

THE SECRET THAT DOGS KNOW

An original screenplay by

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FADE IN:

CLOUDS TUMBLE ACROSS THE SKY

Shapes morph; surreal giants battle for immense kingdoms, bizarre animals race across infinite wonderlands.

A YOUNG BOY lies on a bluff overlooking the ocean, burning the natural fireworks of his imagination in that majestic sky. His name is JOSH. He is TEN years old. He blinks and -

THE CLOUDS

are mere clouds, mounding in a dark sky.

EXT. EDGE OF TOWN - LATER

Josh rides a well-preserved old bike toward a SMALL NORTHWESTERN TOWN.

EXT. NORTHWESTERN TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

Mom & pop stores of another decade lean against their modern counterparts-- Java Nervosa alongside Alice's Sweet Shop, Computer Mania alongside McGale's Antiques, the cell phone franchise alongside a Sears Catalog outlet.

Josh pedals his bike furiously up the sidewalk.

NEARBY ALLEY - SAME

A STRAY DOG scavenges behind a restaurant. It topples a trash can to see inside. A BUS BOY rushes out of the back door of the restaurant, YELLING threats. The Stray bolts.

MOUTH OF ALLEY

The frightened dog dashes into the path of Josh's bike. He swerves to avoid it and shoots out into traffic.

A truck SKIDS, cars HONK. Josh jumps a curb, clips a trash can before he can finally bring the bike to a stop.

He looks back.

THE STRAY DOG

locks eyes with him for a moment, then scampers away.

Josh steps on a pedal and is off again.

EXT. REAR OF SMALL STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Josh exits with an ice cream sandwich. As he unwraps it, he notices that SAME STRAY DOG staring at him from close by.

The Stray Dog licks its lips and swallows.

Pausing before his next bite, Josh breaks off a piece of his ice cream and extends the offering to the Stray.

The dog takes a tentative step closer.

Josh holds out the morsel.

As the dog gets close, Josh shifts and tries to pet it.

It flinches and runs away.

JOSH

Okay... it's okay.

Josh waits until the Stray recovers its courage and cautiously takes the piece. Then it scampers away.

Josh smiles. The first we've seen on his pensive face.

BIGGER KID (O.S.)

Cool bike...

TWO KIDS have come out of the store behind Josh.

One is Josh's size, the other is older, and bigger. There is a rough look to both of them.

JOSH

It's fast too.

BIGGER KID

Yeah? Can I try it?

Josh gives them both a look, sizing them up.

JOSH

Okay.

Bigger Kid climbs on with a knowing glance at Smaller Kid.

BIGGER KID
You gonna wait here?

SMALLER KID
Sure.

Bigger Kid pedals off. Smaller Kid drains his coke can.

SMALLER KID
Whew! Definitely gonna need one more.
(beat)
Hey, you want another?

He gestures to the remnants of Josh's ice cream.

JOSH
You bet.

SMALLER KID
Be right back.

Smaller Kid disappears into the market. Josh settles back against the wall of the store.

INT. SMALL MARKET - LATER

Josh searches for the Smaller Kid inside.

EXT. FRONT OF SMALL MARKET - MOMENTS LATER

Josh looks up and down the block. Both kids and his bike are nowhere to be seen.

THUNDER rumbles. It starts to rain...

... As Josh becomes aware that whatever friendship that might have been offered was in fact a ruse to steal the bike.

EXT. WOOD SLOPE CONDOMINIUMS - AFTERNOON

A manicured maze of over/under units on a hill. Wet from the rain, Josh treads toward unit number 205.

INT. UNIT 205 - BECCA'S CONDO - AFTERNOON

Stacks of unpacked moving boxes invade the otherwise sparse and well appointed den of an imbedded professional.

Josh enters, drawing the attention of his AUNT BECCA, a woman at the cusp of her 40s. Stiffly attired in a business suit, Becca could be attractive if she allowed herself to be.

She looks up from scooping canned cat food to her spoiled PERSIAN CAT named SONATA.

BECCA
There you are. You're dripping.

JOSH
I lost my bike...

Becca is busy and hardly hears him.

BECCA
You just... disappeared. Josh, you can't do that.

JOSH
These two kids pretended, they pretended to be friends...

BECCA
(still not hearing him)
I have to know where you are now that you're living here. You have to tell me.

JOSH
They stole it...

She ushers him to the small kitchen table.

BECCA
Sit down, sit down, dinner's cold.

She pulls a Lean Cuisine from the microwave.

INT. JOSH'S ROOM - EVENING

Josh hangs a model spaceship from a line to the ceiling. It flies there along with two others, positioned as if in the midst of an interstellar chase.

He picks up a brush from his model builder's tool kit and dusts another of the intricate models he's built.

That's about the time something

OUT THE WINDOW

catches Josh's attention: SMALLER KID. From the store.
On Josh's bike!

EXT. CONDOMINIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Josh leaps off the stairs and runs out into the rain.

EXT. WOOD SLOPE - DRIVEWAY - A MOMENT LATER

Smaller Kid SEES Josh coming and pumps the pedals to escape, picking up speed as he coasts down the driveway.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Smaller Kid skids on the wet pavement as a light goes against him. In a panic, Smaller Kid jumps off and SHOVES the bike down the hill.

Josh glares, then runs after his now rider-less BIKE.

TWO CARS

skid to avoid it. A narrow miss.

THE BIKE

hits a curb and is launched in the air...

It sails in a graceful arc...

JOSH

watches incredulously as...

THE BIKE

CRASHES through the front window of AN ANTIQUE STORE in a blizzard of glass.

Josh runs down the hill to the store and climbs through the broken window. He picks his way through the cluttered store until he comes upon the mangled mass of his bike.

An old wire mannequin is tangled in the bent spokes.

Josh yanks hard to free his bike, slips and falls backwards against a shelf, YELPING in alarm as something sharp jabs him in the back.

He spins:

A hundred shadows obscure the surroundings... Until a LIGHTNING FLASH illuminates a

TOY DOG'S FACE

buried within a group of old toys. Its pointed metal snout must have poked him. And now--

ANOTHER LIGHTNING FLASH

illuminates the angry face of ANGUS MCGALE, an imposing man in his late 60s.

MCGALE

So, young hoodlum... caught in an act of malicious vandalism.

THUNDER rumbles ominously. Josh can only stammer as McGale grabs Josh by the collar.

MCGALE (CONT'D)

Come along!

EXT. WOOD SLOPE CONDOMINIUMS - EVENING

NEIGHBORS, their faces bathed by the lights of a SHERIFF'S CAR, watch as the SHERIFF ushers Josh home.

In the crowd, SMALLER KID watches.

INT. BECCA'S CONDO - NIGHT

Josh digs out from under Becca's third degree.

BECCA

And then, he ran it into a store? Why would he do that?

JOSH
Because I almost caught him and I was
gonna deal on him.

BECCA
Deal on him?

Josh holds up a fist.

BECCA
Oh. Dear. That's never an answer
Josh. Don't you know that?

Sulking for several moments, Josh looks away.

BECCA (CONT'D)
The owner said you can work off the
damage...

JOSH
I don't want to go back there!

BECCA
... Like a summer job.

JOSH
It's full of old creepy stuff and--

BECCA
It'll keep you busy while I'm working
afternoons and--

JOSH
-- *Auntie!*

She's finally pulled from her train of thought.

BECCA
For Heaven's sake, what Josh?

JOSH
It's... its...

BECCA
-- Save it. I don't want to hear any
nonsense about this. You have to go.
Is that clear?

Josh looks down at the table with a respectful nod.

INT. JOSH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Josh changes into flannel PJs. Ignoring the dresser, he folds his clothes into a suitcase. As he does that, he pauses to peer at

A PHOTO

lying inside. Josh and his MOTHER, standing on the beach by a Hobie Catamaran, wearing life vests.

JOSH

touches his mother's face. And as he does, the room blooms with the power of

JOSH'S IMAGINATION

His mother pushes the Hobie Catamaran into the ocean and leaps on board... The wind catches the sail...

BACK TO SCENE

It evaporates, leaving Josh alone, holding the photograph.

EXT. FRONT OF MCGALE'S EMPORIUM - DAY

Josh climbs out of Becca's car. A large board has been fitted over the window of the store.

INT. MCGALE'S EMPORIUM - DAY

Josh enters the store. By day, it's a beautiful old place filled with a variety of antiques.

RAZOR (O.S.)

Yo, pin head, broom's in the closet.

BRANDON "RAZOR" BLACK hardly looks up from the Game Boy on which he is playing 'Devil Hunt'. Razor's a punked-out slacker who's maybe just bought his first beer in a bar.

RAZOR (CONT'D)

You might as well start with the front walk. My uncle's gonna limp down eventually and tell me that.

(he yawns)

But, lucky me, I got a little pin head who's gotta do what I say.

He goes back to his Gameboy.

RAZOR (CONT'D)

That window cost 'bout five hundred
dead presidents, see? So, I don't
sweep for a while. Got it?

McGale descends the stairs from his apartment above the
store

As he comes down, Razor quickly hides the Game Boy in the
desk drawer and stands with a respectful nod.

MCGALE

(re: Razor)

Met me nephew I see.

(beat)

Now hoodlum, what skills have you?

JOSH

Skills?

MCGALE

What kin ye do? This arrangement
has to bring some benefit? Eh, lad?

JOSH

I can... I... can... I...

RAZOR

Seems he can stutter.

MCGALE

Ah, get out there with the broom.
Kin ye handle a broom?

EXT. FRONT OF MCGALE'S EMPORIUM - DAY

Josh sweeps the front walk. He looks up, sees SMALLER KID
down the block with several other kids. They lock eyes.

Turning away, Josh picks up the dirt with a dustpan.

INT. MCGALE'S EMPORIUM - REAR ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Josh walks inside, empties the dustpan. He lingers to
explore the back room.

Items here are coated with dust-- antique toys that were, at one time, bought to be fixed up and sold. Now they are all but abandoned.

Josh lifts a battered old toy robot, examining it.

A little smile of delight spreads on Josh's face.

JOSH'S IMAGINATION

The Robot is whole again, wearing a suit and hat. It sets down a briefcase, kisses the doll, which now looks like a housewife in an apron, and then ruffles the hair on the second doll's head, which looks like a little boy.

BACK TO SCENE

Josh blinks. The toys become their forgotten, broken selves.

Josh reaches to return the robot, stepping onto the bottom shelf, which collapses...

Josh is peppered with most of what was on the shelves. He pushes it all off of him, then looks down and sees

A MECHANICAL TOY DOG

Ears bent, fur worn to the metal in places, teeth silver where white paint has chipped off.

It has landed on its side and the fall has apparently jarred its inner mechanics to life. Gear wheels drive its rear legs in a helpless pirouette on the floor.

Josh stands it up. The Mechanical Dog walks into the door, banging again and again as if trying to get out.

Overcome by curiosity, Josh picks it up.

He stares at it for several moments, sees the corrosion on the rusty metal gears, which drive the rear legs.

Turning it over, he examines its face. This is the toy dog that poked him in the back.

The Mechanical Dog BLINKS, then SNIFFS, wrinkling its nose.

Josh hiccups a cry of surprise and drops it.

MECHANICAL DOG (CONT'D)

Ow!

Josh stumbles away in alarm... Right into Mr. McGale.

MCGALE (O.S.)
What exactly d'ya think you're doing in
here, hoodlum?

He looks at the fallen shelves.

MCGALE (CONT'D)
You're supposed to be cleaning up, you
know, not takin' a wreckin' ball to the
place.

JOSH
I... It was...

Mechanical Dog has gone still.

MCGALE
Let me guess. An accident. Or are you
just a clumsy bit of a lad?

JOSH
I'm not clumsy.

MCGALE
Well, you're doing a good job of
fooling old McGale! Back to work!

EXT. WOOD SLOPE CONDOMINIUMS - EVENING

Josh walks home. He sees a car parked out front and takes
off in a run.

INT. BECCA'S CONDO - KITCHEN - EVENING

Josh rushes inside.

JOSH
Dad!

Becca gestures for quiet. Josh's Father ROBERT is seated
at the table and arguing on a cell phone. His briefcase
and a travel bag are near him.

ROBERT
... please don't say I have to go
through this all again.

Robert manages a tired smile and invites Josh over for a silent hug. In the harsh light, Robert looks exhausted.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

It's the same insurance information as the hospital in Dallas.

(beat)

Well, can't you check with them?

Robert hangs up, rises, and opens the refrigerator. He seems caught there, unable to make a selection.

JOSH

Dad?

Robert selects a leftover chicken leg and sits.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Did you give her the book I made?

ROBERT

Hmm?

JOSH

With all the photos?

ROBERT

Oh. Yes.

JOSH

Did you read it to her? You have to make up stories from the pictures and...

Deep in thought, Robert just stares at the table.

JOSH (CONT'D)

You said I could see her.

Robert fights for and then manages a smile.

ROBERT

I did, Josh, didn't I.

EXT. WOOD SLOPE CONDOMINIUMS - EVENING

Josh and Robert drive onto the street.

EXT. NEAR THE HARBOR - EVENING

Josh, Robert inside the car. They are in line at a FERRY CROSSING. Josh's eyes hang on something at water's edge:

In a line of fishing industry buildings is an old

BOAT STORAGE BUILDING

Beyond a salt decayed chain link fence, old boats lie dormant on trailers with flat tires.

SHADOWS

of unkempt trees dance over an old wooden warehouse at the edge of the property.

JOSH

swallows at the sight. *The shadows almost seem alive.* A moment later, their car moves forward in the line.

EXT. BAY - FERRY - EVENING

Filled with cars, the ferry crosses rough bay as the sun descends toward the distant mountains.

INT. ROBERT'S CAR - SAME

Robert, Josh, sitting quietly inside.

ROBERT

Want to get out and watch the boats going by?

Josh shakes his head.

Robert nods and tries to think of something more to say.

He can't.

EXT. MEDICAL COMPLEX PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Josh and Robert walk toward the main entrance, passing nurses, an ambulance that pulls in, and doctors hustling by, all with the cold clinical manner of a busy hospital.

As they walk on, Josh SEES something across an enormous grassy area that stretches to the woodsy hills:

JOSH'S POV - THE SHADOW

of a tree near a grounds light appears to detach itself. It flows across the grass in a liquid amorphous glide...

ON JOSH

frightened by this eerie and unnatural sight.

SHADOW

approaches the hospital buildings... It flows over a bed of flowers... The flowers wilt and die as it passes...

ROBERT (O.S.)

Josh?

BACK TO SCENE

Josh flinches, drawn back to reality by his father's query.

ROBERT

You okay?...

Josh swallows and nods. His father guides him on.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY MOMENTS LATER

Josh and Robert walk along.

ON JOSH

eyes searching the maze of interconnected corridors.

He is startled again as he spots

THE SHADOW

gliding across a distant corridor ceiling... As it slides over a light fixture, the light winks out.

BACK TO SCENE - JOSH

Noting his son's distraction, Robert drops to eye level beside him. His mood is light, though a touch manic.

ROBERT

It's a great place! The doctors are specialists. It's supposed to be the best in the state. That's why we brought mom here.

Josh just manages a nod.

INT. ANOTHER HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Robert is held up by a pair of DOCTORS. Josh steps

INSIDE A HOSPITAL ROOM

Josh's MOTHER lies on the bed, surrounded by a forest of life support equipment, as pale and beautiful as a porcelain doll.

JOSH

sits in a chair beside her. Then he rises and goes to the room's closet. He pulls out a pale BLUE SWEATER from within and lays it beside her.

The hiss and hum of the apparatus fills the void of silence.

JOSH

Momma?

There is no answer. Apparatus HUM rises as we:

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN - DAY

A TRASH TRUCK'S HYDRAULICS whine as it LIFTS a dumpster up over its side.

JOSH

scurries across the street in front of the lumbering truck.

INT. MCGALE'S EMPORIUM - DAY

Josh steps inside.

JOSH
Mr. McGale? It's me, Josh. Hello!
(beat)
Razor?

No one answers his call.

IN REAR ROOM

Josh drops his backpack by the door and stops in front of the high shelf.

On it, Mechanical Dog stares toward the door.

Josh considers it for a beat. Then he walks to the closet and starts digging around for the broom.

He hesitates as he HEARS a WHIRRING SOUND behind him.

He spins.

MECHANICAL DOG

has moved along the shelf. It's now motionless again.

JOSH
I saw that...

Josh drags a stool to the shelf. Climbing on it, he reaches up and pokes once at the dog. He notices something on the fur beneath the dog's chest.

Rusted letters engraved in the metal: **D in i**

JOSH
What's this?

Josh climbs off and then turns away, pretending not to look.

Mechanical Dog, *walks* toward the end of the shelf, its sad eyes pinned on the window.

JOSH
Okay. I'm not seeing anything.

Josh pretends to organize a set of ornate silver frames.

JOSH (CONT'D)
I'm just, busy working, I'm not hearing or seeing anything at all...

The WHIRRING SOUND rises again. It culminates in a YELP!

Josh spins again. The shelf is bare.

JOSH
Hey! Where'd you go?

MCGALE
I'm right here, boy.

McGale enters from behind Josh, carrying a huge cardboard box. He sets it down amidst several others and then tosses an old rusty toaster into it.

MCGALE (CONT'D)
Dealer's coming in from Seattle.
Bringin' me a load of new merchandise
to consider.

Locating an old waffle iron, McGale tosses it into the box with the toaster.

MCGALE (CONT'D)
We're cleaning out old stock today.
(he yells)
Brandon!

RAZOR
It's Razor! No one calls me Brandon
anymore!

Razor enters, bearing the weight of two more boxes.

MCGALE
Well, Razor, Blazor, whatever! All of
it goes!

EXT. MCGALES EMPORIUM - DAY

Josh teeters under the load of a large box of trash.

At the curb, Razor drops another box into the dumpster.

As he returns, Razor SWATS the box Josh carries, almost causing Josh to drop it.

With a snicker, Razor disappears inside the store.

In b.g., another TRASH TRUCK SLAMS a dumpster down.

JOSH

pushes his box into McGale's dumpster.

INT. MCGALE'S EMPORIUM - WORK ROOM

Josh searches behind the empty shelf where he last saw Mechanical Dog. He's puzzled by the sudden disappearance.

As the SOUND of that trash truck outside swells, Josh turns, *realization sweeping across his features.*

EXT. STREET - SAME

HYDRAULIC GRIPPERS reach out from the SIDE of the truck with an evil robot's menace.

With mindless force, the GRIPPERS CLAMP against the sides of the dumpster.

Just as -

THE DOOR

to McGale's is kicked open... and Josh bursts out.

As the dumpster rises, Josh LEAPS and hangs onto the edge.

JOSH

Wait!!!

He's pulled up off of his feet as

THE STARTLED TRUCK DRIVER

quickly reverses the hydraulics.

TRUCK DRIVER

What are you? Nuts!?

Ignoring him, Josh scrambles

INSIDE DUMPSTER

where Mechanical Dog lies in a pile of old broken toys.

INT. MCGALES EMPORIUM - BACK ROOM

Josh sets Mechanical Dog back on the shelf. He stares dubiously, then he pets Mechanical Dog's scratchy head.

JOSH
Good dog. Stay.

Mechanical Dog remains motionless.

With a shrug, Josh returns to his work.

EXT. MCGALE'S EMPORIUM - AFTERNOON

Josh exits, pulling on his backpack.

EXT. WOOD SLOPE CONDOMINIUMS - AFTERNOON

Josh walks up the drive.

INT. BECCA'S CONDO - AFTERNOON

Josh hustles inside.

JOSH
I'm home!

Becca works at the kitchen table. Piles of papers surround her laptop along with a briefcase that has "SMALLCO Office Products" embossed on it.

Involved in a business conversation on the phone, Becca gestures impatiently for Josh to "keep it down."

INT. JOSH'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Josh enters and lays his backpack on his desk. A soft and muffled "whimper" comes from within.

Puzzled, Josh peels down the zipper and--

JOSH
Hey!
(beat)
How did you get in there?

INSIDE BACKPACK

Mechanical Dog's motionless face is visible.

JOSH

pulls him out and sets him down. Pushing aside several of the models on his desk, he digs into his toolbox.

MECHANICAL DOG

seems to watch this hurried search.

JOSH

finds what he's looking for. A one inch dry bristle brush. Using it, he begins dusting away the dirt on Mechanical Dog.

JOSH

Okay, I see some of this is not going to come off right away...

As he works, he locates a little WIND KEY on the side of Mechanical Dog. Josh twists it.

It turns 5 times before it sticks.

Mechanical Dog wiggles to life.

Josh takes a wary step back.

MECHANICAL DOG

blinks and sniffs the air with jerky staccato movements. He starts scratching behind an ear.

MECHANICAL DOG

Oh that feels good...

JOSH

Did you?... You said something.

Mechanical Dog turns to Josh, dark eyes widening in surprise.

MECHANICAL DOG

Did you?... *You heard me say something.*

As Josh's mouth drops open, Mechanical Dog performs a clumsy sort of scamper of delight.

Josh backs away from the dance. Then he runs from the room.

INT. KITCHEN - AT THE SINK - A MOMENT LATER

Josh splashes water all over his face with frantic force.

BECCA

turns from where she still works at the kitchen table. She observes Josh's manic actions with impatient concern.

Josh notices her staring.

JOSH
You gotta see this!

INT. JOSH'S ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

Josh looks in warily from the doorway. Becca hangs just over his shoulder.

The Mechanical Dog is still. Standing on the floor.

BECCA
What is that thing?

JOSH
It talks! It's a toy dog that talks!

Becca shoots another concerned look at Josh.

JOSH (CONT'D)
No no, really.

BECCA
Oh, Josh, come on now.

JOSH
Watch this!

Josh creeps over to the dog and pokes it in the back.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Go on, say something.

Mechanical Dog remains motionless. In the lengthening silence, Becca "tsks."

BECCA
Josh, I'm really busy. So please,
just...

She emits another effusion of impatience, then exits.

JOSH
Auntie!...

But his call does not halt Becca's return to her work. As she disappears down the stairs:

MECHANICAL DOG
Will you help me?

Josh almost jumps out of his shoes.

JOSH
You're scaring the heck out of me!

MECHANICAL DOG
You'll help?

JOSH
Really, I mean, you just blurt things out when a person least expects it!

Getting over his fright, Josh studies the dog anew.

JOSH
How... is this happening?

He lifts Mechanical Dog.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Batteries? A computer chip?

Josh gives Mechanical Dog a shake.

MECHANICAL DOG
Hey! Hey!

JOSH
Oh, sorry.

MECHANICAL DOG
How'd you like it if someone shook you?

JOSH
Sorry. I said I was sorry.

Josh stares, in complete awe over the circumstances.

MECHANICAL DOG
Well?

JOSH
Uh, what was the question?

MECHANICAL DOG
Will you help me become a real dog?

JOSH
You want to be--

MECHANICAL DOG
I have to learn the secret.

JOSH
What.. what secret?

MECHANICAL DOG
The secret all real dogs know.

JOSH
And what's that?

MECHANICAL DOG
Well... It's a secret.

JOSH
So how are you supposed to learn it?

As Mechanical Dog considers this:

JOSH
Okay. I'm having a conversation, with
a toy dog. Great.

MECHANICAL DOG
But I'm going to be real!

JOSH
Yeah, so you said.

MECHANICAL DOG
I'm going to...

Mechanical Dog goes silent as his gears slow to a stop.

JOSH
Hello?

Josh taps on the dog's head. He winds the key 5 times
again until it sticks. Puts Mechanical Dog down on the
floor.

Mechanical Dog shivers, hiccups and coughs.

MECHANICAL DOG
That always tickles!

As Josh starts to speak again:

A SCRATCHING SOUND comes from nearby.

THEIR POV - THROUGH DOOR TO THE INSIDE

SONATA, the cat has decided that a chair in the hall makes a swell scratch post.

MECHANICAL DOG

launches himself at the cat without a thought.

JOSH

Hey!...

Of course, Mechanical Dog is somewhat limited in its athletic ability. It stumbles, then tumbles, rolls clumsily, and then manages to fight to its feet.

Startled by the strange intruder, Sonata darts away...

INT. BECCA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The lone sanctuary of perfection Becca has managed to maintain since her brother and his son have moved in.

Sonatta races to and tries to climb a floor lamp. It timbers to the floor with a CRASH.

Mechanical Dog coughs out a BARK and gains until Sonata dodges left and Mechanical Dog, plows right into a small table, spilling several PORCELAIN FIGURINES to the floor.

Sonata leaps atop and then races along a shelf, knocking a series of PICTURE FRAMES one by one to the floor.

MECHANICAL DOG

strains every gear to keep up. Following the cat one step ahead of each falling picture frame.

JOSH

laughs hard at the sight of Mechanical Dog's plucky efforts. It's one of the funniest things he's ever seen.

His laughter subsides, however, as

BECCA

appears in the doorway, glaring.

BECCA

What is going on in here? Sonata?

Sonata curls innocently around Becca's legs. Becca kneels down and fusses over the cat.

BECCA (CONT'D)

What's happened little baby Boo? Oh Boo, are you all right?

She turns a hard eye on Josh.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Josh? What exactly do you think you're doing?

Standing in the middle of the mess, Josh is speechless. At his feet, Mechanical Dog has gone completely still.

EXT. BECCA'S ROOM - LATER

Josh sweeps up the last of the broken fragments.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Becca, still working. Josh enters.

JOSH

Finished.

BECCA

Now up to your room. To think about it.

Josh starts to speak but Becca cuts him off.

BECCA (CONT'D)

I know your mother always enjoyed this... wild imagination of yours. But there comes a time in every boy's life when he puts that sort of thing aside.

JOSH

Yes Auntie.

BECCA

Now I want you to listen to me. A toy
can't want anything; it can't say
anything. Do you understand?

Josh's eyes widen in protest, but Becca's stern look
convinces him to drop the subject. He nods and starts out.

INT. JOSH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Josh comes in.

JOSH

She thinks I'm making it up.

Mechanical Dog is motionless on the bed, seeming to stare
out the window.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I didn't just, imagine it, did I?

Receiving no reply, Josh winds Mechanical Dog's key.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Hello? Are you there?

MECHANICAL DOG

I almost had that cat.

It still startles Josh to hear the dog speak.

JOSH

Forget the cat.

MECHANICAL DOG

A whisker away!

JOSH

Well, you're gonna need a battery or
motor or something, you know, to keep
going, 'cause you're not gonna learn
anything if you keep running out of
wind.

MECHANICAL DOG

A motor.

JOSH

Yeah, maybe a motor.

Mechanical Dog tilts his head, as if remembering something from deep in its past.

MECHANICAL DOG
A motor that doesn't need winding.
(beat)
You have one?

JOSH
No.

MECHANICAL DOG
Can you help me find one?

JOSH
Well, it's all kind of crazy, isn't it?
A toy can't become real. No matter
what you put inside it.

MECHANICAL DOG
It can happen. I'll prove it.

JOSH
How are you gonna do that?

MECHANICAL DOG
Help me find a motor that doesn't need
winding. After that, I'll prove I can
become a real dog.

Josh emits a sigh of impatience.

MECHANICAL DOG (CONT'D)
Isn't there anything you're counting
on?

Of course there is. Josh lowers his eyes.

MECHANICAL DOG (CONT'D)
If what I'm hoping for comes true,
couldn't the same thing happen for you?

Josh thinks that over. There is hope in his eyes, but
there's also the fear of it lurking as well.

MECHANICAL DOG
Help me.

Mechanical Dog is putting out a paw, as if to shake. That
brings a smile to Josh's lips.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Well, okay. Sure.

Mechanical Dog freezes as his wind runs out.

Josh reaches for the paw. He sees a marking in the fur over the paw, a HEART SHAPE.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Deal.

He gently 'low fives' that little paw.

EXT. BECCA'S CONDOMINIUM - GARAGE - MORNING

Josh works on his bike. He is truing the spokes. It's a tedious procedure, but Josh attacks it with an adult's focus.

After some final adjustments, he spins the wheel.

EXT. NORTHWESTERN TOWN - SAME

Waiting at a light astride his bike, Josh opens his backpack to check on Mechanical Dog.

MECHANICAL DOG

How much further?

JOSH

Not too far.

MECHANICAL DOG

I don't like the dark.

JOSH

We're almost there.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

Parking lot filled with cars. Josh rides up and parks his bike in the racks near an entrance.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - HOBBY WORLD - DAY

Tiny SLOT CARS race around a track at equivalent scaled speeds near 200 m.p.h. One car MISSES a turn and FLIES off the track, SHATTERING on the

BACK WALL

where Hobbyists work diligently on their high speed electric motors. The crash brings little response - it's a common occurrence.

CLOSE - A SPINNING SLOT CAR MOTOR

revved to red line. Until -- POP! It self-destructs in a burst of sparks.

A young man with a PONY TAIL, wearing an iPod headset and a Hobby World apron waves to clear the ensuing smoke.

Another HOBBY WORLD EMPLOYEE taps him on the shoulder. Pony Tail blinks and pulls the iPod off.

HOBBY WORLD EMPLOYEE
Some kid has a wacky problem out front
and you're the expert.

INT. HOBBY WORLD - NEAR FRONT DESK

Pony Tail looks over Mechanical Dog. Josh is by his side.

PONY TAIL
Where'd you find it?

JOSH
Antique shop. Here in town.

PONY TAIL
It moves?

JOSH
Yeah. You wind it. It's full of
springs and stuff inside.

Josh twists the key five times.

JOSH (CONT'D)
That's as far as it goes.

But Mechanical Dog just remains frozen.

JOSH (CONT'D)
I think it gets stuck now and then.

Pony Tail is dubious.

PONY TAIL

Well I don't know how to open it.
'Less you want me to break it.

(beat)

It's old, you know, but it's like, so
well made, it's seamless.

He thinks about it for a moment.

PONY TAIL (CONT'D)

There's a guy you might try. Cranky
old dude. Lives on the outskirts of
town. He makes watches. C'mere.

Josh follows Pony Tail behind the counter as he searches
through a drawer. Within, Pony Tail finds an old business
card. He puts it into a fax/copier and runs a copy for
Josh.

PONY TAIL (CONT'D)

Does custom stuff. He might be able to
open it. Then you could see if there's
a way to rig something for your little
friend over there...

They both look at the now vacant counter.

PONY TAIL (CONT'D)

Huh! Where'd you put it?

JOSH

I left him right there...

Mechanical Dog has disappeared.

INT. MALL - SAME

A SMALL CHILD looks over his mother's shoulder as she
struggles to free a credit card from her purse. The child
points at the sight of:

MECHANICAL DOG

scuttling along the shiny floor, slipping between the foot
traffic, crossing from one line of stores to another.

SMALL CHILD

Doggie! Doggie!

MOTHER

Yes, honey, there's a pet store right over there...

INT. SHOPPING MALL - HOBBY WORLD ENTRANCE - SAME

Josh runs out into mall. He can't see Mechanical Dog anywhere!

INT. SHOPPING MALL - PET PAWS - DAY

CLOSE - KITTENS. Cute as they can be. As:

MECHANICAL DOG'S FACE appears right at the pen. He GROWLS. The Kittens HISS, recoil and then leap up out of the pen.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - ENTRANCE TO PET PAWS - SAME

Kittens rush into the mall, panicked by Mechanical Dog's fumbling pursuit.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - SHARPER IMAGE STORE - SAME

A man who's substantial bulk is stuffed into shiny FILA sweats works a radio control, his eyes focused O.S.

FILA DAD

It's the newest version, it's even got a 'bite' button.

He's controlling a BRUNO, a hi-tech, digitally programmable robot dog.

By his side is his chubby KID, thirteen and similarly stuffed into an identical set of expensive sweats.

FILA KID

It's my birthday, let me try dad.

FILA DAD

One second, just a second...

He's too into the whole thing.

ENTRANCE TO SHARPER IMAGE STORE - SAME

A Kitten scampers inside. Mechanical Dog right on its heels.

FILA DAD

sees the Kitten. A dark smile spreads across his face.

FILA DAD
Check this out...

BRUNO

scrambles after the kitten, as:

MECHANICAL DOG

Appears at Bruno's side.

Running in a dead heat, the two mechanical creations notice one another and become quite intrigued with each other...

... That is, until their inattention to the direction of their rush causes them to SMASH into a power racquet display and a monstrous pyramid of tennis balls.

They disappear into the collapse of that pyramid. Tennis balls roll and bounce everywhere.

A moment later, they rise from the fallen pile, face to face, each gripping the same tennis ball in their metal teeth.

Both dogs GROWL and clamp down. They start to circle and pull, each trying to yank the ball away from one another.

FILA DAD

works at the radio control. Fila Kid swats at his arm.

FILA KID
Let me try! Let me try!

FILA DAD
Just wait a second!

BRUNO, MECHANICAL DOG

spin faster, growling louder. Bruno loses the fight and flies from the spin, tumbling across the floor and SMASHING into a mock aquarium tube filled with little plastic fish.

Cascading water arcs Bruno's circuitry. He performs an uncontrollable dance. As it subsides, smoke drifts from his eyes and nose as he finally lies still.

FILA KID

Too cool! He kicked Bruno's ass! I
want it I want it I want it!

Fila Dad calls to a nearby Sharper Image Employee.

FILA DAD

Hey. The Retro Bruno. How much!?

ENTRANCE OF SHARPER IMAGE STORE - SAME

Josh runs in and sees Fila Dad, Fila Kid and Sharper Image Employee arguing over the ruined Bruno, the broken fish tank and the spread tennis balls. He runs over.

FILA DAD (CONT'D)

It wasn't my fault!

SHARPER IMAGE EMPLOYEE

Well someone's gonna pay for it!

Josh slips in between them and picks up Mechanical Dog.

JOSH

There you are!

FILA KID

Hey! Get your mitts off of *my* birthday present!

JOSH

It's not yours!

FILA KID

Yes it is, my dad's gonna buy it. He can buy anything!

JOSH

He's not for sale!

FILA DAD

He's yours?

JOSH

Uh, yes.

Fila Dad throws a finger toward Josh.

FILA DAD
Then it's his fault!

All of them look at Josh. Sizing up the situation, Josh chooses the only avenue open to him. He runs.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL - MOMENTS LATER

Josh hurries to and climbs on his bike. Mechanical Dog struggles in his grip.

MECHANICAL DOG
Let me go! There are kittens loose!

JOSH
Stop struggling you crazy metal-- I'm gonna be late for work! For cry'n out loud! What is it with you and cats!?

MECHANICAL DOG
How can you ask? Those haughty attitudes, and the way they show off climbing trees! And those tails! Whisking back and forth and back and forth! Taunting a dog with an unspoken '*bite me if you can.*'
(he struggles anew)
One more minute, *it's all I need!*...

BEHIND THEM

Sharper Image Employee leads a pair of Security Guards out of the mall. He starts pointing at Josh.

JOSH

shoves Mechanical Dog into the back pack and rides away as fast as he can on his bike.

EXT. MCGALE'S EMPORIUM - DAY

Josh rides up.

INT. MCGALES EMPORIUM - DAY

Checking items against inventory sheets in a black binder, Josh slaps prices on various items with a label maker.

INT. MCGALE'S EMPORIUM - BACK OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Razor sits at the desk, feet up, perusing one of several antique catalogues. He notices Josh at the door.

RAZOR

What?

JOSH

None of this stuff ads up.

RAZOR

What are you talking about?

JOSH

On these pages. The math is off.

Josh holds up the binder. Razor snatches it away.

RAZOR

Really? And how long have you been in the antique business? Why aren't you out sweeping?

JOSH

Mr. McGale asked me to put new stickers on some items, with a five percent raise.

RAZOR

And you figured it all out, huh? Imagine that.

He snatches the label maker and SLAPS a price tag on Josh's forehead.

RAZOR (CONT'D)

I handle the accounting here.

(beat)

So, do what I say, and keep your nose out of my business.

He shoves the broom into Josh's hands and then pushes him toward the door.

RAZOR (CONT'D)

(calling out)

And get me some coffee!

He puts his feet up, and peruses the ANTIQUE CATALOG again.

CLOSE ON THE CATALOG

showing rare items and their CURRENT MARKET VALUE. This one is open to a page of BEAUTIFUL OLD TOYS.

And there within the various entries, is

AN OLD PHOTOGRAPH

of an old ANTIQUE TOY DOG very much like Mechanical Dog.

It's suggested price is: \$100,000!

Razor digs into the drawer and pulls on a pair of homely old black reading glasses. He blinks at that price again.

INT. MCGALE'S EMPORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Razor rushes past Josh and starts searching in the back room.

JOSH
New look, huh?

Razor realizes he's wearing the silly looking reading glasses and yanks them off.

Holding his hand over the price, Razor thrusts the catalogue in Josh's face.

RAZOR
There... This thing...
(beat)
Have you seen an old, beat up
lookin' mechanical dog in here?

JOSH
Why?

RAZOR
Just answer the question, yes or no!

Josh swallows and manages to shake his head "no."

RAZOR
I know I saw one just like it...
(beat)

Somewhere...

ON JOSH

Uneasy as Razor continues poking around the back room.