Control.com

By

Peter Devonald

Based on an original short story by Robleh Tinning

Peter Devonald
25 Matlock Road
Walkley
Sheffield, S6 3RQ.
Pdevonald@hotmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. SCARBOROUGH SEA FRONT - BAR – NIGHT

Waves crash against the shoreline. Thunder cracks overhead.

RONNIE looks up at the sky, sighs. He’s 29, not unattractive, but awkward, too tall for his own good, messy hair, slumped shoulders.

Burst of music O.S.

Ronnie looks down, around, into the bar through the open door.

Inside, happy laughing people, bathed in warm light.

As the door to the bar closes, rain lashes down. Ronnie stands there, forlorn, miserable, soaked.

INT. RONNIE'S HOUSE – KITCHEN – NIGHT

Congealed waffles and beans are kept warm on the cooker.

Above the cooker, a kitchen plaque: ‘Home is where the Hearth is’.

DORIS sits, knits. Doris, 70, is silver haired, a sweet old lady.

DOOR SLAMS SHUT O.S.

DORIS
Ronnie? Is that you, Ronnie?

Footsteps hammer up the stairs.

Doris sighs, shakes her head, focuses on the knitting.

BEDROOM

Ronnie locks the door, goes to the computer, switches on the lamp, turns on the monitor, clicks the mouse. Modem connecting sound blares out as Ronnie sits down.

SCREEN

On the tool bar, bottom right of the screen, the Internet connection symbol appears.

WELCOME TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD WIDE WEBLOG OF ALISTAIR FEARNLEY.

CLICK. Grainy images of Alistair's house, tracking around the affluent room.

ALISTAIR (O.S)
(through computer)
Today was another splendid day!
Met the most gorgeous woman at a polo match – absolute magic.
Super body, emerald eyes, lush long blonde hair -

KNOCK AT THE DOOR O.S.

BEDROOM

Ronnie stares at the screen, flushed with excitement. His body sinks, almost teenager-like.

ALISTAIR (O.S)
And just you wait till you hear what she said to me!

KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

DORIS (O.S)
Ronnie! Ronnie!

CORRIDOR

Doris stands, anxious, stares at his door, shakes her head.
SOUNDS OF TYPING O.S.

DORIS
Ronnie, whatcha doing?

SOUNDS OF TYPING CONTINUE O.S.

DORIS
I've made you Waffle and Beans, just the way you like it.

Silence. Click – the door is unlocked, slowly opens, Ronnie looks out at her.

Doris smiles encouragingly.

KITCHEN

Ronnie sits at the table. Doris shuffles around, lovingly puts the waffle and beans on the table beside him, then the bottle of ketchup.

DORIS
Tomorrow will be a better day. You'll get a job, Ronnie. Just you see.

Ronnie looks miserable.

Doris pats his shoulder. He places his hand on hers, looks at her, shares the moment.

DORIS
You mean the world to me, Ronnie. I'd be lost without you.

Ronnie smiles, turns back, eats, happy. Doris clips his head.

DORIS
First we say grace.

Doris sits down, puts her hands together.

DORIS
We are thankful oh Lord for what we are -

Ronnie looks at her, then the waffles, sneaks a mouthful

DORIS
And what we can become.

INT. DORIS'S HOUSE - RONNIE BEDROOM – NIGHT

In the darkness, the computer hard drive churns.

Ronnie lies in bed, asleep. He tosses, turns.

INT. ALISTAIR'S APARTMENT – NIGHT (DREAM)

Ronnie stands in an affluent room, wears expensive designer clothes, swills his cocktail glass around. ADORING WOMEN hang on his every word.

RONNIE
And I just looked at him, and said – I am me and you are you: I am a somebody and you are a nobody: now get back to your petty little sty and get out of my way, you odious little man.

Laugh. The Adoring Women swoon, loving him.

ADORING WOMEN
Tell us more Ronnie, tell us more.

Ronnie looks at them with a glint in his eye.

RONNIE
Maybe we can continue this upstairs?

TRIUMPHANT MUSIC.

INT. DORIS'S HOUSE - RONNIE BEDROOM – NIGHT

Ronnie wakes with a start, looks around. The triumphant music continues.

Ronnie gets up, notices the computer is left on. He goes up to it, flicks the monitor on.

SCREEN

Music blares out with fast images of happy people, great lives, boats, cars, girls, everything Alistair has.

On the tool bar, bottom right of the screen, the symbol shows connection to the internet.

BEDROOM

Ronnie looks more and more deflated as the images on screen flash, reflecting in his ill-lit room.

COMPUTER
(through speaker)
Weblog enthusiast? Fancy a change? Let Control.com help you. Click here for a once a lifetime chance.

Ronnie looks at it cynically.

COMPUTER
Just ask yourself, what have you got to lose?

Ronnie sighs, leans back, stares at the screen. Lethargically he clicks to enter the site.

COMPUTER
Hunzicker Labs Inc offer you the unique opportunity to experience life as someone else.
(MORE)

COMPUTER(cont'd)
If they keep a current weblog, you can, for a small fee, get a taste of their life. Literally.

Ronnie hesitates, moves the mouse, clicks.

COMPUTER
Let's get a little more personal, Ronnie.

Ronnie reacts, slides the mouse off the desk. It dangles in the mid air by its ‘tail’, swings like pendulum.

COMPUTER
Life is more than waffles and beans on a Friday, lashed to an existence you hate by her apron strings.

Ronnie glances at the back of the machine, looks around, insecure. He grimaces, goes to turn the computer off -

COMPUTER
Control.com is designed just for you, Ronnie. Ever wondered what would’ve happened if you’d had opportunities, just one single moment of luck? Now you can find out.

Ronnie sits back, slowly wipes his mouth, drags his bottom lip down.

COMPUTER
Simply type in the blog address of the person’s life you want to lead, then take possession, exclusively with Control.com.

Ronnie types, fast.

COMPUTER
Selection verified and validated. Whilst in Control.com an algorithm of your existence will replicate the 98.4% of your waking time split between watching daytime TV, surfing the internet, eating and masturbating. Are you ready to take Control.com?

Ronnie drags his hand through his hair.

LIVING ROOM

TV blares out. Doris sits on the chair, asleep.

Ronnie sneaks in, checks Doris is asleep, goes to the handbag on the table, takes the purse out, steals the credit card.

COMPUTER (V.O.)
Please enter your credit card details.

Ronnie stops, goes up to Doris, tenderly pulls the blanket over her body. He goes to the TV, slowly reduces the volume, turns it off.

COMPUTER (V.O.)
Payment for trial period received. Thank you.

Ronnie looks at Doris, tilts his head, smiles.

COMPUTER (V.O.)
Please click once to accept our terms and conditions before taking Control.

BEDROOM

Ronnie skims down the ‘Terms and conditions’ on the page, CLICKS ACCEPT. The screen goes blank.

RONNIE
Aw, come on!

INDEX FINGER

Taps on the desk –

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. WORKPLACE - NIGHT

POV – Index finger taps the drafting table, with a plan for some grandiose public space. In the b.g., a tabletop model of the same building. He looks up the arm, further, further, it's a different arm, more masculine, toned. Palms of the hands move over the eyes. He rocks back in the chair, splays his fingers, peers through them.

Architectural practice around him, attractive, sparse. A massive window shows a breathtaking view of London.

Ronnie’s arms fall to his sides. He whips his head down and around. He gets up, pads around, stops, sees the reflection in a glass partition.

He leans in, closer. He is still Ronnie, but now he is in Alistair's body, tall, broad, without bulk.

His slumped shoulders lean back, he likes his new self. Confidence oozes from his designer clothes, haircut, new stance. Ronnie twists and turns before the glass in admiration.

SECURITY GUARD (O.S.)
Just doing my rounds Mr Fearnley.
Will you be here long?

Ronnie, caught in mid preen, turns, looks at the stocky SECURITY GUARD.

RONNIE
(Yorkshire accent)
Eh up...
(recovers, London accent)
No, no, I'm leaving now, I think.
Next ten minutes.

Nervous grin.

Security Guard nods, leaves.

Sudden panic. Ronnie runs to his desk, rattles the drawers, opens and riffles through the contents. He finds a small box of Alistair's bone-white cards.

An address – Fearnley, 2A Long Acre.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. ALISTAIR’S APARTMENT – DAWN

Shiny metal plate shines with Fearnley, 2A Long Acre.

Ronnie turns the key, enters.

INT. ALISTAIR'S APARTMENT

Ronnie looks around, in awe. Everything is so much more real than the computer screen: thick sunlight filters through the glass mosaic which reaches up alongside the staircase. Walls festooned with tasteful art, every stick of furniture and accessory beautifully in tune with each other.

Ronnie shrugs off the bag and sits down on a barstool at the kitchen bench.

SOUND OF A KEY AS IT TURNS IN THE DOOR.

Ronnie swivels the stool towards it as the door opens. Ronnie's jaw drops.

PETRA enters. She's a walking wet dream, 22, golden hair, tied back with a simple band from which a single lock swings over her brow. Her emerald eyes glint. She wears a white tee-shirt, jeans cling to her lithe figure.

PETRA
Hi Al.

She comes over, kisses him. He recoils slightly.

PETRA
You okay? Busy night?

RONNIE
Er... Yes.

PETRA
So you'll get tomorrow off then?

RONNIE
I... I suppose.

PETRA
So you can come to Paris?

RONNIE
Of course, I... I'd love to, I –

Ronnie notices that Petra's attention is on the computer.

PETRA
Hey, you know your computer's doing something weird?

RONNIE
What? What do you mean?

PETRA
Something about Ronnie? Anyway, I've got a surprise for you, but I'm gonna take a quick shower before I show you. Could you make coffee?

Ronnie nods, dumbly. She bounces away, flings the folder she was carrying onto the work surface.

He looks around for coffee and cups, fumbles with the gleaming chrome Gaggia.

He glances back, checks that Petra's away – hears the shower O.S, notices the door is open.

He flips the folder she discarded open and looks inside. Photos. Resume. Petra’s Weblog details. Ronnie grunts.

PETRA (O.S.)
Oh, Ali... Can you come here a moment? Your surprise is ready.

Ronnie turns, mouth open, salivation ready.

BATHROOM

The room is thick with steam from the hot shower.

Ronnie enters the lavish room, looks around: clothes strewn around, discarded. He looks more and more excited as his eyes linger on her knickers and bra.

His eyes reach Petra in the shower, hidden by the steam and closed unit.

He goes towards her, grabs hold of the shower door –

Petra giggles O.S.

Ronnie goes to open the door –

RONNIE

Face full of lust.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. DORIS'S HOUSE - BEDROOM – NIGHT

Ronnie blinks, blinks.

Sees his bedroom.

RONNIE
Ah, man!

COMPUTER (O.S.)
Trial expired, Ronnie. Input requested.

RONNIE
You're kidding me, right? You total, total ---

KNOCK ON THE DOOR. Ronnie turns to it, anxious.

COMPUTER
Well, how do you like Petra? Sure beats staying with your old mummy, doesn't it?
(MORE)

COMPUTER(cont'd)
Trial's expired, time to decide whether you want to stay. Paris sounds nice, doesn't it?

DORIS (O.S.)
Who are you talking to, Ronnie? Open the door!

RONNIE
Can I extend the trial?

COMPUTER
No.

RONNIE
I don't understand.

DORIS (O.S.)
Just open the door.

COMPUTER
This does not surprise us, all things considered, Ronnie. Pay the price for Alistair's life, you get it.

DORIS (O.S.)
Is someone else in there? Show me.

RONNIE
If I choose Alistair's life, what'll happen to him?

COMPUTER
That is no concern of yours, as you should know if you'd read the small print.

Ronnie gulps, eyes stray on a photo of Doris sitting next to the monitor. Knocks on the door, insistent.

The monitor pumps out images of Petra, life, cars, boats, possibilities, everything a man could want.

COMPUTER
So what's it to be, Ronnie? Petra and Paris? Or your Mother and the mundane?

SCREEN

Dialogue box; 'Trial period expired. Will you continue with your new existence?'

Yes, no.

His pointer hovers.

Yes, no.

Yes, no.

FADE TO BLACK

CLICK: CREDITS

EXT. SOHO STREETS – NIGHT

Ronnie, as Alistair, arm around Petra, laughs, happy as they walk down trendy streets. They stop, kiss, passionate.

Petra leans back, her arms fall to her sides. She whips her head down and around.

Ronnie stares at her, confused.

PETRA (DORIS'S VOICE)
Oh, hello! I was dusting Ronnie’s keyboard when a strange thing happened –

Ronnie’s jaw drops.

FADE OUT: