'm safe. Fuck you, I won. He lets me out of the patrol car and makes me get on my stomach while he takes off the handcuffs. For the first time, I'm not saying a word because I can't believe my luck. I got away with it. "Now don't get any bright ideas. You

should forget about tonight and make yourself scarce. I know you're a smart guy, so I won't even have to threaten you."

He gets back into the car and drives off, leaving me alone in the vacant lot.

It takes me six hours, but I finally hitch to mountains. I get drunk with some friends, and then report to work and disappear into the burning woods.

THE END