TEN SECONDS TO AIR

a comedy pilot

written by

Tom S. Parker

WGA Reg.

FADE IN:

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

JULIE THURSTON (22), attractive, driven, leads a group of ten-year-old SCHOOL CHILDREN and TWO PARENTS toward the soundstage where the popular TV show "Star Patrol" is produced. Each kid wears an official STAR PATROL SPACE HELMET, a cheap plastic bubble with a rectangular opening in front of the mouth so a kid won't suffocate. Clutched in their hands are autograph books. THE YEAR IS 1951.

> JULIE Stay together and keep your hands at your sides. We're about to enter the stage where the "Star Patrol" TV show is produced.

She stops and whirls on them. The kids abruptly halt, bumping helmets.

JULIE (CONT'D) And be warned, Star Cadets: Inside is dangerous, high-voltage equipment. So touch nothing unless I give you permission to do so.

A wiseacre BOY isn't buying it.

WISEACRE BOY My father works for the network. I can touch anything I want.

BOB SHANKS, the boy's father (40s), a suited network exec, speaks up. He's one of the accompanying parents.

SHANKS Son, listen to the pretty lady.

Shanks grins at Julie, hoping his flattery has found purchase. It hasn't. She raps the boy's helmet with her knuckles to get his attention.

JULIE Last week a boy your age thought he could "touch anything he wanted." He activated a flesh eating ray and it MELTED HIS FACE!

The kids' eyes pop in fright. A little girl WHIMPERS:

LITTLE GIRL I want to go home.

JULIE

Moving on.

Satisfied that she's made her point, Julie resumes walking briskly (her only speed) and everyone tries to keep up. The network guy comes alongside.

SHANKS Flesh eating ray? Was that necessary?

JULIE You're from the network?

SHANKS I arranged this for my son's class. Bob Shanks.

JULIE Mr. Shanks, do you have any idea of the caliber of our production crew?

SHANKS

Well, I--

JULIE The best crews are at the major film studios. We in television must make do with those who are, well, a tad less professional.

STAR PATROL SET - FLASHBACK

Julie discusses the script with BRENT BARRY (28), the handsome star of the show. He is dressed in his Commander Vic Greer costume, a stylized jumpsuit. A LIQUOR BOTTLE falls from the catwalk, smashing to bits on the floor next to them, splashing whiskey on their shoes.

VOICE FROM THE CATWALKS Damnit! That was lunch!

RETURN TO SCENE: STUDIO LOT

Julie and Shanks walking, followed by the kids.

SHANKS

I had no idea.

JULIE It's a miracle no one's been killed or maimed.

A worried Shanks turns to the kids.

SHANKS Keep those helmets on, children!

EXT. STUDIO GATE - DAY

STUART GREENQUIST (23), tall and whipcord lean, earnest and apple-cheeked, wearing a frayed sportscoat, a battered

suitcase at his feet, is trying to get past the veteran, nononsense studio cop OFFICER DONNALLY, who is checking his name against a visitor sheet affixed to a clipboard.

STUART

Stuart Greenquist.

OFFICER DONNALLY

... Nope.

STUART Maybe if *I* looked--

Stuart touches the clipboard--

OFFICER DONNALLY

(sharply) The clipboard--!

Startled, Stuart quickly withdraws his hand.

OFFICER DONNALLY (CONT'D) -- is to be touched by studio security personnel only.

STUART

(shows him a telegram) Here's the telegram from Mr. Tobin. "Report immediately to General Broadcasting Studio, Hollywood, California." I'm the new writer on the show.

OFFICER DONNALLY

You have I.D?

Stuart pulls out his drivers license. The cop eyes it.

OFFICER DONNALLY (CONT'D) My son loves "Star Patrol."

CUT TO:

STAR PATROL TV SHOW (BLACK & WHITE)

The scene is on the flight deck of "Galaxy One," the space ship used by the Star Patrol crew. Commander Greer (BRENT BARRY, 20s, star of the show) is at the controls. Co-piloting is Cadet Buddy (KIRK THOMAS, 5-foot tall, 20s, but plays the 16-year-old juvenile lead). At the ship's radar screen is Major Frank Lamont (EDMUND BAROUX, 40s, the third lead).

> MAJOR LAMONT Meteor shower dead ahead!

CADET BUDDY Jumpin' Jupiter, Commander!

COMMANDER GREER Hold tight, everyone! Mora, any luck with the astro-phone?

At the communication station (looks like a miniature version of a 1950's switchboard) is Mora (NINA WILCOX, sexy, busty, wears a micro-skirt which shows off her stunning legs. She's the reason why the show has a 60% adult male audience). Mora turns to the camera, thrusting out her torpedo breasts.

> MORA I'm trying to raise someone, Commander.

INT. DONNALLY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Donnally, salivating over Mora's body, watches the show with his son, who wears Star Patrol pajamas.

BACK TO SCENE:

STUDIO LOT: AT THE GUARD SHACK

OFFICER DONNALLY (with a leer) "Couple" of things I like on the show, too.

Donnally chuckles, Stuart joins in, not exactly sure why he's laughing.

OFFICER DONNALLY (CONT'D) Any other I.D.? Perhaps a Communist Party member card?

STUART

What?!

OFFICER DONNALLY There'll be no pinko propaganda peddled here. So don't try anything.

STUART I'm not a communist.

OFFICER DONNALLY We keep an eye on you writers.

Donnally hands back Stuart's license. Nods o.s.

OFFICER DONNALLY (CONT'D) Here's Mr. Tobin now.

A massive 1950 Cadillac drives onto the lot, passing the guard shack. Stuart grabs his suitcase and runs after it.

5.

STUART Mr. Tobin! It's me! Stuart Greenquist! Wait!

The Cadillac stops abruptly and Stuart slams headlong into the back of the car. CHURCHILL "CHURCH" TOBIN, (40s) a profane man with large appetites, sticks his head out the driver's window, looking back at the sprawled body.

TOBIN

You hit my car!

Stuart grabs his suitcase, picks himself up and scrambles to Tobin's window.

STUART Sorry, sir. Stuart Greenquist, the new writer?

TOBIN If you scratched my paint I'll have you gelded. Get in.

INT. TOBIN'S CAR - DAY

Stuart hurries around to the other side and gets in. Tobin guns the accelerator, crossing WORKERS dive clear as the land yacht shoots by.

STUART

Gosh! This is the most exciting day of my life! It's a dream come true. I know I have lots to learn in the entertainment business--

A MOAN coming from the back seat interrupts him. He looks back to see a FEMALE HAND poking out from under a blanket.

TOBIN There a girl back there?

STUART

... Uh-huh.

TOBIN Blond or redhead?

Stuart tentatively reaches back and gently lifts the blanket enough to see the girl is a stunning redhead, maybe twenty years old. She doesn't wake.

STUART

Redhead, sir.

TOBIN

Naked?

Stuart gingerly lifts the blanket further and sees she's nude. Her bra and panties are on the floor. He lowers himself into his seat again, eyes like saucers. He nods.

TOBIN (CONT'D) The first thing to learn about the business -- is that it's *none* of your business. Unless I say it is.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

Tobin parks the Cadillac in a space next to the Star Patrol soundstage. As he and Stuart exit, Stuart throws a look back at the car, wondering about the girl.

TOBIN Here's the thing, Greenhorn--

STUART

Green<u>quist</u>--

TOBIN

Look, sonny, you sent me a spec script I didn't hate. Now, I could hire any hack writer lining the bar at Nicodells but then I'd have to pay him real money.

STUART

Real money?

TOBIN

From the start, I mean. Do I pay my pool boy before or after he cleans the pool?

STUART

I--

TOBIN And if he does a crappy job, should he be paid at all?

Before Stuart can answer, Tobin gives him an avuncular shoulder hug.

TOBIN (CONT'D) We're singing from the same hymnbook, son. Deliver a shootable script on time, maybe I'll keep you around.

Tobin abandons the hug, walking off. Stuart follows, alarmed.

STUART But you already read my script.

TOBIN

And you got three days to write a new one. Have it on my desk by four p.m. Friday or you're gone.

Stuart looks like he's been gut-punched.

STUART

Gone? But--but I thought--

TOBIN

Listen up. I don't give crap one about your dreams or if ma, pa, and a mutt named Buster back in Cowpie, Wyoming are rooting for ya. Out here it's produce on time or die.

STUART

(weakly) I'm from Wisconsin.

TOBIN

Farm boy? Well, you seem to be a
bright lad. You'll get the hang of
flush toilets in no time.
 (nods toward stage)
See my assistant Julie Thurston.
She'll find you a desk and typewriter.
By the way, you drink?

STUART

No.

TOBIN Wouldn't hurt to start.

Tobin walks off toward the office bungalows, leaving a shellshocked Stuart.

END OF COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

INT. STAR PATROL SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Julie leads the tour group through the soundstage.

JULIE Friday, four p.m. we broadcast live to the eastern and central time zones. The west coast sees a filmed copy of the broadcast, which is called a kinescope.

They stop at a behemoth TV CAMERA.

JULIE (CONT'D) This camera represents the latest in space-age technology. Weighing only six hundred pounds, it takes just two men to move it from scene to scene.

Edmund Baroux, a hammy, frustrated serious actor who now finds himself playing the supporting role of Major Lamont, strolls by accidentally-on-purpose, hungry for fan adoration. He just so happens to hold a supply of his signed 8x10s.

EDMUND

Hail Star Cadets!

Edmund does the Star Patrol salute, a right hand to the chest then gesturing outward horizonally. Julie can't help being amused by this actor's neediness.

> JULIE Why, it's Edmund Baroux who plays Major Frank Lamont!

EDMUND And I have personally autographed photos! Come forward, one at a time, don't crowd--

Just then, Shank's son, the wiseacre boy, points o.s.

WISEACRE BOY It's Cadet Buddy!

ACROSS THE STAGE - KIRK THOMAS

who plays the juvenile lead on the show, walks, smoking a cigarette, arm around a FLASHILY-DRESSED WOMAN of obviously loose morals. Seeing his pint-sized fans, Kirk crushes the cigarette underfoot.

(to woman) Beat it, doll.

She does, scowling. Seeing their idol, the kids all squeal in excitement and make a bee-line past Edmund, knocking his 8x10s to the floor. As the kids engulf Kirk, he quickly adopts his show persona.

> KIRK (CONT'D) Jumpin' Jupiter! Hi, kids!

WITH EDMUND & JULIE

Edmund bends to pick up his photos. Julie helps him.

JULIE Maybe if you didn't try so hard, Ed.

They look off at the kids swarming around Kirk as he signs their autograph books.

EDMUND

(darkly) Like flies on dung.

Edmund takes the photos from her and walks off with forced dignity.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - NEAR THE ENTRANCE - DAY

Stuart wanders in, suitcase in hand gaping in awe at the goings on in the busy stage. He approaches a couple of veteran, seen-it-all STAGEHANDS.

STUART I'm Stuart Greenquist, the new writer. (extends his hand) I hope my work lives up to the high standards of television programming I know you all strive for.

The men eye him and his hand and burst out laughing.

WITH JULIE

Bob Shanks, the network exec, sidles up to her.

SHANKS So, Julie, how you like being Tobin's girl?

JULIE My job title is production assistant, Mr. Shanks. SHANKS

Well, if you want a career in television, I could be of help.

Julie starts to sense the come-on from Shanks.

JULIE

Sure you can.

SHANKS Tell me, do you have any college? Secretarial school?

JULIE

U.C.L.A. Summa cum laude.

So there.

SHANKS

Impressive.

JULIE I'm learning TV from the ground up. Will come in handy when I'm running the network.

SHANKS

Ambitious.

JULIE

What, for someone not wearing pants?

SHANKS

Look, Julie, you might not know this, but I'm Vice President of Executive Development. And right now we're looking for bright, young candidates to be the TV executives of tomorrow.

Her defenses melt a bit.

JULIE

You are?

SHANKS Yes. And I must say you'd be perfect for our training program.

Her defenses melt even more.

JULIE

I'm sorry, Mr. Shanks, I thought this was the same old come-on. You know, "Honey, let's have dinner and discuss your future." Actually, I was thinking drinks then room service.

He grins wolfishly. Her eyes harden into sharp dagger points, and we think she just might slap him--when Stuart approaches.

STUART

Miss Thurston--

Stuart trips over a camera cable, falls into a ladder, which tips over and brains Shanks -- who then FALLS OUT OF FRAME. Stuart stands there, staring aghast at what he's done.

STUART (CONT'D) Oh my lord! I'm sorry! I'll get an ambulance!

Before he can dash off, Julie stops him.

JULIE

Wait.

STUART

Why?

JULIE I'd like him to bleed for awhile.

EXT. OUTSIDE SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

AMBULANCE MEN load Shanks' stretcher into an AMBULANCE as the hushed children watch and Shanks' son bawls, his mewling echoing within his space helmet. Julie and a remorseful Stuart stand with Tobin nearby.

> TOBIN First day on the lot, you nearly kill a network exec. The writers' guild may give you an award.

STUART Sir, it was an accident, I swear.

TOBIN

Oh, well, he dies, there's always another one to take his place. They get 'em off a rack at Brooks Brothers. So don't waste time fretting.

STUART Thank you, Mr. Tobin.

TOBIN

(clarifying)
Don't waste my time fretting. Start
writing!

Julie and Stuart hustle away.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

Julie and Stuart walk toward an office building.

STUART Mr. Tobin says I have three days to write a new script.

JULIE

He's big on deadlines.

They pass Tobin's Cadillac. Stuart can't help taking a quick peek into the backseat. The girl is gone.

JULIE (CONT'D) Look, it's easy. Type ten pages a day. In three days you have a show.

STUART Wow, you're right. That leaves just two things to mess with: plot and dialog.

Said with a healthy dose of sarcasm.

STUART (CONT'D) (suddenly points o.s.) Is that Carmen Miranda?!

The beautiful Portugese actress and singer CARMEN MIRANDA, in her dressing gown, crosses in front of them.

CUT TO:

FOOTAGE OF CARMEN MIRANDA MOVIE

She sings "The Lady In The Tutti Fruiti Hat," wearing her trademark big headdress made of fruit.

BACK TO SCENE:

STUART

Running the movie in his head, hums her song. Julie nudges him, shaking him from his reverie. He looks off at Miranda.

STUART (waving vigorously) Car-men! HEL-LO!

Miranda glances back at him. Who is this nut waving at me? She quickens her pace away.

STUART (CONT'D)

Wait!

Stuart starts off after her, Julie grabs him.

JULIE What the hell're you doing?

STUART Asking for an autograph?

She smacks him in the forehead with the palm of her hand.

JULIE

Don't do that.

She walks on. Stuart looks back at Carmen Miranda to see she is talking with Officer Donnally, pointing in Stuart's direction. Stuart quickly turns and hurries after Julie.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY -- DAY

They walk down the hallway, past the offices of shows being produced on the lot.

JULIE You're working on the lot now, Greenquist, start acting like you belong.

STUART

I'll try, Miss Thurston. But only three days ago I was at the Beloit train station saying goodbye to my folks. And now I saw a movie star in her bathrobe.

Stuart stops. He looks scared.

STUART (CONT'D) My friends gave me a big going away party. I go back home now, I'll be a laughingstock.

Julie takes some pity on him, decides a pep talk is in order.

JULIE

Home? You're not going home, Greenquist. You're going into your office and bang out a great script.

Stuart latches onto her positive thinking.

STUART You're right. All I need is a big bucket of can-do. Like when I won the county fair milking contest with a busted thumb.

JULIE (feigned awe) C'mon! You write and milk cows?

STUART

(self effacing)
I'm a regular Renaissance Man, Miss
Thurston.
 (re his hands)
But may these never touch a teat
again.

She opens the door to his office.

JULIE Right. Well, here we are. Look, a bit of advice -- stay away from the actors on the show.

STUART

Why?

JULIE

Because they crave screen time like a vampire craves blood -- which means they'll pretend to be your pal or ply you with gifts so you'll pad their parts.

Stuart enters the office after her.

INT. STUART'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

A tiny second story office with a battered couch. There's a door to a closet. A phone and an old, hulking Underwood typewriter sit on the desk that's scarred and pitted by cigarette burns. But Stuart is mightily impressed.

STUART All this for me?

JULIE (re the closet door) No, your space is in there.

Stuart opens the door. The closet is maybe three feet deep. He grins at the joke. He goes to the window. Through the blinds he sees the pleasant, GRASSY QUAD BELOW. Julie can't help being charmed by his naive enchantment.

> JULIE (CONT'D) Good luck, Greenquist.

Stuart pulls on the cord to raise the blinds and they crash to the floor. He turns and sees Julie is gone. He now notices that there is a sheet of paper in the typewriter, a single line of typed words on it. He looks close, reading.

> STUART "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

INT. STAR PATROL SOUNDSTAGE -- DAY

Nina Wilcox, who plays sexy Mora on the show, intercepts Julie. Nina's in costume, wearing an elaborate robe and a headdress made of papier-mâché snakes. (In the episode they are rehearsing now, Mora is kidnapped by Martians and made their Snake Queen).

> NINA I heard you creamed a network guy with a two by four.

JULIE It was a falling ladder and he had it coming.

NINA

(teasing) Because he asked for a date? Julie dear, you don't play the game, you'll get a bad reputation.

JULIE What? That I don't have a "open for business" sign on my panties?

NINA

Seriously, outside of a blood donation, when was the last time you felt a prick?

Nina moves off as a PROP MAN approaches.

PROP MAN Want in on the pool? Four to one the new writer's gone by Friday.

JULIE There's already a pool? He just got here.

PROP MAN Well, you know what happened to the last writer.

JULIE Look, nobody's telling him about that, you hear? (then) Put me down for ten.

PROP MAN For or against?

Julie ponders that.

Stuart stares at the sheet of paper in the typewriter. He's been at it all day and looks tired and wan. His day's work, a small stack of papers, sits on the desk next to the typewriter. He puts his head in his hands, rubbing his eyes..

KIRK (O.S.)

Hey!

Startled, Stuart looks up to see Kirk Thomas (juvenile lead on the show) standing in front of his desk holding a bottle of scotch and two glasses, smoking a cigarette.

> KIRK (CONT'D) Kirk Thomas. You partial to 20-yearold Glenlivet?

Before Stuart can answer, Kirk cracks open the bottle, starts pouring a bit into each glass.

KIRK (CONT'D) Gotta be careful where I imbibe. Tobin put a morals clause in my contract. He's the biggest booze and puss hound in town--and he's worried my vices will offend the kiddies.

Kirk hands Stuart a glass, clinks it with his and throws back the liquor. Stuart is a little shocked to see a "kid" drinking alcohol.

> KIRK (CONT'D) I'm legal, Stu. Drove a Sherman in the war. (re the stack of pages) Pages!

Kirk grabs the pages before Stuart can stop him.

STUART I'd rather you didn't read those!

Too late, Kirk is already scanning them, taking about a second for each of the five pages.

KIRK Yep... uh-huh... uh-huh...

Kirk looks off thoughtfully, as if he was forming his critical opinion of the work. Stuart waits anxiously. Kirk snaps open his lighter, lighting the pages on fire.

STUART What're you doing!?

KIRK

Editing.

STUART

Stop!

Kirk drops the burning pages to the floor. Stuart stomps out the flames but the pages are blackened cinders.

KIRK

Five pages in, the star had yet to show, Stu.

STUART What're you talking about? Commander Greer is on page one!

Stuart holds Kirk's look, and now he gets it.

STUART (CONT'D)

You mean you.

KIRK

Ask Tobin who gets more fan mail.

At his wits end, Stuart balls his fists, meaning to punch Kirk. But Stuart isn't one to hit people, and Kirk knows it. He lifts Stuart's glass and hands it to him. Hoping it will somehow assuage his pain, Stuart swallows half of it. Instantly he reacts as if he's been socked in the gut.

STUART

God in heaven!

KIRK

Another thing: you have a villain with three henchmen. All with dialog.

STUART

So?

KIRK

So Tobin hates paying forty-eight bucks for an actor who speaks, verses paying fifteen for a guy who doesn't.

STUART

He's that cheap?

KIRK

At last year's Christmas party? He gave out towels and ashtrays he'd stolen from hotels. Enjoy the hooch.

Kirk exits. Stuart sighs, looks at the glass of scotch. Lifts and gulps. This time it burns just a little less.

FADE IN:

INT. STUART'S OFFICE - DAY

On the desk is the bottle of Glenlivet, two-thirds gone.

INT. STUDIO OFFICE BUILDING - MEN'S ROOM - DAY

Under the stall door we see Stuart on his knees next to the toilet, hearing him vomiting into the toilet. He comes out of the stall looking very pale. At the sink he splashes water on his face. As he straightens he's startled to see in the mirror Edmund Baroux behind him.

> EDMUND Out, out brief candle!

Stuart whirls to face this lunatic.

EDMUND (CONT'D) Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. (then) Welcome scribe! Edmund Baroux, at your service.

Edmund opens a pink pastry box he holds, revealing donuts, eclairs, bearclaws.

EDMUND (CONT'D) Let's nosh while we adjourn to your digs and see what marvelous scenes you've crafted for moi.

Stuart is not going down this road again.

STUART

Thank you, Mr. Baroux, but you'll see the script when it's ready.

He takes the box and heads for the door, but Edmund hurries to it first and stands there preventing Stuart's exit.

EDMUND

Two bucks for every line you write for me. But not drivel like "Incoming asteroid!" Or "Look! He's got a ray gun!" Give those to that depraved midget, Kirk Thomas.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY -- DAY

Carrying the pastry box, Stuart marches down the hallway, muttering to himself. Edmund appears from the men's room.

EDMUND I've performed MacBeth for the Queen! The Queen!

Stuart turns into his office--

INT. STUART'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

--to see the iron jawed Brent Barry, who plays Commander Greer, fitting a knitted cover over the typewriter.

STUART

Mr. Barry.

BRENT I made you a typewriter cozy.

Stuart stands there, at a loss for words.

INT. TOBIN'S OFFICE - DAY

A large, well-appointed office. At a round conference table, ad agency exec, HURST VAN DOREN, 30, sits across from Tobin and Julie, who takes notes on a pad. Tobin drums his fingers, unable to keep still, a constant condition.

> VAN DOREN I think you'll be very excited about our new toy idea.

From a briefcase he lifts out a RED PLASTIC HANDGUN.

VAN DOREN (CONT'D) The Cosmo-Gun. Shoots real space dust.

Van Doren pulls the trigger and a puff of talcum powder shoots from the barrel onto the front of Tobin's suit. Van Doren is surprised the thing shot so far. Tobin is not amused he was the target.

> VAN DOREN (CONT'D) Talcum powder. Harmless.

Tobin takes the gun, inspecting it. Suddenly he turns it on Van Doren and shoots him point blank, leaving the white talcum covering his face. Van Doren SNEEZES.

TOBIN

I use this on the show, it's gotta have some snazzy effect. And DON'T say it freezes people 'cause we're using that this week. VAN DOREN Okay. How about we call it... the Cosmo-Paralyzing-Gun.

TOBIN Paralyzing? Genius.

Van Doren beams.

TOBIN (CONT'D) Being that all America is terrified of polio. If your father didn't run your agency, you'd be selling urinal cakes.

Tobin rises and paces. He stops, an idea hitting.

TOBIN (CONT'D) We'll create a villain. Dr. Morpheus. One whiff of the smoke from his gun and you're lights out, asleep.

JULIE

I like it.

TOBIN (points at Van Doren) You: Meeting over. (points at Julie) You: Tell the new writer to work it into his script.

JULIE

(alarmed) Work it into...? Sir, you can't--

TOBIN (to Van Doren who hasn't moved) Stop inhaling my air!

Van Doren scrambles out the door. Tobin goes to his desk, looking at his messages.

JULIE Mr. Tobin, Greenquist only has till tomorrow to finish. If you spring a new villain on him, he'll need more time.

Tobin looks up from his messages.

TOBIN Do you feel that?

JULIE

... What?

TOBIN

The earth revolving on its axis. Takes twenty-four hours for one revolution, ya know. But if it's slowed we'd have a longer day, say twenty-five or thirty hours. Has that happened, Julie? Have I missed that news bulletin?

JULIE

No, sir.

TOBIN Then the words "more time" have no meaning in the TV business, do they?

JULIE

No, sir.

TOBIN Gotta drop the kids off at the pool.

Tobin goes into his private bathroom, shutting the door.

TOBIN (O.S.) (CONT'D) By the way, what's the line on him making it past tomorrow?

JULIE It's up to five to one against.

TOBIN (0.S.) I could make a tidy sum.

JULIE You bet against him?

TOBIN (O.S.) And you didn't?

Julie doesn't say.

TOBIN (O.S.) (CONT'D) Crimminy! I gotta stop eating at El Coyote!

CUT TO:

THE STAR PATROL SPACESHIP "GALAXY ONE"

as it soars through outer space. It looks something like a V2 German rocket from WW2. WIDEN to reveal we're in the--

INT. STAR PATROL SOUNDSTAGE -- DAY

--and the prop man is pulling on a black string that is attached to the nose of the rocket -- which moves the rocket

across a swatch of black velour, representing outer space. There are holes punched in the velour and it is backlit, so the pinpricks of light shining through look like stars. (Such were the primitive special effects of the day).

Stuart walks up, amazed by the technical wizardry.

STUART Wow, it's just like real outer space. (sees Julie approaching) Hello, Miss Thurston.

As she takes him aside, she sees he has the red lipstick remains of a woman's kiss on his cheek.

JULIE I see Nina got to you.

INT. NINA'S DRESSING ROOM -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Stuart enters tentatively.

STUART Miss Wilcox? You asked to see me?

Nina comes out from behind the dressing screen. She's topless and dangling a bra from each hand, one red, one black.

NINA

I can't decide. Red or black?

Stuart just stares, goggle-eyed.

RESUME: STUART & JULIE

On the soundstage.

STUART

Miss Thurston, I'm from the Badger State, and I thought there was nothing more tenacious than one of those creatures. *Until* I met an actor.

Julie uses her hanky to wipe off the lipstick on Stuart's face.

JULIE Didn't I tell you that?

He likes her attention, likes the smell of her perfume.

STUART What're you doing Saturday night? Brent Barry invited me to a party at the home of some actor named "Rock Hudson." The names they think up! But guess what? (MORE) 22.

STUART (CONT'D) Randolph Scott might show up. So, since I don't have a date, I was wondering if you'd--JULIE Don't worry, they won't care if you don't bring a girl. STUART (thinking he's getting

(thinking he's getting the brush off)

Oh.

JULIE (re the pages in his hand) How's it coming?

STUART

I've got fifteen pretty good pages. Figure if I work all night I'll make Mr. Tobin's deadline and I'll never again have to get up when it's five below to shovel frozen cow manure.

JULIE Yeah. Well, about that. There's been some...changes.

Nearby, a WORKMAN starts cutting a length of wood on a TABLE SAW, the loud buzz preventing us from hearing Julie's and Stuart's conversation. But by Stuart's reaction, we understand the gist of it. She tells him he has to work in the new villain and he responds with shock and then anger, throwing the script pages in the air and stalking off.

INT. STUART'S OFFICE -- DAY

In a rage, Stuart bursts into his office. Picks up the typewriter to throw it out the window when he suddenly freezes, remembering:

INT. STUART'S FAMILY FARM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Stuart, shovel in hand, bundled up against the cold, wearing a hat with ear flaps, stands knee-deep in cow manure next to his father.

> STUART'S FATHER (gesturing grandly) Someday, son, all of this will be yours!

At the edge of the frame is the back end of a COW. From it comes a STREAM OF URINE that splashes against Stuart's leg and down inside one of his rubber boots.

INT. STUART'S OFFICE -- DAY

Stuart lowers the typewriter, putting it on the desk. Julie enters with his script pages gathered from the stage floor. Without a word he takes them, sits and puts a fresh sheet of paper in the typewriter. Julie exits, closing the door.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE STUART'S OFFICE -- DAY

She pauses outside the door. When she hears the typewriter keys hitting the paper, she smiles, admiring Stuart's grit.

INT. STUART'S OFFICE -- DAY

As he types, we MOVE to the window. DAY DISSOLVES TO NIGHT and we hear the sound of the typewriter clacking. NIGHT DISSOLVES TO DAY and still, the typewriter keys keep going. We now move to Stuart at the typewriter. Exhausted, dark circles under his eyes, he finishes a page and slams it down on the stack he's written.

> STUART (V.O.) Twenty-eight. Two to go.

He checks his watch. It reads two-thirty.

STUART (V.O.) (CONT'D) Two hours left. I'm going to make it. (then) Sleep. Just a catnap, fifteen minutes... (then) No! Don't stop now! JULIE (V.O.)

Greenquist?

Stuart looks up, sees a COW standing in the doorway. The cow talks using Julie's voice.

JULIE (V.O.) (CONT'D) Greenquist!

CUT TO:

STUART

asleep, head resting on the typewriter. Julie shakes him awake.

JULIE (CONT'D) It's almost four o'clock. Are you finished?

Stuart snaps into manic action, rolling a fresh page into the typewriter.

STUART Just two pages to go, easy peesy. Stuart's phone rings. He picks up the receiver. STUART (CONT'D) Hello. JULIE We go live in five minutes, I gotta qo. Just as she starts out--STUART (re the phone) It's for you. JULIE (takes receiver) Hello. (alarmed) What ?! WHAT ?! Ohmigod. In a daze she hangs up. Stuart stops typing, her words finally penetrating his sleep deprived brain. STUART Anything wrong? JULIE Not much. I'm just finished in TV is all. She hurries out. HOLD on Stuart, realizing she's in trouble. INT. STAR PATROL SOUNDSTAGE -- BEHIND THE SET -- DAY Julie with Nina (costumed as the Martian queen) and the prop man, who holds the crushed, utterly destroyed headdress made of papier-mâché snakes. JULIE A forklift backed over it?? If this was a legitimate medium you'd be fired!

> PROP MAN Well, that's why I like TV.

The STAGE MANAGER walks by.

STAGE MANAGER Three minutes!

JULIE

How am I supposed to find another crown of Martian sand snakes?

Stuart rushes up, hyped up and manic, his lack of sleep pushing his normally reserved demeanor to the edge.

STUART Sand snakes? Did you say sand snakes?

JULIE Why aren't you finishing your script?

STUART

Answer my question! If the Star Patrol crew stares at the snake crown, do they become frozen?

JULIE

Yes, why?

STUART

That was in the script I sent to Mr. Tobin. The evil bastard stole my idea!

JULIE

(re the prop man) And this idiot ran over it. But who gets blamed and fired. Me!

NINA

Now you wish you'd slept with that network guy.

STUART Wait. I have an idea. It's nuts -no, not nuts... hopeless? No, that's too pessimistic. (hits on it) Improbable! That's it! The word that conveys there's slim chance of it working!

JULIE Of what working?!

EXT. STAR PATROL SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Stuart dashes out the door, running past us.

EXT. STUDIO LOT -- DAY

He runs between soundstages.

EXT. CARMEN MIRANDA SOUNDSTAGE -- DAY

He rushes up to a stage with the sign "The Carmen Miranda Show," and enters.

INT. CARMEN MIRANDA SOUNDSTAGE -- DAY

Off set, Carmen Miranda sits in a chair, chattering away in Spanish on the phone, as a HAIRDRESSER removes her tall headdress made of bananas. The hairdresser sets the headdress on a nearby table and moves away.

STUART

pops up from behind a piece of scenery, seeing his chance. He lifts it from the table as Carmen Miranda chatters into the phone, oblivious.

EXT. CARMEN MIRANDA SOUNDSTAGE -- DAY

Stuart bursts from the door with the headdress. A banana falls free but Stuart keeps going like a running back smelling the end zone.

INT. STAR PATROL SOUNDSTAGE -- BACKSTAGE -- DAY

A nervous Julie waits with Nina and the WARDROBE LADY.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

Ten seconds!

An out of breath Stuart arrives with the headdress.

STUART

Got it!

JULIE (to wardrobe lady) Hurry!

NINA Bananas? I'm the Martian SNAKE queen!

JULIE Make it work, Nina!

The wardrobe lady works quickly to affix the cumbersome thing to Nina's head. Julie snags the CUE CARD MAN.

JULIE (CONT'D) Danny, I have a change.

CUT TO:

INT. DIRECTOR'S BOOTH

The DIRECTOR sits with the TECHNICAL PEOPLE. Tobin stands in the back, smoking a cigar. On the three black & white monitors is the show in progress. Commander Greer, Cadet Buddy and Major Lamont creep along a cave set.

COMMANDER GREER (on monitor) Remember, Mora is under the spell of the Martians.

CADET BUDDY (on monitor) Golly, Commander, you mean, she won't even know us?

COMMANDER GREER (on monitor) No, and whatever you do, resist gazing at her snake crown.

DIRECTOR

Ready two.

MAJOR LAMONT (on monitor) (pointing) Look, it's Mora!

DIRECTOR

Take two.

On the "live" monitor Mora stands before the men.

MORA (on monitor) Earthmen! Behold my crown of, uh, snakes!

Tobin gapes at the monitor, seeing the bananas.

TOBIN

What the F--

ON THE SET -- CONTINUOUS

For a moment, the "earthmen" actors are thrown by the new headdress. Then Brent Barry (Greer), sees the CUE CARD MAN who flashes the new line.

COMMANDER GREER Shield your eyes, men! Martian banana snakes will freeze you in place!

INT. STAR PATROL SOUNDSTAGE

Behind the cameras, Julie and Stuart watch the scene. Next to them is the FLOOR TV MONITOR showing the live broadcast.

STUART This is my script almost word for word. FLOOR TV MONITOR -- LATER

The closing credits are running. On the screen Stuart sees: "Written by Churchill Tobin."

STUART Written by Churchill Tobin? Liar!

Stuart sees Tobin descending from the booth onto the stage floor. Breathing fire, he sets off after him.

STUART (CONT'D) Mr. Tobin, I want to talk to you about my script--

TOBIN No reprieves kid. You finish it? (off Stuart's tonguetied hesitation) See ya. Watch out for the deer ticks.

Tobin keeps on walking but Stuart won't be brushed off.

STUART I'm referring to my first script. Tonight's show. The one you stole from me and claimed as your own.

TOBIN That's a serious charge. Why don't you call a cop?

Just then Officer Donnally arrives.

OFFICER DONNALLY Mr. Tobin, there's been a theft.

Tobin thinks Stuart *has* called a cop. But isn't concerned. He goes to step around Donnally, but the cop says:

> OFFICER DONNALLY (CONT'D) Don't try to deny it, sir. This is serious.

Tobin can't believe the cop is taking Stuart's side.

TOBIN Are you kidding me? I own this show! I'm God! Get off my set!

The wardrobe lady approaches with the banana headdress.

OFFICER DONNALLY Ah! There it is. Taken from Carmen Miranda's stage. JULIE (stepping forward) It's all my doing.

STUART What? No, it was my idea--

JULIE

--And my decision. The snake queen headdress was ruined and we were minutes to air and--

STUART I took the banana headdress from Miss Miranda's stage. I'll go quietly.

Stuart puts his wrists out, as if waiting to be cuffed. Tobin now realizes what "theft" Donnally was referring to.

> TOBIN (to Donnally) Wait a minute. You came here because of this? (the hat)

Donnally nods. Tobin mulls this, then turns to Stuart.

TOBIN (CONT'D) Kid, you surprise me.

STUART Okay! I broke the eighth commandment. But so did you.

TOBIN Is that the adultery one?

STUART No, God, it's "Thou shall not steal!"

TOBIN

Look, the only commandment *I* care about is "the show goes on," -whether you gotta beg, borrow or steal to get it done. Which you did. You're hired.

STUART

I am??

TOBIN There goes my fifty down the crapper.

The stage manager hands Tobin a phone.

STAGE MANAGER The sponsor, sir. (takes the phone) Teddy! What's up?... Yeah, great show...well, my script had a lot to do with it...

JULIE

(to Stuart) Congratulations, guess I'll see ya around next week.

STUART

Yeah, I guess so.

They hold a look for a beat. She turns to go.

STUART (CONT'D) What did Mr. Tobin mean, about his fifty down the--

JULIE

No idea.

Julie goes over to the prop man to collect her bet. He lays cash across her palm.

JULIE (CONT'D) What're the odds he survives another week?

PROP MAN

Three to one.

Julie looks over at Stuart, standing alone on the TV stage wearing a sublime look as if his dreams have come true.

JULIE Ten bucks he makes it.

INT. CARMEN MIRANDA SOUNDSTAGE

Stuart contritely gives the headdress back to Carmen Miranda.

STUART I'm sorry, Miss Miranda, I hope there's no hard feelings. (holds up a banana) This fell off. Can I have it?

She snatches the banana. Cools a bit, grabs a nearby pen, autographs it and hands it back. He looks at it in awe.

EXT. STUDIO LOT -- NIGHT

Walking on air, signed banana in hand, Stuart approaches Tobin's parked Cadillac.

The sex-kitten redhead he recognizes as the girl who was naked in the Caddy's backseat, leans against the car, languidly smoking a cigarette.

STUNNING REDHEAD So you're the new writer.

STUART (gestures to the Caddy) You were...

She raises an eyebrow as if daring him to finish.

STUART (CONT'D)

Goodnight.

He turns to go.

STUNNING REDHEAD The last writer cracked up, you know.

He stops, turns to look at her.

STUNNING REDHEAD (CONT'D) (with a wicked smile) Stepped off his desk... and kinda dangled for awhile. Till they cut him down.

HOLD on Stuart absorbing this.

-END OF EPISODE ONE-

EPISODE TWO

"ATTACK OF THE MOLE MEN"

FADE IN:

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

Establishing.

INT. STUART'S OFFICE - DAY

Stuart stands looking out his window, wearing a troubled expression. Julie enters, script in hand.

JULIE Morning, Greenquist. Enjoy your weekend?

STUART

Not so much, Miss Thurston. I kept thinking about the last occupant of this office.

(gestures to a ceiling beam over his desk) Specifically how he hung himself from that beam two weeks ago.

JULIE

You found out, huh? Okay, full disclosure: This office also has an ant problem.

STUART

I'm more concerned with the corpse problem.

JULIE

Look, you were under such pressure to bang out a script. And I thought, why fill your head with images of Mel hanging there over a three day weekend?

Stuart gazes at the beam, his unease growing.

STUART He hung for three days?

JULIE Wait, it was four, he was discovered on a Tuesday. There was an odor--

STUART (gestures "stop") I want a new office. JULIE Hey, we aired out the place.

STUART I don't feel comfortable sitting in a dead man's chair... typing on a dead man's typewriter.

JULIE I'm sure Mel used the men's room, too. Watch out for the dead man's urinal. (hands him a script)

His last script. See Mr. Tobin on set at ten for changes.

STUART Seems a little disrespectful to rewrite a man's last words.

JULIE Actually, I think his last words were--(motions like she's being hung) Auuuugggghhhhhhh--

Appalled, Stuart jerks her hand down to stop the hanging pantomime.

STUART Why did he do it? JULIE

(evasively) Who knows? Gotta go.

Stuart stops her, grabbing her arm.

STUART What's the story?

JULIE

Nothing.

STUART

Spill it!

JULIE

0kay!

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE - CONTINUOUS

A JANITOR sweeps the floor, eavesdropping on the conversation.

JULIE (O.S.) Mel was a little guy, maybe five two tops.

INT. STUART'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

JULIE (CONT'D) To tie off the rope he'd have to put the chair up on the desk, and then stand on the chair. Even then I don't see how he could reach the beam.

Alarmed, he grabs her arm again.

STUART You're saying it was murder?

JULIE Just a theory, the cops' verdict was suicide. (re his hand gripping her arm) I need that back, it's part of a set.

He lets her go and she exits--

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE - CONTINUOUS

--nearly colliding with the eavesdropping janitor. She sees one side of his mustache hanging off his face. The janitor quickly turns away, pressing the mustache back in place. She thinks this is strange, but moves off up the hallway.

INT. STUART'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Stuart eyes the beam, his uneasiness growing.

STUART

Murder...

A breeze ruffles a sheet of paper in the typewriter, as if the spirit of Mel was wafting through. EERIE MUSIC CUE.

INT. STAR PATROL SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

HETTY HOOPER, host of the TV show "Celebrity Parade" is doing a FILMED segment with the squared-jawed star of Star Patrol, BRENT BARRY. Hooper is a faded actress turned gossip columnist who wears lots of make-up and big ornate hats.

Lurking behind the camera is the very large presence of Star Patrol producer CHURCHILL TOBIN, puffing on a big cigar.

HETTY HOOPER

I'm Hetty Hooper. This week I'm on the set of the exciting TV show Star Patrol. And my guest is the star of Star Patrol, Brent Barry.

BRENT

Thank you for coming, Hetty. I'm a big fan of your show...

WIDEN to show that Brent is reading CUE CARDS. He waits for the CUE CARD MAN to show the next card.

BRENT (CONT'D) ... Celebrity Parade.

AT THE CRAFT SERVICE TABLE

Picking over the meager offerings are the other cast members of Star Patrol. KIRK THOMAS is the 5-foot tall juvenile lead, 25 but looks 14. NINA WILCOX is the well-endowed female lead. EDMUND BAROUX, hammy Brit, is the fourth lead--and despises this lowly status.

> EDMUND Good God, the man's as wooden as Geppetto's puppet.

NINA Give him a break, you know he hates to improvise.

KIRK

(looking around the table) Where's the aspirin? I got a hangover the size of Jackie Gleason's ass.

EDMUND Another Cuba Libra bacchanal?

KIRK About that, where were you last night?

EDMUND

Ah, the bowling alley grand opening. Pity I had to miss it. I have informed Tobin I won't do appearances until he meets my demands.

KIRK

What demands?

EDMUND I want my salary doubled and co-star billing. Nina and Kirk crack up, thinking he's joking. Edmund glares.

NINA

Wait -- he's serious.

KIRK Ed, come on, that's like the appendix wanting co-star billing with the brain. I mean, if you were gone, the audience wouldn't miss you.

NINA That's harsh. True, but harsh.

EDMUND Joke all you want. But I am *not* budging.

He grabs a carrot, loudly crunches it in Kirk's face and leaves.

INT. STAR PATROL SOUNDSTAGE - LATER

The interview is wrapping up.

HETTY HOOPER

It's been a delight talking with you, Brent. Any last words for your millions of fans across America?

BRENT

(off cue cards) Kids, outer space can be a pretty rough neighborhood. So to get me out of tight fixes, I wear a genuine Star Patrol Hydrogen Ray-Gun Ring. (shows ring on finger) It has a real radioactive particle that lights up in the dark. So get yours today, kids! And don't forget: obey your parents, drink your milk and look both ways before crossing the street.

Brent gives his trademark all-American smile.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Cut.

Tobin comes to Hooper, out of Brent's earshot.

TOBIN Nice job, legs.

HETTY HOOPER (re Brent) Where'd you get this one? TOBIN He was All-American at SC.

HETTY HOOPER Did he play without a helmet?

TOBIN He's alright. Hits his marks and the kids love him.

HETTY HOOPER I could say the same for Lassie.

Tobin moves off and Brent intercepts him.

BRENT Mr. Tobin, can we talk for a minute?

TOBIN What's on your mind?

BRENT It's about my contract.

Tobin stops, looks at Brent with cold, dead eyes. The abrupt change from cordial to menacing is frightening.

TOBIN

What about it.

BRENT Well, I was reading it--

TOBIN

Don't do that. It's full of lawyer lingo you won't understand.

BRENT

That's just it, Mr. Tobin. I came across something called "merchandising net profits." And according to my contract I'm supposed to get five percent of these profits.

TOBIN

Brent--

BRENT

And I just told kids across America to buy this cheap plastic ring. You sell it for half a buck but it can't cost more than two cents to make.

TOBIN

You're forgetting the radioactive particle, Brent. With all the atom bombs they're making today, the price has skyrocketed. Tobin starts off, but Brent has another question.

BRENT About that--if there's a real radioactive particle in here... couldn't it be harmful to kids?

As if he never had even considered this question before, Tobin mulls it. Shrugs.

TOBIN

Probably not.

Tobin leaves Brent to ponder that. Just to be safe, Brent tosses the ring in the trash.

FOLLOWING TOBIN

Crossing the stage he spots Stuart, script in hand, waiting to talk.

TOBIN (CONT'D)

Come with me.

Stuart follows Tobin to where they can talk alone. Tobin hands him some money.

TOBIN (CONT'D) Here's the advance you asked for.

STUART Thank you, sir. Now I can pay my first week's rent.

Tobin leans in, his tone deepens, a ribbon of LIGHT leaking from the set slashes across Tobin's eyes, giving him a baleful appearance.

> TOBIN I want you to come to my house tonight.

Stuart feels a pinprick of caution. Hint of the EERIE MUSIC.

STUART

Why?

TOBIN Just be there. Julie will drive you over. And I need Ed Baroux gone. Kill him off this week.

STUART

Kill him? Why?

TOBIN Because no one puts the squeeze on Churchill Tobin. (MORE) TOBIN (CONT'D) (taps the script in Stuart's hand) This week.

Tobin walks off, leaving an unsettled Stuart.

BEHIND A NEARBY SCENE FLAT

is the janitor, having heard it all.

INT. EDMUND'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Stuart stands before Edmund, who casually reads Variety.

STUART Mr. Baroux, you have to swear you didn't hear this from me.

Mocking the ritual, Edmund puts his left hand to his heart, raises his right.

STUART (CONT'D) Mr. Tobin ordered me to kill off your character.

This gets a raised eyebrow from Edmund.

STUART (CONT'D) Something about how you "put the squeeze on him." Mr. Baroux, I'd hate to see you gone from the show. You're such a vital cog. (backtracks) Well, a cog.

Edmund jumps up from his chair, ecstatic.

EDMUND Tobin has fallen into my trap!

He pulls out a TV script, showing it to Stuart.

STUART "Chips Fontaine, Private Eye."

EDMUND The new TV show I'm to star in! I play a tough, two fisted ex-Scotland Yard copper now prowling the sunny streets of L.A.

STUART That sounds terrific.

EDMUND Tobin would never let me leave to do So I misbehaved--and walla. it. Freedom. (grabs Stuart by the shoulders) Mums the word, lad. If Tobin knew I'd tricked him, he'd keep me around just for spite. Stuart mimics Edmund's left hand to heart, raised right hand. EDMUND (CONT'D) Now off with you. Write me a death scene for the ages! Stuart goes to the door, turns back with a question. STUART The last writer... do you think he committed suicide? Edmund is perusing the Chips Fontaine script. EDMUND (distracted) That's the official verdict. But I did see him having a rather nasty row with Tobin the day before. (beat) Watch yourself, lad. Tobin is a dangerous man. HOLD on Stuart, absorbing this. INT. JULIE'S CAR - NIGHT (MOVING) Julie drives. The big 1951 pop hit "Come On-A My House" by Rosemary Clooney plays on the car radio. Stuart in the passenger seat, worried. JULIE Still in a dither about your haunted typewriter? Finally Stuart says what's on his mind. STUART Did Mr. Tobin have a big argument with Mel the day before his death? Julie reluctantly goes there. JULIE Mel had a serious gambling problem and was into Mr. Tobin for a lot of

(MORE)

JULIE (CONT'D) money. He couldn't pay so Mr. Tobin ordered him to paint his house. And Mel refused. STUART Paint his house? JULIE Well, Mel did owe him. It was quid pro quo. It means--STUART I know what it means. Why am I going to Mr. Tobin's tonight? JULIE Beats me. He just said to drop you off at seven. STUART You're not coming in? JULIE I have a date. STUART (a little jealous) Oh. Is he a steady? JULIE (amused by the quaint term) A steady? Maybe. We're seeing "The Day the Earth Stood Still." STUART I've seen it three times! "Gort: Klautu berada nikto."

She has no idea what he's babbling about.

STUART (CONT'D) It's what Patricia Neal tells the robot so he doesn't destroy the world.

Now she's peeved.

CUT TO:

EXT. CURB - NIGHT

Stuart at the curb where Julie just left him off. The car speeds away.

STUART Sorry for ruining the movie! Stuart turns and looks at Tobin's place, a big ranch-style house in the valley.

EXT. TOBIN'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Stuart rings the doorbell. Tobin, drink in hand, cigar in mouth, opens the door.

TOBIN Go through the side gate to the back.

EXT. BACKYARD OF TOBIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stuart follows Tobin across the large yard which features a big pool and tennis court. They go into a small building next to the garage that serves as a stable.

INT. STABLE - NIGHT

Tobin gestures into the stall o.s.

TOBIN Bought him from the man who runs the pony rides at Griffith Park. He warned me the nag was pretty old.

STUART I'm sorry for your loss, Mr. Tobin.

Tobin grabs a shovel, holds it out to Stuart.

TOBIN Well, better start digging.

STUART

... What?

TOBIN

My wife and son are in Chicago visiting relatives. They'll be back in two days, so we have to get Buttercup buried pretty quick so the kid won't have to see this.

STUART You want me to bury it?

TOBIN You were raised on a farm, you've buried animals before.

STUART I've *helped* with that, but--

Tobin shoves the shovel into his hand.

TOBIN Now you're in charge. Tobin walks out, Stuart quickly following.

STUART

Mr. Tobin--

EXT. BACKYARD OF TOBIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

They emerge from the stable.

STUART Mr. Tobin, this is not within the realm of my job description.

Tobin stops, turning on him, his eyes cold.

TOBIN

Job description? Is that written up somewhere?

STUART Sir, aren't there other people you can hire to do this?

TOBIN Look, Greenquist -- if you can't do a *small* courtesy like burying a Shetland pony for me after I advanced you a considerable sum of money, well then--

STUART

I'll do it.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - TIGHT ON JULIE

Eating popcorn, she watches the scene from "The Day The Earth Stood Still." No one is seated next to her, so it appears she's dateless. O.S. we hear:

PATRICIA NEAL Gort: Klaatu berada nikto.

Julie turns to a rapt AUDIENCE MEMBER a couple seats away.

JULIE (whispering) He doesn't destroy the world now.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS angrily SHUSH her.

EXT. BACKYARD OF TOBIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dirt flies out of a deep hole dug in the lawn next to the swimming pool. Tobin, in bathrobe and slippers, sleep mask on his forehead, looks down into the hole.

TOBIN

It's three a.m., Greenquist. I can't sleep with the racket you're making.

We now see a dirty, exhausted Stuart in the bottom of the hole he's dug.

STUART Sorry, Mr. Tobin. Maybe you have a shovel with a silencer.

TOBIN Come out of there, you can finish tomorrow night.

Stuart struggles out of the hole.

TOBIN (CONT'D) A taxi is at the curb. Need cab fare?

STUART No, sir, I can't borrow anymore. I'm not good at house painting.

Tobin weighs the uppity remark, slightly amused by it.

TOBIN I want your rewrite by eleven a.m.

Tobin turns to go... then turns back, always having to have the last word.

TOBIN (CONT'D) (re the grave) Ya know, kid... you might have a big future. At Forest Lawn.

Tobin walks to his house as Stuart picks up his coat, weighing the double meaning of *that* remark.

-END OF ACT ONE-

FADE IN:

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

Establishing.

INT. JULIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Julie dabs rubbing alcohol to the blisters on Stuart's hands.

STUART

Ow!

JULIE You're such a baby.

STUART

Look, I dug a pony grave til three a.m., got two hours of sleep, then banged out a finished rewrite on time. Let's see Hemingway try that!

Her PHONE RINGS. She answers it.

JULIE

Hello... yes sir, Greenquist just delivered the rewrite. (hands phone to Stuart) Mr. Tobin.

STUART (as he listens, he gets progressively angrier) Yes, sir...really...really...I see...fine...whatever you say, Mr. Tobin.

Stuart slams down the phone, the action--OW!--hurting his hand.

STUART (CONT'D) Seems Mr. Tobin learned that a local rendering plant pays thirty bucks a head for deceased equines. In his words, "Buttercup will be turned into many useful household items."

JULIE

Poor Buttercup.

STUART And I have to go back tonight and fill up the hole.

Julie applies bandaids to his wounds.

JULIE Hold still.

STUART I forgot to ask, how'd you like the movie?

JULIE It was good. But can you believe it-they upped the price of a large popcorn to fifteen cents.

STUART Where will it end? A quarter for a box of Milk Duds?

JULIE

Madness.

INT. STAR PATROL SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Prior to the day's rehearsals. Gathered near the set are Brent, Kirk, Nina and a distraught Edmund.

KIRK It was all a ruse to get Tobin to can you?

EDMUND I was sure I had the Chips Fontaine role sewn up. But now the sponsor has backed away.

NINA

Why?

EDMUND I can't figure it out. The character is suave, cool, manly...

Edmund bursts into tears.

EDMUND (CONT'D) I'm perfect for it!

KIRK Who's the sponsor?

Edmund composes himself.

EDMUND The Lily Soap Company.

This touches a nerve in Nina.

NINA Lily soap? I hate Lily soap. KIRK How can you hate soap?

NINA I hate that soap. When I was seventeen I entered their contest to become the "Lily Beauty Bar Girl."

BRENT

So did I. (off their looks) I, uh, thought there was also a boys competition.

NINA

(intensely) I wanted to win that contest more than anything. I was the prettiest girl... I had more poise than all of 'em put together. So why didn't I win? WHY?

That smolders there for a beat.

EDMUND Don't up-stage my crisis!

Nina dramatically arches her back, thrusting out her two assets.

NINA I was traumatized!

EDMUND And my career is hanging by a thread!

KIRK Ed's right, Nina. He's facing ruin, you at least have those 36Ds in the bank.

Nina petulantly crosses her arms over her chest.

NINA

Alright Ed, go on.

EDMUND I have one last chance to pull my chestnuts from the fire. Seven o'clock tonight I'm meeting Mr. Ferguson from Lily Soap at the Biltmore.

NINA Well, Ed, I wish you and your nuts good luck.

She pats him on the arm patronizingly and walks off.

BRENT

So how're you going to convince 'em you're right for the Chips Fontaine role?

They all think.

KIRK

I got it. I come in, pick a fight. Throw a punch, then you--BAM BAM-let me have it. I'm down for the count, crying for mercy and you say, "let that be a lesson to you, punk."

EDMUND

Ah, so to prove I'm manly, I beat up a munchkin.

KIRK

Hey!

EDMUND I'm sorry, Kirk, but the whole thing is absurd.

BRENT Not if I do it. I'll even wear a disguise so they won't know it's a set-up.

EDMUND Well, I don't know.

BRENT Can we rehearse this?

KIRK

Sure. Okay, Ed, you sit there like you're in the bar chatting with the sponsor... and then Brent enters.

EDMUND

This is ridiculous.

But Edmund goes along, sitting in a chair next to a couple of stacked "apple boxes." (Over this scene in the b.g., a CREWMAN at the CRAFT SERVICE TABLE a few feet away fills a PAPER CUP with orange juice from a carton... puts the CUP atop the stacked boxes while he turns back to the table to retrieve a danish.)

KIRK

Action.

Brent walks up to Edmund.

BRENT

Line.

KIRK Hey, Baroux, you stole my girl and I'm gonna tear you apart.

BRENT Hey, Baroux, you stole my girl and I'm gonna tear you apart.

EDMUND (reluctantly playing along) Well, old chap, perhaps we can do this at another time.

KIRK We'll do it NOW!

BRENT We'll do it NOW!

Thinking the moment needs punctuation, Brent grabs the CUP and throws the contents in Edmund's face. Edmund leaps up, wiping at his eyes.

> EDMUND Owwwww! That's orange juice!

Edmund stumbles back, trips over a cable, falls onto the CRAFT SERVICE TABLE which collapses, the large COFFEE URN falling over, spilling all of its hot contents over him, causing more cries of pain.

Brent and a contrite Kirk stand there, watching.

BRENT This is why I hate improvising.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Edmund enters, his face pink and blistered from the hot coffee. He comes to the FRONT DESK CLERK.

EDMUND I'm Edmund Baroux, I'm to meet Mr. Ferguson.

The clerk looks up, sees Edmund's face, winces.

EDMUND (CONT'D) A tad too much sun today.

FRONT DESK CLERK Mr. Ferguson has been detained. (MORE) FRONT DESK CLERK (CONT'D) He asked if you would wait in the lounge for him.

INT. HOTEL LOUNGE - NIGHT

Edmund takes a seat at the bar. BARTENDER arrives, reacts to the blistered face.

EDMUND Just give me a scotch!

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

MR. FERGUSON, middle aged, balding, enters from the street. Checks his watch, heads toward the lounge.

NINA (O.S.)

Mr. Ferguson?

He turns to see Nina, wearing a very revealing outfit.

NINA (O.S.) (CONT'D) It's me, Nina Wilcox.

FERGUSON Oh, yes, from Star Patrol. I happen to be meeting your co-star--

Ferguson looks to the bar, but Nina squeezes his arm, jerking his attention back.

NINA Big coincidence -- I was in the Lily Beauty Bar Girl contest a few years ago. I'm sure you remember me.

FERGUSON Were you? Sorry, I judge those every year. Hundreds of girls, I'm afraid--

Nina's hand subtly moves out of frame below his belt.

FERGUSON (CONT'D) Ohhhh, Nina! Yes, of course.

INT. HOTEL LOUNGE - NIGHT

Edmund checks his watch. He's getting more antsy by the minute. He drains his scotch as the bartender puts down another. In the b.g., through the doorway to the lobby, (unseen by Edmund) a laughing Nina and Ferguson enter the elevator.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

POP! Ferguson opens a bottle of champagne, pours two glasses, hands one to Nina.

FERGUSON I'm so happy for your success.

They clink glasses.

NINA Can't say it's been easy. 'Course, if I'd won the Lily contest, things might've been different. Starring in movies instead of just TV.

FERGUSON Well, Star Patrol is my children's favorite show.

NINA I'd be glad to sign an autograph for them.

FERGUSON Yes, there's a pad here somewhere.

As Ferguson goes to look, Nina covertly opens her purse, takes out an ENVELOPE and dumps POWDER into his glass.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Edmund at the front desk.

FRONT DESK CLERK I'm sorry, Mr. Ferguson still hasn't arrived.

Edmund bangs his fist in frustration, making the clerk jump.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

An unconscious Ferguson is in his underwear, tied to a chair. Nina throws a glass full of water in his face. He awakes, groggy from being drugged.

FERGUSON Wha... what's happened?

NINA I'm sure your wife will want to know that, Mr. Ferguson. How you again lured a young, innocent woman to your room.

FERGUSON Young? Innocent? NINA

Me!

Nina snaps his photo with a little Brownie camera.

NINA (CONT'D) And unless you want your wife to see this picture, you'll play ball.

FERGUSON What do you want?

NINA

Two things. I want Ed Baroux for the role of Chips Fontaine, Private Eye.

FERGUSON That's impossible. We just signed Douglas Fairbanks Jr. today.

NINA So it's a done deal?

Ferguson nods.

NINA (CONT'D)

Then you better deliver on this one. I was one vote shy of winning the Lily contest. Who was it that crushed my dreams?

FERGUSON But that was years ago.

NINA

Tell me!

FERGUSON It was a secret vote!

NINA You're lying! You know!

FERGUSON

You're insane!

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sitting at the bar, Edmund downs another scotch. He's drunk. A defeated Nina sits on the stool next to Edmund, surprising him.

EDMUND

Nina?

NINA (reacting to his face) Ooo, Ed. Are you in pain?

She touches it, he doesn't react.

EDMUND

I was until the fifth scotch. What're you doing here?

NINA

The truth is, Ed, when you said you were meeting Mr. Ferguson, I decided to come here and confront him. He was a judge in the Lily Bar Beauty Girl contest.

EDMUND Oh, that again!

NINA I saw him in the lobby.

EDMUND (starts to stand)) He's here??

Nina stops him.

NINA It's no good, Ed. He won't say who voted against me.

EDMUND Oh, who cares about that!

NINA And they signed Douglas Fairbanks Jr. for the Chips Fontaine role. I'm sorry, Ed.

Edmund slumps back on his barstool, his world collapsing.

EDMUND

I'm finished.

NINA There's only one thing to do. Beg Mr. Tobin to keep you on the show.

EDMUND

Beg Tobin?! I'd sooner be tied naked to an anthill than go down on my knees before that man, that--that vulgar Philistine!

EXT. ON TOBIN'S FRONT WALK - NIGHT

Edmund on his knees, hanging on to Tobin's legs. Tobin is dressed to go out.

EDMUND Please! I'll take a ten percent cut if you let me stay! Don't kill me off!

Tobin extricates himself.

TOBIN You're stinking, Ed. Go home.

Tobin walks to his Cadillac parked in the driveway. Edmund follows, unsteady.

EDMUND I thought I had the starring role in a new show locked up. That's why I made those silly demands--

Tobin opens the car door, looks at Edmund.

TOBIN I knew that, Ed. I threatened CBS with a lawsuit if they tried to poach you for Chips Fontaine.

EDMUND

You--you knew?

TOBIN There's nothing I don't know.

He gets in the Cadillac.

EDMUND Wait! I'll take a fifteen percent cut.

Tobin thinks about it.

TOBIN You're back on the show, Ed.

EDMUND (overjoyed) Mr. Tobin, I can't tell you how much I--

TOBIN Shut up. There's a little job I got for ya. I gave it to Greenquist, but it's more up your alley. EDMUND

Anything.

TOBIN You dug a hole for yourself, Ed. And your punishment is filling it in. You'll find it out back.

EXT. BACKYARD OF TOBIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Edmund comes through the side gate, stumbling about in the pitch dark, looking for the hole. His trips over the shovel and flies head-first into the hole, disappearing with a THUD and a GROAN.

BACKYARD - MINUTES LATER

Stuart and Julie, with a FLASHLIGHT, enter through the gate.

JULIE How long's this going to take?

STUART You got something pressing?

JULIE Frank Sinatra's waiting at Ciro's. It's a supper club, very chic.

He's not sure if she's kidding.

JULIE (CONT'D) Unfortunately, he's waiting for Ava Gardner.

Stuart grins, grabs the shovel, starts throwing dirt into the hole.

SAME SCENE - LATER

Stuart is working up a sweat. Julie sits on the grass. More dirt is flung into the hole. Edmund is almost buried.

> STUART You know, when I'm done here we could go for a swim.

JULIE And what would we wear?

Stuart lets her figure it out.

JULIE (CONT'D) Greenquist, are you trying to get me undressed? STUART

I'll take the deep end and you the shallow end. It's dark, so we won't see each other.

JULIE

But I have the flashlight.

She shines it on his face, then lowers it to his crotch.

JULIE (CONT'D) And if I saw you naked, I'd have to call you Stuart and not Greenquist.

STUART

I'd like that.

JULIE Nah, Greenquist fits you.

A MAN'S VOICE

Hold it!

They gasp, startled. WIDEN to reveal the man holding another flashlight. We recognize him as the studio janitor, sans the fake mustache. His name is PERLEY and he's seen too many "Dragnet" TV shows.

STUART

Who are you?

PERLEY

I'm a P.I. working for the Chattahoochee Life Insurance Company, investigating the *alleged* suicide of one Melvin Memmelmen, former writer of the Star Patrol TV series.

JULIE

We know who Mel was.

PERLEY

But did you know he had a twentyfive thousand dollar life insurance policy? And that the beneficiary is Churchill Tobin?

JULIE

No, that's new.

PERLEY

I've been undercover at the Star Patrol studio lot for the past two days. While investigating the Memmelman case, I happen to hear a very incriminating conversation between you-- PERLEY (CONT'D) (Stuart) And Tobin.

STUART What conversation?

PERLEY Don't play dumb with me. He told you to kill Edmund Baroux.

STUART Kill? He meant kill his character on Star Patrol, you nitwit!

Perley takes a couple of beats to sort through this, his eyes darting left and right.

PERLEY Well, then where is he?

STUART Baroux? How should we know?

PERLEY I tailed him here tonight. He went into this backyard and never emerged. (shines light on the hole) What're you burying?

STUART I was supposed to be a Shetland pony but--oh it's a long story, there's nothing in there but dirt.

Perley grabs the shovel from Stuart and probes the dirt with the blade. It hits Edmund's body under the dirt.

PERLEY There's something in here.

Perley scrapes away the dirt.

STUART I'm telling you there's nothing--

PERLEY

It's a body!

STUART & JULIE

What?!

Perley shines his light down to reveal a part of Edmund's hand... and then the hand moves & there's a muffled MOAN.

Perley whips out his gun, aiming it at Stuart & Julie who recoil.

PERLEY (CONT'D) What kind of sick, twisted people are you?!

CUT TO:

FLASH -- STUART'S MUG SHOTS

FLASH -- JULIE'S MUG SHOTS

A SPINNING L.A. TIMES

Comes at us, freezing on the image of the front page, headline reading "TV ACTOR BURIED ALIVE" over Edmund's picture.

MATCH CUT TO:

THE NEWSPAPER FRONT PAGE

widen to show an amused Tobin reading the paper sitting in--

INT. POLICE STATION LOBBY - DAY

He looks up to see the bedraggled Stuart and shoeless Julie, who have spent the night in jail, emerge through a door.

TOBIN

How were the accommodations?

JULIE A prostitute stole my shoes. But the gruel was delightfully bug free. Two stars.

STUART Is Mr. Baroux okay?

TOBIN

He woke up in the hospital, told the cops the whole story. So you're in the clear and he'll be back to work tomorrow.

STUART You're not killing him off?

TOBIN

(slaps paper) With his kisser on every front page in the nation? Why, all of America will tune in to see him. Funny, he's gotta get buried alive to finally get his moment in the sun.

STUART That's ironic, all right. Mr. Tobin, I have to ask you--

TOBIN Mel's life insurance policy is none of your business.

Julie and Stuart look at him, wanting an answer. Tobin's hates to explain, but he will this one time

TOBIN (CONT'D) Okay, it was collateral for a loan. And between just *us*--I'm using the twenty-five grand to set up a college fund for Mel's kids. Satisfied?

They are. They all move toward the front door to exit.

TOBIN (CONT'D) I want you to work up a script that hits this angle. (the paper headline)

JULIE

Buried alive?

TOBIN That's too literal. No, what lives under the dirt? Some monster... I got it. A mole.

STUART

A mole?

TOBIN ("seeing" the title in the air) "Molemen of Mars."

CUT TO:

STAR PATROL TV SHOW

On a Mars terrain set, Commander Greer (Brent), Mora (Nina) and Cadet Buddy (Kent), have their ray guns aimed at humansized MOLEMEN who are emerging from holes in the ground to attack them. One of the Molemen is Major Lamont (Edmund). MORA The molemen are attacking, Commander!

GREER Hold your fire! Major Lamont has been bitten by a moleman--he's turned into one of them!

CADET BUDDY But which one is he?

GREER

There! He's still half human!

One moleman is wearing a mole costume from the waist up, his lower half is clad in pants.

GREER (CONT'D) Fire only on the molemen *not* wearing pants!

INT. CONTROL BOOTH - ON A BLACK & WHITE MONITOR - CONTINUOUS

The "Molemen scene" is seen on the monitor. Pull back to reveal Stuart and Julie watching the monitor. They whisper back and forth.

STUART

Poor Mr. Baroux. He finally gets to star in an episode and has to wear a mole suit.

JULIE

Oh, by the way... you know how Mr. Tobin said he's using the life insurance money to set up a college fund for Mel's kids?

STUART

What about it?

JULIE Well, I checked. Mel didn't have any kids.

They share a look, then in unison, turn to look toward the far side of the control booth. There stands Tobin, watching the show, serenely puffing on his obscenely large cigar.

-END EPISODE TWO-