TEN SECONDS TO AIR

a comedy pilot

written by

Tom S. Parker

WGA Reg.
COLD OPEN

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 swirls 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, no-nonsense 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 spaceship 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.
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
Greenguist--

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
ACT ONE

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 horizontally. 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.
KIRK  
(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."
SHANKS
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 Portuguese 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."
Stuart straightens, feeling a pinprick of unease.

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.
INT. STUART'S OFFICE - NIGHT

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-year-old 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... 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.

END OF ACT ONE
ACT TWO

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 (O.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.
(see's 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)
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 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. Exhusted, 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 go.

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 tongue-tied 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.
TOBIN
(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)
   Auuuuggggghhhhhhhhh--

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
Okay!

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 it. So I misbehaved—and walla. 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
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-
ACT TWO

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?
He looks around for another woman

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 Memmelman, former writer of the Star Patrol TV series.

JULIE
We know who Mel was.

PERLEY
But did you know he had a twenty-five 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--

(MORE)
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
Holy mother of God, you buried him alive!

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 human-
sized 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-