

Jsem Robot

by Terry Dugan

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Cast of characters

CHRIS, an overweight American mouse from Wisconsin

MOUSER, his portly wife

ROBOT, an aged robot manufactured in the Czech Republic

The KAFCO 5000, a cultural translation device

Jsem Robot

SCENE: A back alley in Prague, Czech Republic. Part of the stage is a maze, possibly made up of piles of discarded maps and other junk left behind by tourists.

AT RISE: Somewhere in an open area near the front of the stage, a ROBOT stands behind a puppet's stage and plays with headless marionettes. Marionette heads are hanging in decoration around the frame of the puppet stage. Two mice, MOUSER and CHRIS, can be heard off-stage and enter the maze, eventually meeting up with the ROBOT.

MOUSER

Just admit that you have no idea where we're going.

CHRIS

We're not lost.

MOUSER

Well, we're definitely not anywhere near the TGI Fridays.

CHRIS

I'm so hungry.

(MOUSER enters.)

MOUSER

That's what walking around in a circle all day does to you, Chris.

(CHRIS enters. One of his hands is a map.)

CHRIS

When I get home, I'm getting back on that wheel. I'm so out of shape.

MOUSER

What street are we looking for, again?

Jsem Robot

CHRIS

I think it's "Na Porcupine." Do you see a sign for this street, Mouser?

MOUSER

I haven't seen a sign on any street in this entire city.

CHRIS

Well, at least we're having a wonderful time in the most beautiful back-alleys in Europe. Who knew there were so many different architectural styles one could use to construct a drainage pipe? Can you imagine how old some of the holes in these buildings are?

MOUSER

Yes, and I'll never forget the fourth time I stepped in dog poop.

CHRIS

Soak it in, Mouser. Soak it in. When we're back in Wisconsin and it's cold and snowing, you'll wish you were back in Prague, stepping in dog poop.

MOUSER

When you put it that way, I guess it is romantic.

CHRIS

Now, if we can just find the TGI Fridays, our romantic day in Prague would be complete.

MOUSER

I can just taste those fried mozzarella sticks now. The Czech fried cheese tastes like tofu.

CHRIS

But at least it's fried.

MOUSER

At least it's fried.

Jsem Robot

CHRIS

(Coming upon the ROBOT.)

Mouser, look!

MOUSER

Oh my stars!

CHRIS

Something around here that actually moves.

MOUSER

Ask for directions! Ask for directions!

CHRIS

Get off my back! Get off my back!

(CHRIS approaches the ROBOT.
The ROBOT notices CHRIS, turns
to him and lowers its marionettes.)

ROBOT

Dobrý den.

CHRIS

Excuse me, but can you tell us how to get to Na Porcupine?

ROBOT

Dobrý den.

MOUSER

What's it saying?

CHRIS

I don't know.

ROBOT

(Goes back to playing with marionettes.)

Dobrý den.

CHRIS

The TGI Fridays. Do you know where that's at?

Jsem Robot

ROBOT

Dobrý den.

MOUSER

What does it keep saying?

CHRIS

Sounds like “Dopry den?”

(The ROBOT puts the marionettes
back down and turns its attention
to CHRIS. MOUSER steps next to CHRIS.)

ROBOT

Dobrý den.

CHRIS

We are lost. Losto. Can you help us findo TGI Fridays-o?

(The ROBOT seems to understand,
says “ano” and searches his things
for a chalice. He offers it to CHRIS.)

ROBOT

Napijete se se mnou? Napijete se, kamaradi.

MOUSER

Oh, I think it said camera! It wants a picture with you. Hold on.

(Gets into picture position.)

Say cheese.

CHRIS

Cheese!

MOUSER

Perfect.

ROBOT

Pijte, pijte.

Jsem Robot

CHRIS

Maybe his name is Petey.

MOUSER

I think he wants you to drink out of that thing.

CHRIS

Huh. That's not going to happen. "What did you bring back from Prague?" Herpes – and not the fun kind.

(To ROBOT.)

No, thank you. It's nice of you, but no thank you. We're really, really hungry. Can you point to the way out of here?

ROBOT

Jsem robot.

MOUSER

Robert?

CHRIS

I think he said, "Robot."

ROBOT

Ano, jsem robot.

(The ROBOT goes to find a small device from his belongings.)

CHRIS

Why aren't you understanding more of this, Mouser? I thought your family was Czech.

MOUSER

Yeah, like 100 years ago my family was Czech.

ROBOT

Prosim.

(The ROBOT gives the small device to CHRIS.)

Jsem Robot
MOUSER

What is it?

CHRIS

It says: Kafco 5000: The Cultural Translator from Kafco Machines.

ROBOT

Jsem robot.

(ROBOT motions for CHRIS to push a button. CHRIS pushes the button and an off-stage voice, the KAFCO 5000, is heard.)

KAFCO 5000

I am a robot.

CHRIS

Well, would you look at that. This machine said that machine is a robot.

(To ROBOT)

Can you understand me?

ROBOT

Rozumim.

MOUSER

Push the button, Chris.

KAFCO 5000

Yes, like all the other robots in Europe, I'm programmed to understand English, but asking me to speak it is like asking me to rape my mother while you watch, snacking on the dreams of my ancestors who came before me like your popcorn with extra butter.

CHRIS

Whoa. That's a little too much information.

MOUSER

What's your name?

Jsem Robot

ROBOT

Jmenuji se Robot.

KAFKO 5000

I would tell you, but I don't even know who I am. What should I say? There is a name I have been given, but you would only use it to try to define me by it. Robot is how I feel, and Robot is who I am. But if feel you must be less formal, you can call me Vaclav.

CHRIS

I don't think I even pushed the button that time.

MOUSER

Will you just get us the heck out of here?

CHRIS

Do you know where the TGI Friday's is?

ROBOT

Samozřejmě.

KAFKO 5000

Of course. Whether consciously or subconsciously, a dog knows where he stands in relation to his master at all times.

MOUSER

So, will you tell us where it is?

ROBOT

Ano, ale chtěli byste vidět nějaké divadlo?

KAFKO 5000

Being told where to go will only take you as far in this world as others want you to go. Yet, I can tell you through interpretive theatre. Would you be my guest and enjoy a special presentation of the theatre of life?

CHRIS

Yeah, I guess.

ROBOT

Výborně.

Jsem Robot
KAFCO 5000

Excellent.

MOUSER

Why did you say yes?

CHRIS

How often do we see robots perform puppet theatre in Wisconsin?

MOUSER

I think there's a good reason for that.

(The ROBOT goes behind the stage and performs a scene with two headless men. The ROBOT makes talking noises, but doesn't actually say anything.)

Well, this is great. This is much better than asking directions and going where you actually want to go.

CHRIS

OK, I get it already.

MOUSER

I don't think you do, and that's why we'll get lost again.

CHRIS

How was I supposed to know we were going to get lost?

MOUSER

You weren't. That's why you ask. Say, "Excuse me, is this the right way to Na Porcupine or does this way lead to a series of dead end streets, a crazy robot performing street theatre and a talking machine that would probably be a child molester in real life?"

(The ROBOT makes one of the puppets fall out of a window from the puppet stage. The ROBOT giggles.)

Jsem Robot

CHRIS

That's not good.

(The ROBOT pounds down on the stage to destroy it. CHRIS and MOUSER squeal and hold onto each other.)

Hold me, Mouser!

MOUSER

Tell me we're not going to die, Chris.

CHRIS

We're not going to die, Chris.

ROBOT

Smrt. Smrt přijde pro nás všechny.

KAFKO 5000

There's no need to fear death even when you recognize which particular single moment will be your last despite living your life pretending you're immune to it.

(The ROBOT grabs a knife from its belongings.)

CHRIS and MOUSER

Ack!

CHRIS

We're going to die.

ROBOT

Člověk musí přijmout co je nevyhnutelné.

(The mice scream as the ROBOT draws closer.)

KAFKO 5000

The near-sighted see it as an end, but one's passing is a transition or transformation – a joyous moment that frees you from your own worst fears.

Jsem Robot

MOUSER

Why do we mice always suffer from knife violence?

(The ROBOT points the handle
of the knife to CHRIS.)

ROBOT

Zabij mě, prosim.

KAFCO 5000

If I believed in a God, I would say he delivered you to take me away from this world, but as I will maintain my atheistic identity, I would simply ask that you kill me because you're the only ones here.

MOUSER

What?

CHRIS

What?

ROBOT

Zabij mě, prosim.

MOUSER

What?

CHRIS

Huh?

KAFCO 5000

Please.

MOUSER

Kill you?

CHRIS

We don't even know you.

MOUSER

We can't possibly kill you.

Jsem Robot

CHRIS

Because we don't even know you.

MOUSER

Kill that little talking machine-

CHRIS

Now, that's something we could probably do.

ROBOT

Moje provedení je zastaralé. Nemám žádný účel.

KAFCO 5000

Those who designed me have discarded their creation because their ideals of the perfect robot changed. And where does that leave me - a martyr of progress and slightly incremental technological advances hyperbolized for the sake of a new sale?

CHRIS

Mouse meeting.

(MOUSER and CHRIS huddle up
at the front of the stage.)

Honey, if we make it out of this alive, I'll never guess which road to take again.

MOUSER

I should take that knife and stab both of you.

CHRIS

Mouser, I don't think joking about robotic manic depression is appropriate here.

MOUSER

That's it! I know what it needs.

CHRIS

But I left my Prozac back at the hotel.

MOUSER

No, not drugs. It needs a good-old-fashioned pep-talk-slash-intervention – Wisconsin-style.

Jsem Robot

CHRIS

That might be the most brilliant idea that you've ever had - maybe that has ever been had!

MOUSER

It is, isn't it? And you were here to see it. You're so lucky.

(They turn to confront the ROBOT.)

Listen, Robot-person, let me tell you something: Life – even for those technically not breathing – is hard. And sometimes it feels like you can never catch a break, like when the clothing store runs out of your size of this cute, cute outfit or when you get skim milk instead of cream milk in your half-caf decaf-quarter-caf mocca. In this life, there'll always be some cat around the corner, ready to chase you back into your hole – well, not in this city because I haven't even seen one cat, but what I'm getting at is that you can't give up. Life has so much to offer. If you can dream it, you can do it. Follow your dreams. Keep hope alive. Become the robot you've always wanted to be. The power is in your hands! What's your passion? Find out and follow it.

(The ROBOT stands stoic.)

CHRIS

I don't think he gets it.

MOUSER

You like to play with the puppets, and I think that is so great! And you're so good at it. Maybe what you can do is work hard and apply yourself to your craft even more, and who knows? Maybe you'll become the most-famous puppet-master robot-person that ever lived a simulation of life! You can be the best, and all you have to do is dream big and work hard. Don't give up. Don't ever give up.

CHRIS

Yeah!

MOUSER

See, that's support.

Jsem Robot

CHRIS

You can do it!

MOUSER

Wow, even more support! And we're not saying these things because we don't want to kill you.

CHRIS

Not at all.

MOUSER

We're saying them because we care about you. Because you're special in every way.

CHRIS

And in whatever ways you're not special, you're probably special and we just can't see why.

MOUSER

You just have to believe in yourself, robot-person. Believe in yourself and work hard and let Jesus do the rest.

(The mice pump their fists
for the great pep-talk they've done.)

ROBOT

Práce? Jsem Čech.

KAFKO 5000

To work for one's dreams is to be a slave to an illusion, to prolong a ritual manipulation of the masses long established by those who hold the most gold, promising you some nugget for digging a mine when at the end of the day you get black lung and a promise of more of the same tomorrow.

CHRIS

Whoa. I don't think he understood you.

MOUSER

How is that even possible?

Jsem Robot

KAFCO 5000

Expectations are the downfall of civilizations.

CHRIS

Hey, you can't say anything unless the robot says something first.

KAFCO 5000

Sorry, I was filled with the spirit of nothingness.

MOUSER

Well, I have to say I feel sorry for you, Robot, that your pseudo-life is filled with that kind of emptiness, that people just threw you away because you weren't the newest, shiniest thing. I feel sorry that you don't see the hope that's all around you when you look past the trash and graffiti and the black buildings and dog poop and car exhaust and brown rivers and someone shooting up heroin at the train station, that hope that tells us that even brighter days are on the way, that you can make a difference in this world.

ROBOT

(THE ROBOT tries to hand
them the knife again.)

Chci smrt –

MOUSER

No. Snurf or smurf or whatever you said. Hope! Life! Love!
That's what you want, Robot. That's what you want.

ROBOT

Jestli mě zabiješ, povím ti, jak se dostat do restaurace.

KAFCO 5000

It seems foolish to negotiate my life on such terms, but if you are willing to deal, I have a proposition for you. If you find it in your heart to kill me, I'll tell you how to get to your beloved TGI Fridays.

CHRIS

Sweet!

(CHRIS grabs the knife and
stabs the ROBOT in the neck.)

Jsem Robot
MOUSER

Chris!

CHRIS

I am so hungry!

ROBOT

(Slowly dying.)

Děkuji, kamaradi. Konečně je tento mizerný život u konce a tím končí má transformace.

KAFKO 5000

Thanks. Bye.

(ROBOT dies.)

MOUSER

How could you do that, Chris!

CHRIS

I'm starving here! I haven't eaten for at least an hour!

MOUSER

But you killed him before he even told you where it was.

CHRIS

I know! I thought about that right after I stabbed him.

MOUSER

How many times do I have to tell you? Ask! ASK!

CHRIS

That's it! I'll ask the Kafco 5000 if it knows how to get out of here.

(KAFKO 5000 snores. CHRIS
shakes the device.)

Hey, you're not fooling anybody here, buddy.

KAFKO 5000

Prosim?

Jsem Robot

CHRIS

How do we get out of here?

KAFCO 5000

Nemluvím Anglicky.

CHRIS

Oh no you don't.

MOUSER

If you tell us how to get out of here, we'll let you describe our meal.

KAFCO 5000

If the truth must be told, there is a pleasure to be found, although one not profound or interesting at all to human existence, in the crunchy, delicate, melticious formation that is the mozerella stick. I don't like that I like it, but I like it.

CHRIS

Wait until you try to describe the fried Mac & Cheese.

KAFCO 5000

One must not look forward to things one does not have. It's dangerous to assume that you will get any service, no matter how long you're willing to wait.

MOUSER

So is that left or right?

KAFCO 5000 (pause)

Right.

(BLACKOUT.)