

Prometheus Unplugged
(Our hideous progeny)



a ceremony
by
Stephen Richter

Prometheus Unplugged
(Our hideous progeny)

(a ceremony)

by

(Stephen Richter)

CHARACTER NAME

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

AGE

GENDER

SCENE ONE.

Complete darkness. HEAR orchestra STRINGS, bass and cellos play somber tune. An oboe joins in. Projection: the night sky rotates slowly, as if in a planetarium. The planet Earth turns amid the stars. Music builds. We push in on the Pacific coast of the United States. Powerful surf crashes against the shore. Drone footage: a camera glides over the massive silos and the machinery of an abandoned cement plant.

Above the audience, in the catwalk, a woman steps into a spotlight. She is dressed as a park ranger. She sings to the crowd below:

PARK RANGER

*Empty spaces - what are we living for?
Abandoned places - I guess we know the score,
On and on, does anybody know what we are looking for?*

(Not a soul may be found on the grounds of the silent cement plant, nor on the abandoned walkways, towering above the tree line and the Pacific coast, on screen. The drone climbs higher, revealing the scale of the forgotten facility.)

Enter a procession of 19th century construction workers, from the back of the theater. They carry what appears to be a body, covered with a white sheet. An engineer with blueprints under his arm walks ahead of them.)

PARK RANGER

(gestures at the procession)

*Another hero - another mindless crime
Behind the curtain, in the pantomime*

(The workers place the shrouded being on a table then begin tying down ropes.)

*Hold the line
Does anybody want to take it anymore?*

(The workers pick up sledgehammers and tools. Projections: EXPLOSIONS at a rock quarry. The theater RUMBLES with the concussion of the blasts. Everyone sings in chorus as they continue to labor.)

EVERYONE

The Show must go on...!

ENGINEER

Heave!

(Workers pull ropes with all their might, lifting the shrouded body, upright, hoisting it high. Black and white footage of a stormy sea plays, then footage from the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Lightning FLASHES. Thunder RUMBLES.)

EVERYONE

On... with the... On... with the...

PARK RANGER

Show...!

(The engineer snatches the sheet free, revealing THE CREATURE - a mechanical MAN, dressed as a "cement factory," ankles and wrists bound with ropes, splayed into a jumping jack. The factory GASPS, drawing in its first breath. Eyes open wide. EXPLOSIVE QUARRY FOOTAGE BLASTS over every surface in the theater, as the music reaches its climax.)

LIGHTS OUT.

(Projected text: Davenport 1907.)

LIGHTS UP ON:

(Davenport - a wee little town, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Workers carefully lower the factory onto a TREADMILL. PORTLAND - the engineer, watches the process with pride.)

PORTLAND

Easy... easy now, boys. That's my pride and joy you got in your hands there.

WORKER #1

(straining)

Vaffanculo!

PORTLAND

What'd he say?

WORKER #2

He said, "Easy does it, signore."

PORTLAND

Well he's right. Easy does it, amici. Slowly... Slow...

(The workers strain to lower the factory onto the treadmill. The factory looks terrified. Portland touches the factory's foot, reassuring it, as the workers lower it toward the mechanical beltway.)

PORTLAND

It's alright... You're gonna be just fine, fine and dandy, you'll see.

(The factory smiles, nervously, as its toes brush the belt of the treadmill. Finally, the factory is standing upright. It exhales with relief.)

PORTLAND

That wasn't so bad, now was it?

(The factory smiles.)

THE FACTORY

Ba...ba... bad.

PORTLAND

Come on, we got work to do. Whole lot of people depending on you.

WORKER #3

Fire in the hole!

(HEAR an EXPLOSION. The factory trembles.)

PORTLAND

It's okay. Here, watch. Just like this...

(Portland runs in place. The factory watches, then begins to run.)

PORTLAND

That's it. You got it. Now... faster!

(The factory runs faster. Workers cheer. Projection: black & white footage of a cement factory at full production. Music resumes. Projections of Pearl Harbor being built, the Panama Canal, then finally the Golden Gate Bridge. The factory runs faster and faster. Sweat pours down its face. Plumes of smoke rise sky, on-screen behind it, as Portland and the workers dance a Bob Fosse inspired jazz routine, with bags of cement in their arms. A WHISTLE BLOWS. The factory slows. Portland and the workers put away their tools then exit. The factory doubles over, heaving and gasping. It VOMITS a stream green liquid into a tin pail, labouring for breath. A worker pushes the bucket off to a corner of the stage with a broom. The sun sets. The factory regains its composure, panting. It looks around. Everyone is gone.)

THE FACTORY

Pe-ople. Depending on you.

(The sun sets. Projected text: "1915." A rooster CRIES. The sun rises. Projection of a small house. A LITTLE GIRL exits the house, skipping rope, as the factory walks the treadmill in the light of the morning sun. The little girl watches. She skips rope closer to the factory then stops. The factory notices her and smiles. The girl smiles back. She points to herself.)

ESPERANZA

Esperanza.

THE FACTORY

Es... Esss...

ESPERANZA

(skipping rope around the factory)

You can call me Hope if you'd like.

(The factory laughs.)

THE FACTORY

Hope!

ESPERANZA

That's right.

THE FACTORY

Hope! People. Hope.

ESPERANZA

(laughing)

You're funny. Wanna play?

(The factory nods then starts to run. Esperanza runs in place, beside the factory. The factory runs faster. Esperanza runs faster. Smoke billows into the sky behind them, on-screen. They are both laughing. Esperanza falls into a fit of coughing.)

WOMAN'S VOICE (INSIDE HOUSE)

Esperanza!

(Esperanza continues to cough. The factory watches her with concern.)

ESPERANZA

Sì, sto arrivando! (to factory) I better go. I'll come back tomorrow.

(Esperanza takes a flower from her hair and places it beside the factory's treadmill. She runs back inside the house, next door. A man with a white coat and a doctor's bag enters the house behind Esperanza. Only the family's shadows can be seen. They sit at a dinner table and say grace. The factory watches as it continues to walk the treadmill.)

DOCTOR (INSIDE HOUSE)

Amen.

THE FACTORY

Men... Hope. Depending on you.

(The factory walks the treadmill with renewed purpose. Enter a well dressed group of people, dressed in white. Portland, is among them. He is older now and uses a cane. Projection: images from the 1914 Pan American Exposition in San Francisco.

HEAR Esperanza coughing inside her house. Portland approaches the factory, carrying a gold medal on a ribbon. Portland brushes cement dust from his lapels then places the ribbon over the factory's head. The factory admires the medal. The men and women applaud.

HEAR a SCREAM from inside the house. The factory continues to walk the treadmill.

A procession of construction workers exits the house, carrying a stretcher with a white sheet on top of it. The factory notices. Portland and the well dressed group pose beside the treadmill. A camera FLASHES.

The factory's expression fades. Esperanza's little arm falls from beneath the sheet. Her mother and father follow behind the stretcher, to the doors at the back of the theater. A bottle of champagne POPS. The awards committee cheers. The factory HOWLS.

The funeral procession exits the building. The factory sprints on the treadmill. Futile arms stretch outward. Portland and the committee drink their champagne. They laugh and sing:)

PORTLAND & COMMITTEE

Momma's little baby loves shortnin shortnin...

THE FACTORY

Rrrrrrrragh!!!!

(Portland falls into a fit of coughing. A committee member escorts Portland aside. Enter a well dressed MAN in a cowboy hat. Portland and the Cowboy shake hands as the Lights dim.

The factory runs and runs and runs beneath a lone spotlight. Exhaust emissions rise as tears fall from the factory's eyes.)

LIGHTS OUT.

(Projected text - psychedelic font: Davenport 10. 31.1967 HEAR Ray Manzarek's organ intro to "Light my Fire." Costumed Partygoers arrive at the Davenport Volunteer Firefighters' annual masquerade ball. Projection: a photograph of the Davenport cement plant. A gate with a sign above it reads, "Lone Star Cement Corp." People dance to the music. Enter the man in the cowboy hat. He shuts off the treadmill then walks to the front of the dance hall, tapping his highball glass with a Mont Blanc pen. The factory is amazed but doesn't know what to do. The music stops.)

LONE STAR (MAN IN COWBOY HAT)

May I have your attention please?

WORKER #1

Who are you, man, the new sheriff in town?

LONE STAR

The name's Lone Star. I'm the new-

WORKER #2

Well, I'm sunshine, man, this here's Moonbeam!

(People laugh.)

LONE STAR

Alright, settle down, that's enough.

(The factory steps off the treadmill and draws closer. Lone Star watches the factory intently as he continues to address the crowd.)

LONE STAR

Look, I realize y'all been doing things differently, long before Lone Star showed up and I appreciate that. But you see the times... well, they are a changin'... least that's what they say.

(Lone Star caresses the factory's cheek then slaps it gently. He smiles then addresses the crowd again.)

LONE STAR

And things are gonna change around here too.

(The workers look from one to another.)

LONE STAR

We're gonna work harder. We're gonna work longer, I ain't gonna lie to you. And we're gonna build monuments the likes of which the world has never seen. I shit thee not. And we're gonna make us a good living, a good life, for each and every one of you in this town. That's not a threat it's a promise.

(The workers nod their approval. The factory looks around nervously.)

LONE STAR

So enjoy yourselves tonight, cause tomorrow we're going to work!

EVERYONE

Yeah! Woooo! Right on, man!

(The workers cheer and applaud. The factory turns to walk away. Lone Star catches the factory by the wrist, spinning it back to face him.)

LONE STAR

May I have this dance?

THE FACTORY

I'm a cement factory.

LONE STAR

Hell, son, this ain't my first rodeo.

(Two cellos begin to play a tango version of "The Show Must Go On.")

THE FACTORY

a 19th century machine.

LONE STAR

That's what turns me on about the deal.

MOONBEAM

That Lone Star's a piece of work, man.

(Lone Star and the Factory dance a passionate yet aggressive tango. Projections: Construction begins on the San Francisco - Oakland Bay Bridge.)

MOONBEAM

You think this'll be alright for Davenport?

SUNSHINE

Who cares, man, look at him!

(Cement pours into the foundation of the Transamerica Pyramid as Lone Star dips the factory deeply on the dance floor. The Factory SLAPS Lone Star. Lone Star SLAPS the Factory.)

SUNSHINE

He's a hell of a dancer. We're gonna be just fine, man, you'll see.

(Lone Star and the factory continue to tango. It becomes more aggressive and sensuous.)

MOONBEAM

Come on, Sunshine.

(Workers remove their shirts. They strut and circle, like tank top-wearing Banderilleros. One of the workers throws their shirt to the floor, cuts in, then starts dancing with the factory.)

LONE STAR

(stepping away)

Atta' boy! Work em! Pretend I ain't even here.

(Projections: an animated FLOWCHART highlights each step in the cement making process as each dancer cuts in. The factory is passed from worker to worker. Their dances interpret the steps in the cement production chain: clinkering, mixing, grinding, and God only knows what else. STEAMY emissions rise. The Park Ranger sings.)

I guess I'm learning PARK RANGER

EVERYONE

(baritone *f. Vivace*)

I'm learning...

PARK RANGER

I must be warmer now,

(Lone Star cuts in again. He spins the factory, furiously, round and round. The workers clasp hands and dance a circle around them.)

PARK RANGER

I'll soon be turning,

EVERYONE

Turning, turning...

PARK RANGER

round the corner now.

(Images of Candle Stick Park being built. A photograph of cars and buildings covered with thick cement dust, in Davenport...)

PARK RANGER

*Outside the dawn is breaking
But inside in the dark I'm aching to be-*

(A WHISTLE blows. The factory pushes Lone Star away. Stumbling, it works its way back to the treadmill and begins to walk the conveyer belt again, obviously not feeling well. Workers pick up their shirts and lunch boxes and begin to head for the exit. The factory VOMITS into a plastic bucket with a hazmat symbol on it. The factory keeps walking the conveyer. The last worker takes the bucket away. She places it on the ground in the corner of the theater, then exits.)

EVERYONE (OFF STAGE)

(faintly in the distance)

The show must go on...

The show must go on...

(Lone Star puts on a jacket then falls into a fit of coughing.)

THE FACTORY

On with the-

LONE STAR

Enough of the noise, damnit! (coughs) tired of this horseshit.

RMC

(British)

I was rather hoping you'd say that.

(Enter a well dressed MAN.)

LONE STAR

Well don't just stand there gawking, boy, get me some water. I'm dying over here.

(RMC obliges.)

RMC

(filling glass with tap water)

Mr. Lonestar, have you given our offer serious consideration, sir?

(RMC returns carrying a glass of rust-colored water.)

LONE STAR

What the hell's that? A whisker sour?

RMC

Well, I suppose it probably is rather sour, Mister Lone Star, but I don't believe you have very much choice at the moment.

LONE STAR

Gimme that son-of-a-bitch. Aghh...!

(Hacking and choking, Lone Star gulps down the heavy water with a foul expression on his face. RMC produces a folded paper from inside his breast pocket. He offers it to Lone Star. Lone Star dries his mouth off with the back of his hand then takes the paper from RMC with suspicion. He looks over at the factory on the treadmill. They hold each other's gaze for a moment. Lone Star shakes his head.)

LONE STAR

People screwing each other *Every Which Way But Loose* around this camp... Sorry, son. Man can't live on no whiskey sour. (Coughs. Then to RMC) Gotta pen there, Archibold?

RMC

Naturally.

LONE STAR

Course' you do.

(Lone Star signs the document. He takes one last look at the factory then exits, coughing. RMC carefully removes his jacket. He folds it neatly over a chair, humming to himself. The factory walks the treadmill with a worried expression. Workers enter, watching RMC with suspicion. RMC rolls up his sleeves and he addresses the group.)

RMC

I've had enough of scheming and messing around with jerks. My car is parked outside but I'm afraid it doesn't work.

MOONBEAM

That's not encouraging, man.

SUNSHINE

Shhh, hear him out.

RMC

I'm looking for a partner, someone who gets things fixed. So, ask yourself this question, do you want to be rich?

EVERYONE

Yeah! Come on, fellas!

("Opportunities," by the Pet Shop Boys plays. RMC tilts his bowler hat and begins to dance with elegance and grace. The workers pick up their tools and get to work. Projections: A MONTAGE - images and video footage of popular culture and industrial production from the 1960's through the 1980's. A disco ball rotates overhead, turning the theater space into a nightclub of sweat and toil. RMC fits the factory with Lacoste sweatbands, for its wrists and forehead. Determined, the factory sprints towards the next decade, at a dead hard run.)

RMC & PET SHOP BOYS

*You've got the brawn, I've got the brains
Let's make lots of money...*

THE FACTORY

Hope!

EVERYONE

(working)

*Oh... There's a lot of oppor-tunities...
if you know when to take them, you know...
There's a lot of oppor-tunities...
if there aren't you can make them...*

(RMC Pacific and the workers of Davenport dance and labour on, working their way into the 21st century. MEN and WOMEN with safety glasses on, clipboards, and windbreakers that read "EPA," watch from the catwalks, above. They point and take notes, shaking their heads. LIGHTS dim. Projected text: Winter 2005. The factory blows on its hands, rubbing them together as it walks the treadmill. A worker enters. She looks inside the bucket sitting next to the treadmill then carries it over to the corner of the theater. She places it on the ground. One of the EPA officials pulls the worker aside and begins to ask her questions. Enter a WELL DRESSED MAN wearing dark sunglasses. He uses a white cane, as he crosses the stage to the factory. The factory watches the man. The man removes his gloves then touches the factory's face. He feels its chest and powerful arms...)

CEMEX (BLIND MAN)

Es una hermosa fábrica. You are very beautiful. Has anyone ever told you?

THE FACTORY

No. People hope, they depend on me.

(Enter RMC. He notices the EPA official taking a sample from the bucket in the corner. He walks over to Cemex and the factory.)

CEMEX

Well, you were obviously made with a great deal of love.

RMC

Brilliant! Mister Cemex, you hit the nail right on the head, sir. Love. Love is a many splendid thing and that is a *splendid* idea you just came up with, my friend.

CEMEX

No me andas con pendejadas, *my friend*. Get to the point. What do you want?

RMC

You mean, for the factory? Oh, no, no, I couldn't, sir, I just... the history alone and all the sentimental value, the community would be *devastated*. I mean, selling out our most precious institution to a foreign power, who could *dream* of such a thing?

(They all look out at the audience.)

CEMEX

I live in Houston, cabrón.

RMC

Done.

(RMC shakes Cemex's hand then gives him a pen and a folded paper. RMC watches nervously, as an EPA official approaches the factory.)

RMC

Yes, yes, right there on the dotted line, bruv. There we go...

(The EPA official hands the factory a urinalysis bottle. A crowd of people gathers around the remaining EPA officials on the corner. Their discussions grow louder and more intense.)

RMC

And... Alright, bruv, enjoy Davenport! Lovely town. One love!

(RMC takes the contract then runs offstage. The somber orchestral version of “the Show Must Go On” begins to play again. Cemex pours a glass of dark-colored water then offers it to the factory. The factory stops walking the treadmill. It watches the crowd. An official holds an oversized REPORT CARD overhead. She opens it wide for all to see. People GASP. The report reads, “Toxic Release Chemicals -VERY HIGH!”)

THE FACTORY

(to Cemex)

No, no thank you. You probably should go.

CEMEX

You are a good factory.

(The crowd approaches, slowly, carrying broom sticks, torches, and chains. Cemex exits, stage right. The music builds. The factory can only do one thing now. It runs... faster and faster on the treadmill as the crowd encircles it. The projections from the show play in reverse, at high speed, like memories flashing by, as the factory runs and runs with a look of hope on its face. The circle of people closes. LIGHTNING flashes. THUNDER rumbles. Workers grab ropes and hoist the factory off the treadmill. People tear down the set, breaking the machines and mechanical artwork into parts and scrap. They chain the factory to a boulder. Other workers stretch caution tape in a perimeter around the bound factory.)

THE FACTORY

(smiling)

Hope. Hope. Hope.

(A worker tapes the factory’s mouth shut with yellow caution tape, then exits. The factory bows its head and closes its eyes. The music reaches it’s crescendo.)

SILENCE. Aerial drone footage of the abandoned cement plant. A piano plays single notes.

Above the audience, in the catwalk, a woman dressed as a park ranger sings to the crowd below:)

PARK RANGER

Empty spaces - what are we living for?

Abandoned places - I guess we know the score,

On and on, does anybody know what we are looking for?

(Four Graduate Students from the local university carefully approach the chained-up facility. They carry cameras, sketch pads and other equipment. The factory opens its eyes.)

LIGHTS OUT.

FIN