

1981

Written by FIREBIRD

Set in the universe of:

Mad Max 1-3

and Heads Will Rock: A Chronicle Of Postapocalyptic Mayhem

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FADE IN:

AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK - MIDDAY

"Oil donkey" (AKA pumpjack) pumping. Credits. The title "1981" appears, taking up most of the frame. We hear the voice of a radio announcer with an Aussie accent.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

In the US territory of Puerto Rico, explosions destroyed several Air National Guard aircraft. Police suspect it was yet another act of terrorism in the wave of violent rebellion currently sweeping the US.... Researchers in South Africa have identified several new cases of a mysterious and deadly immune deficiency disease affecting young men. The researchers suspect that the mens' illnesses are all being caused by the same unidentified virus....

Then we hear the notes of Happy Birthday beginning to play on a music box.

CUT TO:

AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK, HOUSE INTERIOR, BEDROOM - MORNING, JANUARY 1981

DEBBY, a punk-rock girl with long brassy blonde hair, sits propped up in bed with a music box on her pregnant tummy. She is turning the crank of the music box, playing Happy Birthday. RADIO ANNOUNCER can still be heard faintly in the background. Debby doesn't play the last three notes of Happy Birthday because she is interrupted by the sound of a ringing timer coming from the kitchen. She sets the music box down and leaves the room. We can now see BRUCE asleep in the same bed. He slept in a work cap and a denim work vest. Inexplicably, on his bottom half Bruce is wearing only his underwear, and his underwear is nothing more than a g-string that shows off his butt cheeks. Bruce's cap and work vest have been heavily personalised to make them look more punk. On one side of Bruce's vest there is a nametag patch. On the other side there is a patch with the company logo of 7 Sisters Petroleum ("7SP"). Above the 7SP patch Bruce has painted "I DRINK" [7 SISTERS PETROLEUM].

CUT TO:

HOUSE INTERIOR, KITCHEN - MORNING

Debby is preparing breakfast. Closeup of frying pan with eggs. The radio can be heard more clearly now.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Biologist Paul Ehrlich (ERR-lick) predicts hundreds of millions will starve before the end of the decade. Ehrlich's predictions are highly respected and he is well on his way to winning a bet with professor Julian Simon. Ehrlich famously bet Simon that the prices of raw materials will continue to skyrocket over the next decade, with no end in sight. Oil prices have more than tripled, leading prime minister Fraser ("FRAY-zer") to announce this morning that Australia's oil resources have been nationalised and will now be managed exclusively by the government.

Debby brings a bacon and egg roll on a plate to Bruce in the bedroom.

CUT TO:  
BEDROOM

Debby leans over and whispers into Bruce's ear.

DEBBY  
Time to get up Brucie.

BRUCE  
(Mumbling) Fuelling the world.

DEBBY  
I made you brekkie.

Debby playfully shoves the sandwich into his face.

BRUCE  
Could you wrap it up for me? Zed's going to be here any minute.

DEBBY  
I'll wrap a couple up for Zed and Neil, too.

Bruce gets up, puts on some pants, and makes a minimal attempt to get ready for work. Debby returns to the kitchen to wrap up the sandwiches.

INTERCUT:  
DEBBY/BRUCE

DEBBY

Did Pappagallo have you working late again?

BRUCE

He wants every vehicle we have running tip-top and topped off. He's getting ready for something big but he won't say what it is.

DEBBY

Fraser ("FRAY-zer") nationalised the oil companies.

BRUCE

It's about bloody time.

DEBBY

Is that good news or bad news?

BRUCE

It worked for Chile ("CHEE-lay").

DEBBY

I mean, are you going to lose your job?

They are interrupted by a knock at the door.

CUT TO:  
KITCHEN

Bruce emerges from the bedroom.

DEBBY

There will be three of us soon.

Bruce gives her a peck on the lips. He kneels and gives her peck on the belly, too.

BRUCE

There already are.

CUT TO:  
HOUSE EXTERIOR - MORNING

Bruce's coworker ZED is waiting outside, wearing a grey work vest with a white shirt under it, and an aqua-coloured bandana around his neck. Zed is shouting in a manner that is rudely inappropriate for the time of day.

ZED

Wake you bloody slacker! 7 Sisters  
Petroleum, fuelling the world!

Bruce rushes out the door. Zed tries to peek in the door but Bruce immediately slams it shut. They both start heading off to work but then we hear Debby inside making a distinctive whistle. Bruce immediately returns to the door and replies with the same whistle. The door opens and Debby hands Bruce a bag with three wrapped sandwiches in it. She keeps her head mostly inside the doorway, avoiding Zed's glances. Zed is confused by the whistle, but he imitates it successfully, without Bruce hearing.

CUT TO:

HOUSE INTERIOR, KITCHEN

Debby takes a bite out of the sandwich that was on the plate. She returns to the bedroom to find a human-shaped oil stain on the sheets. She sighs and removes the sheet.

#### RADIO ANNOUNCER

American economist Deanna Binns has been invited to address the Australian parliament later this year. Binns believes that Australia should adopt economic policies similar to those of Chile's ("CHILL-eez") reactionary dictatorship. With unemployment and inflation both over twenty percent, these controversial reforms are just as likely to devastate Australia's economy as they are to save it.... The Tynong ("TIE-nong") North and Frankston murders remain unsolved after three more women's bodies were found last month. And speaking of serial killers, now back to the music. This song is about Brenda Spencer, a 16-year-old girl who shot up a school. It's the Boomtown Rats, with "I Don't Like Mondays."

CUT TO:

7SP FIELD OFFICE, EXTERIOR - MORNING

The 7 Sisters Petroleum office is run down. There's graffiti on the sign by the front door. NEIL is leaning under the open bonnet of a car, trying to work on the engine as best he can while in a wheelchair. He is dressed in a white work vest with a yellow shirt under it, and a dark blue bandana around his neck. Bruce and Zed arrive at work. Both of them are eating their sandwiches. Zed talks with his mouth full.

BRUCE

Do you ever sleep?

NEIL

Nah. But I do eat.

Bruce hands Neil the last sandwich.

NEIL

Have you heard the rumour?

BRUCE

We're being nationalised.

NEIL

No, the other rumour. Pappagallo is bringing some of us into his office for a one-on-one meeting.

BRUCE

He's firing us.

NEIL

That's not what I heard. I heard he's picking the best of us for a special project.

ZED

I hope he picks me!

NEIL

He's picking the best. So you know he's not picking you.

???

ZED

Aw, Debby still cooks for me.

NEIL

She never cooked for you.

ZED

Yes she did. She used to be my girlfriend.

NEIL

She went on one date with you.

ZED

One date she'll never forget.

NEIL

One date you'll never forget.

BRUCE

Or shut up about.

ZED

(To Bruce) You ever choke her? She likes it when you choke her.

BRUCE

No she doesn't. And that's why you only got one date.

ZED

One date so far.

Bruce moves to attack Zed but Neil grabs his arm. Bruce tugs so hard that he pulls Neil's wheelchair sideways.

NEIL

Pay him no mind. The last woman he was inside was his mother. He's all talk. He'd never try anything with Debby. Especially not with you around.

Neil lets Bruce go. Bruce feigns another attack and Zed flinches. Bruce walks away and begins work on another nearby vehicle. PAPPAGALLO appears. He is a middle-aged businessman wearing a 70s suit and a wide tie.

PAPPAGALLO

Bruce, can I see you in my office?

Neil and Zed make schoolboy sounds, as though they are making fun of Bruce for being in trouble with the principal. Bruce leaves with Pappagallo.

ZED

I've had a lot of girlfriends. Look.

Zed pulls a locket, an earring, a button, a toy figurine, and a barrette out of his pocket. Neil ignores him.

CUT TO:

7SP FIELD OFFICE, INTERIOR - MORNING

Pappagallo is seated at his desk. A photo of oil derricks is mounted on the wall behind him. The nameplate on his desk indicates that he is the CEO of 7 Sisters Petroleum. Pappagallo

has a list of employees' names in front of him. He has drawn lines through the names of some of the employees, and circled others. We see him circling Bruce's name as Bruce enters. Bruce closes the door, but doesn't sit down, and Pappagallo doesn't bother asking him to.

PAPPAGALLO

I don't have time for long speeches. You've probably heard we're being nationalised. We all knew it was coming. So I've taken steps to ensure that when they come to take everything we have, there's nothing for them to take. 7 Sisters Petroleum no longer exists. I'll pay you what I owe you by the end of the day.

BRUCE

It's been nice working with you.

PAPPAGALLO

This doesn't have to be the end. A few of us are going to go out to one of the oil donkeys and build a refinery around it. We'll use the fuel to barter for everything we need. We'll start a new life while the rest of the world goes to the dogs.

BRUCE

With all due respect, you're acting like a child who won't share his toys. That oil doesn't belong to you. It belongs to everyone.

PAPPAGALLO

That may be, but it takes the brains of people like me... people like us... to get it out of the ground and turn it into something everyone can use. We're the ones who have the know-how and the do-how. That's why I want you there with us. You're the best mechanic we've got.

BRUCE

No I'm not. Neil is.

Pappagallo looks out the window at Neil.

PAPPAGALLO

We need someone... with more mobility.



BRUCE

Can Debby come?

PAPPAGALLO

Once the compound is built you can send for her. Four weeks. Six tops.

BRUCE

No way.

Bruce walks out of the office. Pappagallo gets up and follows him.

CUT TO:

7SP FIELD OFFICE, EXTERIOR - MORNING

Bruce goes back to work on the car. Zed runs up to Bruce.

ZED

What's the special project?

BRUCE

He's pissing off to an outpost in the desert. He wants a few of us come with him.

Pappagallo joins them.

ZED

Are you going to go?

BRUCE

I have everything I need right here.

PAPPAGALLO

You don't have a future. I can offer you that. You think you can find another job? You'll be fighting over scraps. I can triple your pay.

BRUCE

You know as well as I do that cash isn't worth anything anymore.

PAPPAGALLO

I can pay you in fuel.

BRUCE

I'm not going without Debby.

PAPPAGALLO

While we're getting started we can't have dead weight mulling about, getting in the way. Does she have any skills?

BRUCE

She fixes things up around the house.

PAPPAGALLO

That's not good enough. We wouldn't have any use for her.... Unless you'd allow her to be... community property.

ZED

(Giggling) Breeding stock.

BRUCE

No thanks.

Bruce keeps trying to get his work done as Pappagallo hounds him.

PAPPAGALLO

You think you're happy here? You want to run with the dogs? The punks? The misfits? You're a nobody with nothing to do and nowhere to go.

Bruce is trying to ignore him but Pappagallo is in his face and going for broke.

PAPPAGALLO

Why is Debby so special? You've got no one else in your life? What about your family? What about your parents?

Bruce turns and walks away. His manner suggests Pappagallo has touched a nerve. Pappagallo grabs him and stops him from leaving.

PAPPAGALLO

Is that it? You lost your parents? Well you know what? We all lose our parents. If we're lucky enough to live that long.

Bruce angrily shakes Pappagallo off of him, but Pappagallo grabs him again.

PAPPAGALLO

Bruce....

Bruce punches Pappagallo and knocks him over. Zed runs to Pappagallo's aid. Bruce leaves and starts walking home. Zed helps Pappagallo up. Pappagallo nods and mutters a few words. He waves to Zed to join him in his office. Zed jumps and cheers.

CUT TO:

HOUSE EXTERIOR - MIDDAY

Debby is outside on the porch with her hair tied back with a bandana, pounding some nails down. Bruce arrives home and walks right by her. He enters the house and slams the door. Debby follows him.

CUT TO:

KITCHEN - MIDDAY

DEBBY

Bruce, what happened? Did you lose your job?

BRUCE

I punched my job in the face.

DEBBY

What do you mean?

BRUCE

Pappagallo is dissolving the company. There is no job. Not anymore.

DEBBY

Did he fire you?

BRUCE

Not exactly. He offered to triple my pay. He invited a few of us to come with him out into the desert. He thinks he can put civilisation into a little jar and take it out there with him.

DEBBY

That doesn't sound so bad.

BRUCE

He said you can't come. At least not at first.

DEBBY

How long would it be till I could come?

BRUCE

Four to six weeks.

DEBBY

I'm not due for eight more weeks.

BRUCE

Do you think I should take the offer?

DEBBY

The world is falling apart around us.

BRUCE

I'm happy here, with you.

DEBBY

I'm happy with you, too. But I'm not happy here. Have you listened to the radio lately? I don't want to raise a child in this world. This could be our chance for a better life.

BRUCE

If I go, you'll be alone here.

DEBBY

(Taps her belly) I won't be alone. You give it a go. If you hate it there you can come home.

CUT TO:

BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bruce packs his bag, including three books.

VISUAL MATCH CUT TO:

7SP FIELD OFFICE, INTERIOR - NIGHT

Pappagallo has a bloody lip and is holding a cold rag to his jaw. He packs his briefcase, including several maps and three books. There is a knock at the door. Bruce enters.

BRUCE

I'll take the job.

PAPPAGALLO

I've given the job to Zed.

BRUCE

Do you want the best? Or do you want Zed?

Pappagallo sits down and thinks for a moment. He opens his briefcase and goes through the books he was just packing: The Last Whole Earth Catalog... Atlas Shrugged.... Then he finds the one he was looking for and hands it to Bruce: How To Win Friends And Influence People.

PAPPAGALLO

Read this. And next time let your mouth  
do the talking.

Pappagallo touches the cold rag to his face. Bruce chuckles and goes through the books in his bag: The Art Of War... Das Kapital.... Then he finds the one he was looking for and hands it to Pappagallo: Solar Energy.

BRUCE

You read this and we've got a deal.

Pappagallo smiles.

PAPPAGALLO

Tell Zed he's fired.