

"OSTENSIBLE"  
An original screenplay  
©2016 by Deenur E. Gill

WGA registration #1830848

Adapted from "The Defenders"  
By  
Philip K. Dick

Deenur Gill  
[deengill@gmail.com](mailto:deengill@gmail.com)  
Twitter @dgillboy  
360-606-4645

FADE IN:  
BEGIN OPENING CREDITS

INT. GREAT INDUSTRIAL WAREHOUSE- DAY

Don Taylor (white, 30s, average build) is surrounded by multiple bi-ped robots (leddys). Some of the leddys (class-A) are slender with a human-like appearance and unarmed.

Others (class-B) are security robots, more stocky, with treads instead of feet. The B-class leddys are armed with standard laser pistols that shoot yellow beams, and engage in a fire fight with the humans, firing near the people but not hitting them.

Taylor is fighting back with Moss (white, male 50s) and Security Commander Franks (male, Black, 40s) and Franks' soldiers against leddy hoardes.

The humans are armed with Walker-slems, 3 barreled pistols that fire purple beams that vaporize the robots. Franks' dozen soldiers fire continuously, dropping leddy after leddy as the robots fill their ranks with reinforcements.

Moss grimaces as he drops to one knee, firing up. The LEDDY COUNCIL LEADER dissolves in a cloud of particles. On all sides more B-class leddys rush up, with guns. The room is confusion. Off in the distance, a siren screams.

Franks and Taylor are cut off from the others, separated from the soldiers by a wall of metal bodies.

FRANKS

They can't fire back at us. This is a bluff. They've tried to bluff us all the way. They can only frighten or restrain us. Remember that.

Franks fires into the face of a leddy. The leddy dissolves. They keep firing and leddy after leddy vanishes. The room reeks with the smell of burning metal, the stink of fused plastic and steel.

Taylor is knocked down. He struggles to find his gun, reaching wildly among metal legs, groping frantically to find it. His fingers strain, a handle swims in front of

him. Suddenly something comes down on his arm, a metal foot. He cries out in pain.

DISSOLVE TO:

BEGIN FLASHBACK-

ALL HUMANS HAVE BEEN FORCED UNDERGROUND BY THE WAR ON THE SURFACE OF THE PLANET. ALL ACTIVITY IS CONDUCTED UNDERGROUND, WITH THE GOVERNMENT TRYING TO APPROXIMATE LIVING ON THE SURFACE THE BEST THEY CAN. DAYLIGHT HOURS ARE LIT BY AN ARTIFICIAL SUN.

INT. TAYLOR'S RESIDENCE- DAYLIGHT HOURS  
SMALL MODEST 1950s STYLE HOME

DON TAYLOR (white, 30's, average build) sits back in his chair in the living room, reading the morning newspaper.

MARY TAYLOR, a house wife (Hispanic, brunette, mid 30s, average build) makes coffee, cooks meat on the stove, makes toast. She is wearing a blouse, slacks and an apron.

Kitchen looks like something out of the 50s, with a small dinette set, refrigerator, stove, oven, porcelain sink, pantry cabinet and various small appliances.

PAN TO:

DON TAYLOR folds the second section of the paper back, and the corner comes off in his hand. He growls with aggravation. Mary calls from the kitchen.

MARY(O.C.)

What is it?

TAYLOR

This paper is getting worse all the time- bad print, yellow tinge-

MARY(O.C.)

Well when you have to recycle something that many times, it's no wonder.

He turns the page angrily and rips it again. He yells out in frustration.

MARY(O.C.)

Just set it down dear. Your breakfast  
is ready anyway.

Mary enters the living room carrying a plate of food and  
cup of coffee. She sets up a TV tray in front of TAYLOR and  
places the food on the tray.

TAYLOR

Oh man, that smells good.

Mary pulls up an ottoman and sits in front of TAYLOR.

MARY

You know what I read? Back in the day  
they used to have coms that were  
hardwired into the walls. And to find  
someone's contact, you had to look it  
up in big thick paper bound volumes  
called phone books.

TAYLOR speaks between bites.

TAYLOR

How inefficient is that? How could you  
get anything done? Someone had to be  
pulling your leg.

TAYLOR powers through the coffee and finishes the cup.

MARY

I'll get you some more.

TAYLOR sneaks another peak at the paper while Mary is in  
the other room. He carefully turns to the front page. The  
lead off story says "Peoples Socialist Republic heavily  
bombed".

END OPENING CREDITS

TAYLOR

Hot Dog!

MARY(O.C.)

What?

TAYLOR

They pasted the Pissers capitol again last night. Gave them a real pounding. One of those R-H bombs. It's about time.

Mary re-enters the room with more coffee.

MARY

You didn't see that first?

TAYLOR

I turned to sports. I wanted to see how the Viceroy's were doing.

MARY

What city this time?

TAYLOR

Paper says the Pissers keep moving the command center around, but it looks like we nailed some of them in Beijing.

MARY

Yes, they're doing a wonderful job.

TAYLOR

Hey that's me too! I'm not just another factory worker lugging a cart of scrap around. A technician is an integral part of the war program. That could have been one of the ones I wired personally. Makes me proud to be a Nationalist!

TAYLOR slaps the paper down and a few edges fly off. He picks up his coffee again.

TAYLOR

And you know what else? We almost have the new subs perfected. Wait until the leddys get those going. When we start shelling from underwater, the Pissers are sure going to be surprised.

MARY

Speaking of leddys, do you know what we

are doing today? Our team is getting a leddy to show to the school children. I saw the leddy, but only for a moment.

TAYLOR stops in between gulps of coffee.

TAYLOR

A leddy? Make sure it's decontaminated properly. You don't want to take any chances.

MARY

Oh, they always bathe them when they bring one down from the surface. They'd be too hot.

TAYLOR

I'm sure they'd never make that kind of a mistake. Tell you what. Let's decide what I am going to do with all this time off. 3 days in a row only comes twice a year, so lets whoop it up! You want to take in a show?

MARY

A show? Do we have to? I don't like to look at all the destruction. Sometimes I see the places I remember, like San Francisco. They showed a shot of the Golden Gate that was all broken and fallen in the water. I don't think I can look at that.

TAYLOR

But don't you want to know what's going on? No humans are getting hurt. It's all leddy casualties now.

MARY

But it's so awful! Please, can we not?

Don Taylor picks up his newspaper sullenly. Mary walks back into the kitchen.

TAYLOR (LOUDLY)

All right, but there isn't much else to do living down here. It isn't like I

can take you to the beach, or watch a  
real sunset.

(beat)

And don't forget- the Pisser's cities  
are getting it even worse.

THE VIDPHONE RINGS. Taylor stands and walks over to the  
unit with a questioning look on his face. He clicks the  
unit on.

MOSS

Taylor?

Moss's (white, male, late 50s) face forms into place, old,  
craggy, gray and grim.

MOSS

I'm sorry to bother you during time  
off, but this thing has come up. I need  
you to hurry over here.

Taylor stiffens at the request.

TAYLOR

There's no chance it could wait?

(beat)

If you need me to come down to the lab,  
I suppose I can get my uniform-

MOSS

No. Come as you are. And not to the  
lab. Meet me at second lift stage as  
soon as possible. Should take you about  
a half hour, using a fast car. I'll see  
you there.

The picture breaks and Moss disappears. Mary pokes her head  
into the living room. She is drying a dish.

MARY

What was it?

TAYLOR

Moss. He wants me for something.

MARY

I knew this would happen.

TAYLOR

Well, you didn't want to do anything  
anyhow, so what does it matter?

He stands and walks into the bedroom. Mary follows. She  
watches him put on his boots.

TAYLOR

It's all the same, every day. Maybe I  
can bring you back something. I'm going  
up to second stage. I'll be close  
enough to the surface to-

MARY

Don't! Don't bring me anything. Not  
from the surface.

TAYLOR

All right, all right. I won't.

He walks over and kisses her cheek.

TAYLOR

I'll vid you later.

CUT TO:

INT. SECOND STAGE, TWO LEVELS BELOW SURFACE- DAYLIGHT HOURS

The SECOND STAGE IS DEAFENING WITH INDUSTRIAL NOISE.

Moss and Taylor fall in step with each other, Moss carrying  
a document bag. A series of cars go up to the surface,  
blind cars clanking like ore-trucks up the ramp,  
disappearing through the stage trap above them, up to First  
Stage and then the surface.

Taylor watches them, heavy with tubular machinery of some  
sort and weapons. Workers are everywhere, in the dark gray  
uniforms of the labor corps, loading, lifting, shouting  
back and forth.

MOSS

We'll go up a way, where we can talk.  
This is no place to try and give you  
details.



They take a private lift up. The commercial lift is behind them, and with it most of the crashing and booming. Soon they emerge on an observation platform, suspended on the side of the Tube. Sprawling out above and below them, a vast tunnel leads up to the surface.

TAYLOR

Good Lord, it's a long way down.

Moss laughs.

MOSS

Then don't look.

They cross the observation platform and enter a horizontal tunnel leading to the Security office.

CUT TO:

INT. SECURITY OFFICE, 2nd STAGE- DAYLIGHT HOURS

They open a door and enter an office. Behind the desk, an officer of Internal Security (Black, male, 40s) sits. He looks up.

FRANKS

I'll be right with you, Moss.

MOSS (TO TAYLOR)

Commander Franks. He was the first to make the discovery. I was notified last night.

He taps the document bag.

MOSS

I was let in because of this.

Franks frowns as he stands up.

FRANKS

We're going up to first stage. We can discuss it there.

TAYLOR

First stage? I've never been up there.

Is it all right? It's not radioactive,  
is it?

The three of them walk down a side passage to a small lift.

FRANKS

Really? Just like everyone else. Old  
women afraid of burglars. No there's no  
radiation leaks on the first stage.  
There's lead and there's rock. And  
there's whatever comes down the Tube,  
which is always bathed.

TAYLOR

What's the glitch anyway?

Franks ignores him. They enter the lift and ascend.

CUT TO:

INT. SECURITY OFFICE, 1st STAGE- DAYLIGHT HOURS

They step out, into a hall of soldiers, with weapons and  
uniforms everywhere. Taylor looks around.

TAYLOR

Wow. I man really. Wow.

Above him he sees rock, lead and rock, and the tubes  
leading up like the burrows of earthworms. Above that,  
where the tubes open up, the surface of the planet. Taylor  
gawks in awe.

TAYLOR

First stage. Almost to the surface.

MOSS

Don't worry. Not quite.

Franks doesn't speak as he leads them through the soldiers  
and out a door.

MOSS

In a few minutes, a lift will bring  
something down to us from the surface.  
Franks told me that every once in a  
while Security examines and

interrogates a surface leddy, one that has been above for a time, to find out certain things. A vidcall is sent up and contact is made with a field headquarters. It's done because they can't depend on vidcall contact alone.

FRANKS

An A-Class leddy is coming down. There's an exam chamber in the next room, with a lead wall in the center, so the interviewing officers won't be exposed to radiation. It's easier than bathing the leddy.

Franks leads them through a hallway.

FRANKS (cont)

Two days ago, an A-class leddy was brought down and interrogated. I did the session myself. We were interested in a new weapon the Pissers have been using, an automatic mine that pursues anything that moves.

Franks leads them into the room, in front of the door, next to the exam chamber.

FRANKS (cont)

This A-class leddy was brought down with information. We learned a few facts from it, obtained the usual roll of film and reports, and then sent it back up. It was going out of the chamber, back to the lift, when a curious thing happened. At the time, I thought-

Franks breaks off. A red light flashes.

FRANKS

That's the lift coming down.

He nods to some soldiers.

FRANKS

Let's get to the chamber. The leddy

will be along in a moment.

TAYLOR

An A-class leddy. I've seen them on the vidscreens, making their reports.

MOSS

It's quite an experience. They're really human looking.

CUT TO:

INT. EXAM CHAMBER ROOM, 1st STAGE- DAYLIGHT HOURS

They enter the chamber and seat themselves behind the lead wall. After a time, a signal flashes, and Franks makes a motion with his hands.

The door beyond the wall opens. Taylor peers through his view slot. He sees something advancing slowly, a slender metallic figure walking on human-like legs, its arm grips at rest by its sides. The figure halts and scans the lead wall. It stands, waiting.

FRANKS

We are interested in learning something but before I question you, do you have anything to report on surface conditions?"

LEDDY

No. The war continues.

The leddy's voice is automatic and toneless.

LEDDY

We are a little short of fast pursuit craft, the single-seat type. We could use also some-

FRANKS

That has all been noted. What I want to ask you is this. Our contact with you has been through vidscreen only. We must rely on indirect evidence, since none of us goes above. We can only infer what is going on. We never see

anything ourselves. We have to take it all secondhand. Some top leaders are beginning to think there's too much room for error.

LEDDY

Error? In what way? Our reports are checked carefully before they're sent down. We maintain constant contact with you; everything of value is reported. Any new weapons which the enemy is seen to employ-

FRANKS

I realize that. But perhaps we should see it all for ourselves. Is it possible that there's a large enough radiation-free area for a human party to ascend to the surface? If a few of us were to come up in lead-lined suits, would we be able to survive long enough to observe conditions for ourselves?

The machine hesitates before answering.

LEDDY

In the eight years since you left, things have continually worsened. It has become difficult for any moving object to survive for long. There are many kinds of projectiles sensitive to movement. The new mine not only reacts to motion, but continues to pursue the object indefinitely, until it finally reaches it. Also the radiation is everywhere.

FRANKS

I see.

Franks turns to Moss, and his eyes narrow oddly.

FRANKS

Well, that was what I wanted to know. One thing before you leave. I want you to examine a new type of shielding

material. I'll pass you a sample with  
the tong.

Franks rises. He holds out his hand and Moss passes him the document satchel. Franks slides a thin sheet of what looks like metallic paper from the document bag. He then puts the sample in the toothed grip and revolves the tong so that he holds the other end. The sample swings down to the leddy, which takes it. They watch it take the metallic paper in its hands and turn the sample over and over.

LEDDY

This material is inadequate for the current level of contamination. Each month the amount of lethal particles in the atmosphere increases. The tempo of the war-

Then the leddy stops, stiff. Franks puts his shoulder against the divider wall and a section slides aside. Taylor gasps as Franks and Moss hurry to the leddy.

TAYLOR

But it's radioactive!

The leddy stands unmoving, still holding the material. Soldiers appear in the chamber. They surround the leddy and run a counter across it carefully.

SOLDIER

It's okay, sir. It's as cold as a long winter evening.

FRANKS

Good. I was sure, but I didn't want to take any chances.

MOSS

See, this leddy isn't hot at all. But it came directly from the surface, without even being bathed.

TAYLOR

But what does that mean?

FRANKS

It may be an accident. There's always the possibility that a given object might escape being exposed above ground. But this is the second time it's happened.

TAYLOR

The second time?

MOSS

The previous interview was when we noticed it. The leddy was not hot. It was cold, like this one.

Moss takes back the shielding material from the leddy's hands.

MOSS

We shorted it out with this, so we could get close enough for a check. It'll come back on in a second now. We had better get behind the wall again.

They walk back and the lead wall swings closed behind them. The soldiers leave the chamber.

FRANKS

16 hours from now, an investigating party will be ready to go surface-side. We're going up the Tube in suits, up to the top. The first human party to leave undersurface in eight years.

TAYLOR

At 0300? Why? No one gets up at 0300.

MOSS

That's exactly why. Something's going on, something strange. The leddy told us no life could exist above without being roasted. That story doesn't fit.

Taylor nods. He stares through the peep slot at the immobile metal figure as the leddy begins to stir. Taylor speaks while staring through the slot.

TAYLOR

From the looks of him-

(beat)

it- has been up there a long time. It doesn't look like human flesh could survive what that leddy has seen. I'd hate to be out there.

FRANKS

Taylor, you're going with us. You and Moss.

Taylor's face shows concern.