

The Worst Thing in the World

Script by Dave Stone

SCENE ONE

A BRIEF 'EASTENDERS'-REMINISCENT
MUSICAL INTRO. THEN -

WE'RE IN THE CLOSING MOMENTS OF THE TV
SHOW, *SQUAXOBULAN STREET*. LISTENING
TO AN ARGUMENT BETWEEN A PAIR, DEL AND
TRACE, WHO ARE BASICALLY THE DIRTY DEN
AND ANGE OF POPULAR LEGEND. THE
WHOLE THING IS PLAYED OUT IN SUITABLY
OVERBLOWN AND TEETH-GRITTED FURIOUS
STYLE ...

DEL: You what?!

TRACE: That's right, Del! I've been poisoning you for months with potassium cyanide in your synthahol! I started doing it right after I cheated on you with your half-brother Kevin!

DEL: You what?!

TRACE: And it was me who framed your dad for the War Orphans' Relocation Fund fraud, right after I cheated on you with him! He was going to shop me when he found me cheating on him with his own mum!

DEL: You what?!

TRACE: And it was me, also, who dug your dead old gran up in the first place! And if you think that's all then you've got another think coming! I've got news for you, Del! I'm pregnant! I'm having a baby!

DEL: You what?!

TRACE: And it isn't mine!!

THE DRAMATIC *BAM-BAM BAM-BAM-BAM*
STING OF AN 'EASTENDERS' STYLE CLOSING
THEME. THE THEME CONTINUES UNDER ...

ANNOUNCER: Wow! What a turn-up! Be sure to catch up with the folk on Squaxobulan Street, three hours from now, for even more shocking revelations. In the meantime, stay tuned to GalNet Four Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-six, and our costume-drama, set back in the twenty-first century, and another trying case for our sleuth, Inspector

Wembley. That's all-new Inspector Wembley, coming next
...

EASTENDERS THEME CROSSFADES TO A
SNATCH OF A COP-SHOW THEME TRACK,
JUST ENOUGH TO GET THE IDEA OF IT, AND
THEN -

THE 'CLUNCH!' OF A DOOR BEING VIOLENTLY
SHOULDERED DOWN. SNOUTY - A WEASELLY
ROY KINNEAR-TYPE MINOR CRIMINAL -
SQUEALS IN ALARM.

WEMBLEY (gravelly-voiced, Jack Regan-type cop) All right, Snouty, you've given me the runaround for long enough!

SNOUTY (weaselly bravado) Why Mr Wembley, I have no idea what you're talking about!

WEMBLEY That's Inspector Wembley to you, Snouty. *Detective* Inspector Wembley. You been telling porkies up and down the Balls Pond gaff, Snouty, setting up a bunch of blaggers up for a ten-stretch apiece. Nice little earner for you when you pick up the scraps, but what do you think happened with the big boys, eh, Snouty?

SNOUTY (still in character, but missing a page of script) What are you ..? Um. Yeah. Okay. Well you've gotta do a bit of the old ducking and diving, haven't you? Bobbing and weaving. Stuff like that. I mean. But I, uh, thought you wanted to know about that pair of PractiBrantic con artists who were taking all these old biddies for their life savings and ...

A 'TV-TOUGH-GUY' SLAP.

SNOUTY Ow!

WEMBLEY Don't give me that, you nonce! Wee Jock McMuffin and his boys leave the frame, the other firms move in to fill the hole and the next thing happens we've got a shooting war on our hands. D.S. Taffy Powys gets caught in the crossfire and tops himself, and that's all down to you!

SNOUTY (out of character now, genuinely frightened) I say, Jeremy, are you feeling all right? This isn't what we -

A GENUINE, MEATY SLAP. THE ACTOR PLAYING SNOUTY EXCLAIMS IN GENUINE FEAR AND PAIN.

WEMBLEY

You scum!

ANOTHER PUNCH AND A SQUEAL FROM SNOUTY. AND ANOTHER. AND ANOTHER ... THE SOUNDS OF A SAVAGE AND PATENTLY REAL BEATING.

THE ACTOR PLAYING SNOUTY BLUBBERS AND WHIMPERS. WEMBLEY IMPROVISES ON THE FRENZIED THEME OF 'I'LL KILL YOU, YOU SCUM!' AND SO FORTH. THIS CONTINUES UNDER ...

DIRECTOR

(loud intercom voice from the gallery) And cut! Cut! I don't think that was what we ran through in rehearsal, loves ...

FEMALE P/A

(intercom) Oh my God! He's doing it for real! He's doing it for real!

THE SOUNDS OF THE BEATING DEVOLVE INTO A CONFUSION OF VARIOUS PEOPLE, MALE AND FEMALE, STRUGGLING WITH THE CRAZED AND BY NOW INCOHERENT D.I. WEMBLEY, SHOUTING THINGS LIKE 'GET HIM OFF HIM!', 'OH SWEET JEEZ, LOOK AT HIS FACE!', 'BOOM IN SHOT!' ETC. THE INTERCOM-DIRECTOR VOICE BREAKS IN SPORADICALLY DEMANDING WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON.

FADE TO A BEAT OF SILENCE. THEN –

SCENE TWO

A BRASH, THUMPING INTRO-TRACK OF THE SORT THAT TV EXECUTIVES THINK IS HIP. IT'S FOR A SHOW NAMED 'MEDIA BLITZ', SO MAYBE SOMEONE SHOULD BE SINGING THAT AS A STING TO THE TRACK. AND POSSIBLY A PHASED BOMB-DETONATION SOUND.

THE MUSIC RUNS ON AS A BEAT IN THE BACKGROUND UNDER A PAIR OF, AHM, YOUTH-ORIENTATED PRESENTERS:

- DANNI (bubbly, dim) Hey there, welcome to Media Blitz. I'm Danni Consart.
- JUDE (jaded cynic) And I'm Judas McCrae.
- DANNI Coming up, N'Synthetic sole-survivor and solo pop sensation Manda T talks about her new daughter, Pixie Astroflash. She's a right little star, sez Manda, as you'll see when she uses the holo-vid of the birth to back her brilliant new single, 'Pumpin your Extremely ...'
- JUDE (cutting in) And we'll be talking to hot-rockin' Xeno-porn director Jason Kane about his upcoming and utterly original holo-sim, Xenomorphic Bondage Slaves Part Thirty-seven. I can hardly wait.
- DANNI But first, we have an exclusive interview with Marvin Glass, CEO of Drome Productions and the man responsible for the creation of the Drome itself! Welcome, Mr Glass.
- MARVIN (in laid-back PR-mode) Good to be here. Call me Marvin.
- DANNI Well, uh, Marvin, what exactly is the Drome. What's the thinking behind it?
- MARVIN It's Planetoid Hollywood, simple as that. A self-contained ecosphere devoted to the creation of a single product – holo-vid entertainment – in designed and concentrated form. Something broadly similar happened back on Earth, in the nineteenth century, I think, with the founding of the Garden Cities ...

DANNI (uncomprehending) Garden Cities? What, with houses up in trees and stuff ..?

JUDE (oh dear god) Garden Cities were artificial communities built by industrialists for their workers, Danni. They're called that 'cause the workers all got somewhere nice to live with gardens.

DANNI Oh.

MARVIN Effectively, that's what the Drome provides. An entire self-contained community populated with performers and technicians under contract, living in homes that can double up as sets. Everything you'll see can make it to the holoscreen in one form or another. It's the only viable response to the conditions of the market today.

JUDE In what way, Marvin?

MARVIN The proliferation of GalNet channels and their ancillary media. The amount of airtime that needs filling is astronomical - and there's just so many slots in which you can roll-over the existing archive-material like holo-restored episodes of Are you Being Served ...

DANNI (babbling nervously) I used to like that. It was funny, specially when Mrs Slocombe kept on talking about her big fat -

MARVIN (shutting her down) What's needed is a kind of self-sustaining mechanism for the generation of new and original product.

JUDE A bit like a recycling plant?

MARVIN A bit like recycling. We have our flagship productions like the Inspector Wembley movies, one-off period or Slasher dramas, situation comedies like Head Down and of course our long-running soap-opera, Squaxobulan Street. The stars of all these sideline as the celebrity guests for chat shows, gardening shows, cookery shows, comedy quiz shows and even lightweight, puff-piece media shows like this.

JUDE Thank you.

MARVIN You're welcome. And the beauty of the concept is that we produce it all in-house. And if all else fails, of course, we

simply let a camera crew wander around and put out the footage as a fly-on-the-wall docu-soap ...

SCENE THREE

A BURST OF 'AIRPORT'-STYLE DOCUSOAP
TITLE TRACK FADES TO GENERAL
PRODUCTION-OFFICE TYPING, PHONES AND
CHATTER.

DOC NARRATOR It's been something of a rough day in the Drome central control office, and Marvin Glass is rapidly nearing the end of his tether ...

MARVIN (media-tyrant mode) I don't care, Hannah! I want that Consart girl fired! Did you ever actually *listen* to her? She's single-handedly bringing down the good name of Drome Productions.

HANNAH GLASS (the 'production assistant' from earlier) Oh yes. Like Topless Garden Makeovers and Whose Stool is That give us such a cachet. The Media Blitz demographic calls for airhead-factor and I'm not going to fire her for giving us precisely that in spades. Leave it alone.

MARVIN Don't you take that tone with me, Hannah. You'll do as you're told.

HANNAH I certainly will not, *father*. I took this job on the express condition that our family relationship would stay out of it. This is a production office decision, I've made it and it stands. Unless you want to remove me from my position as Executive Production Manager.

MARVIN I'm sometimes tempted, Hannah, believe you me.

HANNAH Just say the word. Now let's move onto the matter of that unfortunate business on the Inspector Wembley set, shall we?

MARVIN What happened there?

HANNAH We still don't know. The guy just seemed to lose it and started laying into the supporting cast. The savagery of it was ... well, I don't know. You know what I think, pops? I think our Jeremy was overdoing it with the old nose candy, that's what I think. Maybe one of those new psychototropics coming out of the Catan Nebula ...

MARVIN Jeremy Timson is an actor of the classical school, Hannah. All claret and after-dinner brandy with the lovies.

I don't think he'd know what to do with a rolled up thousand-credit note if his life depended on it -

A 'CRASH!' AND THEN GENERAL OFFICE
CONFUSION AS WE HEAR THE NEIGH OF A
REARING HORSE AND THE HIGHWAYMAN
WE'LL MEET BELOW CRYING 'STAND AND
DELIVER!'

MARVIN What the hell was that?!

HANNAH A horse?! They're extinct! How could anybody get a
horse in ...

HIGHWAYMAN
(over general fitful horse sounds) Ah, sir ! Perchance to
meet on such a night! My trusty flintlock, you must know,
is loaded with powder and ball, so I must ask that you
hand your personals and movables to my good self!

MARVIN What the hell is this? You've got up here from the Frock
and Fanny set, haven't you? Well let me tell you -

AN IMPRESSIVE FLINTLOCK DISCHARGE.

MARVIN Ugh!

HANNAH Daddeeee!

HIGHWAYMAN Thus die all enemies of the common man! Ha-hah!

THE PUFF, AND FADING CHEER AND NEIGH
OF RIDER AND HORSE VANISHING INTO THIN
AIR.

THE OFFICE PANIC AND CONFUSION
CONTINUES, TOGETHER WITH HANNAH
SHOUTING 'OH GOD! OH GOD! SOMEBODY
GET A DOCTOR!' AND THE DEATH-RATTLING
OF MARVIN ...

THE PREVIOUS SOUNDS BECOME SLIGHTLY
TINNY – OBVIOUSLY THE SOUNDTRACK ON A
VIDEO.

THE CLICK AND DEAD-CHANNEL STATIC OF
THE VID BEING STOPPED, THEN THE SOUND
OF THE MONITOR ITSELF BEING SWITCHED
OFF.

SCENE FOUR

A MUSICAL TAG TO JUST BASICALLY SAY
WE'VE CHANGED LOCATION – I.E TO BENNY'S
APARTMENTS IN THE BRAXIATEL
COLLECTION.

- JASON ... so the Media Blitz guys never got around to doing my interview. That's an entire moron-demographic's worth of publicity I'll never see again.
- BENNY Dear me. To think that there are millions of people out there, even now, whose lives will never be worth living – because they've never heard of Xenomorphic Bondage Slaves Part Thirty-seven. Oh, the humanity!
- JASON This is serious, Benny. I mean, if holo-vid production companies can't work for fear of highwaymen on horses appearing out of thin air and blowing out their renal systems, bang goes my livelihood. Something really weird and freaky's happening. This needs investigating – and you're just the person to do it.
- BENNY I wasn't aware that my, ah, experience included highwaymen appearing out of nowhere, blowing the renal system out of holo-vid media-magnates and then disappearing into thin air again.
- JASON And there I was under the impression that this was *precisely* the kind of thing that was down your street. Or up your alley. Whichever you prefer.
- BENNY Jason, the way things are at the moment – I mean, I have responsibilities. I can't just go gallivanting off looking into every intriguing murder I hear about.
- JASON Let the responsibilities go hang for bit. I think we could all do with a fun adventure that doesn't really relate to anything else. Did I tell you that I've wangled you VIP-treatment if you go? All expenses paid and an open bar?
- BENNY (suddenly enthused) Well, the first thing I can tell you, from that holo-vid footage you showed me, is that it wasn't a genuine highwayman. The costume is completely incorrect, historically speaking - that's just what it is, in fact. A costume. That sets me to wondering ...
- JASON Go on.

BENNY It's obviously faked for the camera - and I gather that this Drome is basically a glorified studio. I can think of any number of ways of producing something of that nature, for any number of reasons. A particularly tasteless and asinine publicity stunt, for example. Given that, why should we immediately think that something really weird and freaky is automatically involved – rather than just an overcomplicated bit of corporate in-fighting?

JASON It's in the details. It didn't just happen on the documentary film-footage. It happened on the office CCTV, too, apparently. The body of Marvin showed all the damage that would really happen if someone was shot by a flintlock – but no physical trace of anything that would have caused it.

BENNY Some kind of psychic phenomenon?

JASON Something like that. The guys are really freaking out, talking about curses and ghosts and whatnot. When I offered to ask you if you'd help – and explained to them who you were – they jumped at the chance. (beat) So, you're going to do it?

BENNY I suppose so. Like you say, we could all do with a fun break that doesn't necessarily have to relate to anything else. An open bar, did you say?

SCENE FIVE

MUSICAL LINK TO DENOTE A CHANGE IN LOCALE.

SOUNDS OF A SPACE SHIP RETRACTING ITS LANDING GEAR AND BLASTING OFF, CROSSFADING TO INSIDE-OF-A-SPACESHIP- IN FLIGHT SOUNDS.

THE QUIET CLICK OF A HAND-HELD TAPE RECORDER BEING ACTIVATED.

- JASON (dictating) So here we are, heading for the Drome-planetoid by interstitial jump-capsule. I've managed to wrangle Benny a consultancy deal as a visiting on-screen expert for a series of discussion shows. Gods alone know what in. I'm going along as a sort of Technical Assistant. Nobody knows me well enough there in the Drome to recognize me ...
- BENNY Jason? What are you doing?
- JASON Dictating some notes. You know how Brax wants some kind of record of anything we do, these days. God alone knows why ...
- BENNY I meant, what are you doing it with? That looks like an old-style dictaphone. I haven't seen one of those used in centuries.
- JASON Security, you know? I picked it up from the Collection. It's my own idea. I mean, people find written notes, they can read them in the end no matter how whacked and cryptological you get. Record things holostatically, there's any number of things lying around that can read the format. Find an old dictaphone tape, where are you gonna find anything to play it on? Which reminds me. I've got one for you. Here.
- BENNY (ironic) Thank you. Are you sure Irving Braxiatel can spare them?
- JASON Oh, there's any amount of old crap like this lying around. He'll never miss them.

BENNY I wouldn't be so sure. You know how possessive he's been getting about the inventories, lately – like those office clerks whose one bit of power is the stationary cupboard, and say you to sign in triplicate before they'll even give you a pen. (beat) Is it me, or has Brax been getting a little bit ... odd of late?

JASON Ha. Define this 'Braxiatel being odd', if you please.

BENNY Odder than usual, I mean. Obsessive, forever locking himself away. I don't know, there just seems to be something darker than usual about him ...

JASON Hey, it looks like we're coming up on the Drome at last.

A BUILDING PIECE OF MUSIC CONVEYING THAT WE'RE COMING UP ON SOMETHING SPECTACULAR, MONOLITHIC AND EVEN TECHNO-MYSTICAL. THERE'S A BRIAN ENO TRACK CALLED 'THE BIG SHIP' OR SOME SUCH. THINK THAT.

THE MUSIC SUDDENLY CUTS OFF, ANTICLIMACTICALLY.

BENNY Oh. I was expecting something bigger.

SCENE SIX

FADE UP PRODUCTION-OFFICE BABBLE AND GENERAL PHONE-AND-KEYBOARD SOUNDS.

HANNAH Ms Summerfield? Mr ..?

JASON Kane. You wouldn't have actually met me – I'm just the guy who put you people onto Benny here. Call me Jason, darling.

HANNAH (pointedly not) Mr Kane. I'm Hannah Glass. Pleased to meet you. Did you have a good trip out?

JASON Yeah, except for five months into the voyage when the food ran out, so we had to eat the cabin boy.

HANNAH (getting it) I do beg your pardon. We tend to be so ... self-contained, here in the Drome, that it's easy to forget we're less than an half an hour from the Galactic Core. Sometimes it feels like a whole other galaxy. I hope you understand.

BENNY Uh, yes. Don't mind Jason. We're, um, sorry for your loss, Ms Glass. I understand how it must -

HANNAH No you're not. No you don't. You could never understand if you haven't ... sorry. It still feels so raw, and I don't mean it as unfriendly as it sounds, but what I feel about my father isn't any of your business. Your business – as I understand it – is to help me find out what's happening here. The Drome was my father's dream, for a large part of his life, and I'm *damned* if I'm going to let it simply fall apart after his death.

BENNY I understand. You, uh, seem to be keeping on top of things, though. This all looks very impressive. Is this where you control the whole concern?

HANNAH Not exactly. This is where we ride herd on the actual product. There's a whole hidden infrastructure, of course. Power and communications, payroll, sewerage-systems hookup ... we're a community, here, and we need something just that little bit special to keep it running productively ...

FADE OUT TO A BEAT OF SILENCE, THEN -.

THE 'CHOFF' OF AN HERMETIC DOOR
OPENING. AMBIENCE SAYS WE'RE IN A
QUIETLY-HUMMING COMPUTER ROOM.

HANNAH Here it is. Here's the most important part of my father's dream. The thing that makes it work.

JASON Oh my God, it's ... it's ...

BENNY (arch) A transputer system?

JASON You could say that. You could say that in the same way that a room full of mother - er - motherloving next-gen quantum-supertransputers hooked together would make *this* look like the Grand Canyon next to a hole in the ground.

BENNY Oh yes? And when did you learn to recognize state-of-the-art transputronics, precisely, Jason?

JASON I know how to recognize all sorts of stuff, me. Including quite unfounded and hurtful comments as to how much stuff I can recognize. The question is, how the hell did anyone ever get together the funding for something like this?

HANNAH My father wanted it. Simple as that. He set up entire self-liquidating subsidiaries to come up with the components, apparently. This is what he sunk his fortune into. The entire Drome, in effect, in one sense, is just to give it something to do.

JASON Its operating on bubble-chip technology? Liquid dynamics?

HANNAH Holographic, so I'm told. The people who know tell me that they were able to jump a couple of technological stages ...

JASON Never mind technological jumps. We're looking at a *species* jump here. This is one *serious* bit of kit. This could very probably be the basis for the first true God-grade Artificial Intelligence ...

HANNAH We call it MARVIN.

JASON Ah.

HANNAH My father's thought-processes were mapped and used as the basis for its user-interface. MARVIN, this is Hannah Glass.

MARVIN'S VOICE, WHEN HE SPEAKS, HAS THE STILTED QUALITY OF SAMPLES CUT TOGETHER. POSSIBLY A BIT OF LOW-LEVEL COMPUTER-COMMS SOUND IN THE BACKGROUND.

(HANNAH'S INTERACTION WITH COMPUTER MARVIN HAS A SUBTLE KIND OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT IT - WE GET THE IMPRESSION THAT SHE FEELS A LITTLE SHAKY ADDRESSING SOMETHING THAT REMINDS HER OF HER FATHER, BUT SHE'S MASKING IT ALMOST PERFECTLY.)

COMPU MARVIN Good afternoon, Hannah Glass. Preference of personal address: Hannah. I see by my sense-net that you are in my mainframe-core with two other people, neither of whom are stored on my files as registered users. Is there a reason for this?

HANNAH Their names are Professor Bernice Summerfield and Jason Kane. They're consultants. It's ... a necessary part of their work that I show them around.

COMPU MARVIN You have the security clearance to do this. Is there anything I can help you with, Hannah?

HANNAH Have a visiting-VIP suite prepared, full service - what's your favourite colour, Ms Summerfield?

BENNY Uh, turquoise, I suppose, but ...

HANNAH Turquoise-themed decor. That's all for the moment, MARVIN.

COMPU MARVIN Confirmed. I am logging Hannah Glass out. See you soon, Hannah.

COMPUTERY LOGOUT SOUND.

JASON (as an aside) Talk about a bit spooky, yeah?

BENNY I see what you mean. It's a bit like someone talking to one from the grave ...

HANNAH

(pointed) Except that my *father* never treated me that politely and compliantly in his life. Come along, I'll show you to your rooms.

SCENE SEVEN

FADE UP TO WHAT'S EFFECTIVELY 'VIP-SUITE AMBIENCE', POSSIBLY TINKLY HOTEL-ROOM MUZAK LOW AND IN THE BACKGROUND.

A WELL-STOCKED FRIDGE TINKLES AND SLAMS.

JASON Blimey! They do well for people, don't they?

THE POP AND FIZZ OF A BEER BOTTLE BEING OPENED.

JASON I'm assuming the minibar is a freebie.

BENNY I like the walls, Ms Glass. When you asked me what my favorite colour was, I assumed you simply had a variety of guest suites ...

HANNAH Integrated liquid-crystal panels. Some of the largest ever built. If you don't like the design, you can customise it from this control terminal here, which is slaved back to MARVIN. You can put anything you like on the walls, effectively.

JASON I can't help noticing that there's only one bed in here – and if I'm pretending to be Benny's Technical Assistant, that could come off a bit, you know, inappropriate. I'm assuming there's an adjoining room or something for me?

HANNAH Not exactly. You're support-staff, technically, Mr Kane. We've put you over in the accommodation reserved for them.

JASON Oh, I get it. Can't have the on-screen talent mixing with the plebs, yeah? And I take it that this 'support-staff' accommodation's gonna be somewhat lacking in the hot-and-cold running champagne and minty Glaxolan chocolate on the pillow department, right?

HANNAH You might say that.

JASON Typical.

HANNAH I though it would be for the best. There's no unionization as such, here in the Drome, but things have been polarising recently and there's a high degree of

demarcation. If I put you in a suite, it would get any number of backs up among the staff - and at the very least it would be suspicious. People would notice ...

JASON

Yeah, fine.

MINIBAR OPENS AND GENERAL CLINKING OF BOTTLES BEING MOVED AROUND.

JASON

I shall repair to my hovel, then - with a pocketful of these here little bottles of scotch, if that's all right by you, Benny.

BENNY

Help yourself. Just don't get too drunk.

JASON

Not much chance on this much.

BENNY

It could actually work out quite well if we split up like this. This way we can attack the problem on two fronts. My VIP privileges should allow me onto the various sets, and you can look around and see what's happening behind the scenes ...

JASON

I get you, yeah. You take the high ground and I nip round the back. I'll let you know if I find anything out.

FADE.

SCENE EIGHT

A BURST OF CHANNEL-CHANGE STATIC.

MEASURED, PERIOD-PIECE HARPSICHORD MUSIC TO ESTABLISH THAT WE'RE NOW IN A TV COSTUME DRAMA.

(AS EVER, THE PEOPLE IN THIS AND OTHER VIGNETTES ARE PLAYED BY MEMBERS OF THE MAIN CAST, PUTTING ON VOICES, THE LINES PLAYED STRAIGHT RATHER THAN SILLY.)

POLLY Oh, Mr Dunkstrom, can it be that you can love me, even after such sundry, vile and contumelious complications as were instigated by the villainous Mr Slee?

DUNKSTROM My Polly, my dear little Polly, how can I but do otherwise than love you with my very heart!

POLLY Then I am to take it that his foul imprecations are unfounded? That those he mentions in your private and salacious connection are but megrims of his own devising? That they mean nothing to you?

DUNKSTROM But of course! Not one jot or tittle!

POLLY Neither Jacqueline nor Moira?

DUNKSTROM Not the merest scintilla of an iota.

POLLY Dianne, Maxine and your still-vivacious godmother, Mrs Kapple, severally?

DUNKSTROM No chance there.

POLLY Martin, Basil and that impertinent young stable-boy who was discovered up to no good in the hayloft?

DUNKSTROM Nope.

POLLY The Amazing Glendina and her especially trained Spectacle of Otters ..?

DUNKSTROM Enough, Polly! Come sit by me here upon the spooning couch and all such matters shall contrive to be revealed without delay!

CLOTH TEARING AS A BODICE IS
APPROPRIATELY RIPPED.

POLLY

Why, Mr Dunkstrom! I fear that I am quite undone!

DUNKSTROM

And very handsomely undone, too!

A VERY OBVIOUS MODERN-DAY ZIPPER.

MR DUNKSTROM AND POLLY MUTTER,
GROWL AND LAUGH TOGETHER IN A WAY
THAT SUGGESTS THEY'RE QUITE OBVIOUSLY
RAVENING AWAY AT IT LIKE RABBITS - MORE
'CARRY-ON' THAN ACTUALLY
PORNOGRAPHIC. THIS CONTINUES UNDER ...

DIRECTOR

(over intercom) Hang on, people, this is getting a bit ...
look, this isn't for the Adult Channels, people. This isn't
something we can use if we're going to - oh my *God!*
Somebody try to ... somebody go and get a bucket of
water or something!

A BURST OF CHANNEL-CHANGE STATIC.
THEN –

SCENE NINE

AMBIENCE SAYS WE'RE IN A 'REAL LIFE' CORRIDOR OR THE LIKE. SOUNDS OF JANE - A WORKING-GAL TECHNICIAN - GENERALLY GRUNTING AND MURMURING TO HERSELF AS SHE TINKERS WITH SOME COMPLICATED KIND OF HARDWARE.

BENNY Hello, there. What's that you're working on? It looks a little complicated.

JANE (initial suspicion) It is. And you are ..?

BENNY Benny Summerfield. I've been retained here as a ... consultant, I suppose. I was given an identity pass to ... here it is.

JANE Whoo! Access Almost All Areas. Some of the big high poobahs don't have one of these, even. Something like that would come in useful for us techs, if certain people pulled their heads out where the sun don't shine and damn well issued them. I'm Jane, by the way. Jane Peters.

BENNY What do you mean?

JANE Well, you see this here, behind the panel? That's one of the relay-unit substations slaved back to MARVIN in the main computer room. Integrated control for pretty much everything on half of this floor. You'll find these units networked through the whole of the Drome. We still need to iron out the bugs in half of them - only problem is, we can't *get* to 'em. The on-screen so-called talent and the production staff need their privacy or some such wank. You should see the paperwork it takes to get into their precious bloody environs ...

BENNY What sort of bugs, exactly? What's wrong?

JANE Have a listen to this.

CLICK-CLUK OF SOMETHING BEING PLUGGED INTO THE UNIT.

A CHEERFULLY MANIC, HIGH-PITCHED AND TINNY LITTLE COMPUTER VOICE IS SINGING:

COMPUTER VOICE (sings high-pitched, speeded up gibberish ...)

THE COMPUTER VOICE CONTINUES SINGING
MANIC GARBAGE IN IN THE BACKGROUND.

JANE The subsystems are infected with a whole bunch of these corrupted little routines, sheared off from the production-music database and proliferating. They're like this swarm of little automemes. Or automegrims. Hang on ...

TINKERING SOUNDS.

COMPUTER VOICE (sings high-pitched, speeded up gibberish ...)

JANE Not quite there ...

TINKERING SOUNDS.

COMPUTER VOICE (sings high-pitched, speeded up gibberish, then) - *grak, gug, bleep* - Subsystem resetting. Please stand by.

JANE The upshot is, we keep getting these weird little output-fragments. God alone knows why. It's like the system itself is going through a kind of compulsive-obsessive breakdown ...

BENNY (thoughtful) Hmm.

SCENE TEN

CHANNEL-CHANGE STATIC.

A MUSICAL LINK FROM AN OLD-STYLE, COSY
'TERRY AND JUNE' TYPE SITCOM.
(APPROPRIATE CANNED-LAUGHTER
THROUGHOUT.)

DOTTY What's the matter, Dan? You seem so glum.

DAN The dog died, Dotty. The dog's dead and my boss, Mr Wimsley, has invited himself over for dinner tonight. What are we going to do when my boss sees a dead dog in the middle of the floor?

DOTTY Is it very rotted, Dan?

DAN Its hardly rotted at all, Dotty. But its been savaged by rats!

THIS ELICITS A PARTICULARLY BIG CANNED-
LAUGH, AS WITH A CATCH PHRASE.

DOTTY Oh, Dan, whatever are we going to do?

DAN There's only one thing for it, Dotty ...

DOTTY What are you doing with that knife, Dan?

DAN I'm going to kill myself. Slit my wrists. Across and up. First me, then you.

DOTTY You are a silly, Dan. If you do yourself first, you won't be *able* to do me!

AN UNDERSTATED COSY-SITCOM 'WA-WA-
WAAH' STING AND CANNED LAUGHTER AND
APPLAUSE.

DAN You're right, Dotty. I am a silly. [genuine quiet menace] First you, then me.

A BURST OF CHANNEL-CHANGE STATIC. THEN

=

SCENE ELEVEN

WE'RE IN A 'REAL LIFE' CORRIDOR' AGAIN.

SECURITY GUARD (jobsworth little shit) You there! Drome Security Services. Just where do you think you're going?

JASON Well, uh, yeah, I'm just going into Production Control to check up on -

GUARD Identification.

JASON Hang on ... I've got it somewhere. Yeah. There you go.

GUARD This card gives you access to only grade four facilities or less.

JASON (to self) Bloody typical!

GUARD (disquietingly psycho-cop) You're way out of place, chummy. Ideas above your station. We don't *like* people getting ideas above their station.

JASON Er, what?

GUARD Up against the wall, dirtbag! Hands where I can see them!

JASON Hey, hey, hey - ow! - what do you think you're going. I'm - ow!

JOE TURNER (cutting in) Hey, Sloat, what do you think you're doing to one of my boys?

JASON Doing? He's doing a total bleeding nut-job if you ask me ...

GUARD Shut it, you slag! (To Turner) Invalid ID, Mr Turner.

TURNER Well, I'm sure it's all just a misunderstanding, right? You there, you're new, yes?

JASON It's, uh, my first day.

TURNER There you are, then! It's his first day. The guy's just got a little turned around. What say you turn him over to me and I make sure he gets back where he belongs?

GUARD (jobsworth-mode again) Well, uh, mister Turner, it's ...

JASON Highly irregular. He's gonna say it's highly bloody irregular, isn't he ...

TURNER (urgent) Shut up! (to guard) I'll make sure he stays out of trouble, Sloat.

GUARD Well, seeing as it's you, Mr Turner ...

TURNER Thanks.

GENERAL AMBIENT FOOTSTEPPY STUFF TO CONVEY THAT JASON AND TURNER ARE WALKING AWAY FROM THE SECURITY GUARD.

TURNER That was close. You really don't want to get the security guys pissed-off at you. They sometimes get a bit enthusiastic about their job, if you get me.

JASON Thanks. And you are ..?

TURNER Joe Turner, Technical Services. I'd be the leader of the union around here, if our lords and masters up top allowed such a thing. I can see you're a tech - and we don't let down one of our own.

JASON One of our own?

TURNER Yeah. (quiet but slightly disturbing change of tone) There's a war coming. Blood in the corridors. And it's time for all of us to pick a side. You're either with us, or against us, and up against the wall and shot ...

JASON Er, what?

FADE.

SCENE TWELVE

A SNATCH OF SLIGHTLY PLONKY, COD-WEIRD SYNTH/GUITAR MUSIC - OBVIOUSLY THE THEME TUNE FOR SOME LOW-BUDGET BRITISH SCI-FI SHOW. (THINK OF A SLIGHTLY, HUMOROUSLY OFF 'TOMORROW PEOPLE' RATHER THAN THE OBVIOUS.)

THE THEME FADES INTO GENERAL REAL-LIFE 'SETTING UP A SOUND STAGE' VOICES AND SOUNDS.

- JANE (the tech from earlier) Set Three. One more terminal to debug around here - though I think it'll have to wait. They look like they're getting ready to shoot.
- BENNY This looks a bit ... well, all these old egg boxes and silver paint ... is this something for a children's show?
- JANE You wouldn't want to let my kid brother hear you saying that. Total old-fi menk, you know? He went on about it for *weeks* when Drome Productions got the license for a pilot. This is the set for the All New Adventures of the Infinity Division.
- DIRECTOR (the same we've heard throughout, off) Look, can we *please* have those flenser-deathray controls looking like something other than old Pifco radio sets? At least stick some gaffer tape over the logos or something ...
- BENNY The Infinity Division? I seem to remember that from years ago. I'd have thought the production values might have advanced at least somewhat from then.
- JANE Well, there's a lot of rather bog-standard five-dimensional modeling in post, apparently, but there's no point in even thinking of competing with the big-budget periods like Inspector Wembley. So they're going for the camp-value and wobbling scenery nostalgia sort of thing. I mean, if you -
- DIRECTOR Quiet on the set! If we don't have quiet I'm going to close it! Now remember, this is the bit where our heroes find the evil Madroc in his lair, only to find that he's constructed one final line of defence. A hideous hybrid of flesh and machine! A monstrous, mutantoid obscenity of slithering and inutterable evil set to rend the bodies of mere mortal man to shreds! (beat) That's you, Ron.

RON Right-oh.

DIRECTOR So, onto your marks, people. let's try to get this right first take. We can sort out any problems in post-production. Playback!

A SLIGHTLY TINNY STUDIO-PLAYBACK OF THE SORT OF INCIDENTAL MUSIC YOU GET IN AN OLD BRITISH SCI-FI SHOW AS THE HEROES COME ON SOMETHING MENACING.

SCOOTER (enthusiastic idiot) Jeepers-creepers, commander, this place sure does give me the willies. There could be anything lurking out in that there swirly fog!

COMMANDER TRASK (heroic idiot) Hold hard there, Scooter. You'll find we're up to anything the cruel fates can throw at us, even in the fetid fungus jungles of Bresabetbelia six - or I'm not commander Reginald Trask of the Infinity Division! What say you, Professor Praxis?

PRAXIS (senile idiot) Mmm ... whu? ... I had eggs for tea.

TRASK Damned well said, professor, and if we -

THE LOUD, ULULATING ROAR OF A HIDEOUS MUTANTOID ETC.

SCOOTER Jeepers-creepers!

TRASK Aha! Unless I am very much mistaken, this hideous mutant monstrosity has been manufactured by the fiendish Madroc himself and laid in our path to - (breaking character, genuine fear) - oh dear bloody hell!

THE ROARING (AND SOMEHOW MORE GENUINE-SOUNDING) MONSTER SMASHES ITS WAY THROUGH THE SET, ACTORS AND CREW. MUCH SCREAMING AND SHOUTING IN GENUINE FEAR AND PAIN.

JANE (off this) Uh ... what was that you were saying about proper production values?

BENNY I wasn't thinking of anything quite this realistic. Let's just see if we can find a live electrical cable somewhere ...

(POSSIBLE LITTLE 'BZZT' AND BENNY GRUNTING AS SHE PULLS AN ELECTRICAL CABLE FREE.)

THE MONSTER ROARS LOUDLY AND THUMPS AT ITS CHEST.

BENNY Well, yes, you would say that, wouldn't you. (to self) I only hope this works ...

THE MONSTER'S ROAR TURNS TO PITIFUL ALIEN SCREAMS AS A ELECTRICAL ENERGY BURSTS AND CRACKLES. POSSIBLY THE SOUND OF FRYING.

THE MONSTER COLLAPSES WITH A SUITABLY BULKY THUMP. GENERAL BACKGROUND CONFUSION OF THE HURT AND SHAKEN.

JANE Whoo ... that was ... that was quite impressive.

BENNY Well, I've had a little, uh, experience in such things.

JANE Was it me, or did that rubber suit he was wearing ... change? That wasn't a rubber suit. That was ...

BENNY Well, it's a rubber suit again, now. Help me get the mask off and ... he's still breathing. It might be an idea to get him to the infirmary, if there is such a thing and -

JANE Hey! Watch what you're doing with that cable! It's still ... (realising something) Uh, Benny?

BENNY Yes?

JANE You know that live cable you're still holding?

BENNY Um, yes?

JANE That isn't part of the studio equipment. It's part of the set. It isn't live and it never was.

BENNY Hmm. Can you get this chap to the infirmary or some such on your own? There are a few things I need to go and see. I think I'm starting to get some insight into how things are *really* working around here.

FADE.

SCENE THIRTEEN

WE'RE IN AN UTTERLY GENERIC MEETING-HALL SPACE. AN ANGRY CROWD SHIFTS AND MUTTERS AND LISTENS ON AS JOE TURNER MAKES A RABBLE-ROUSING SPEECH.

TURNER For too long we have cowered under the iron heel of the oppressor! For far too long have we cowered like worms!

JASON (to self) You know, I never knew worms could actually *cower* ...

MEMBERS OF THE CROWD AROUND HIM SHUSH ANGRILY.

JASON Sorry.

TURNER Soon we shall take back what is ours by right! But first I have to warn you. There are traitors in our midst. Look around you – look around you now! Which of your comrades is a filthy collaborator with the forces of oppression. They must be rooted out! Root and branch! Root and branch! Death to the traitors!

JASON Uh ...

CROWD Death to the traitors!

TURNER Death to the traitors!

CROWD Death to the traitors!

TURNER Death to the traitors!

CROWD Death to the traitors!

(THIS LOOKS SET TO GO ON FOR QUITE SOME WHILE.)

JASON I, uh, think it's about time I made my excuses and left ...

SCENE FOURTEEN

(POSSIBLY A BIT OF GENERALLY OMINOUS LINKING MUSIC HERE TO BREAK THINGS UP. THEN:)

WE'RE IN WHAT BY THE AMBIENCE IS OBVIOUSLY 'REAL LIFE' - BENNY SUMMERFIELD'S VIP SUITE.

A CLASSY-HOTEL DOOR OPENS. (IT CLOSES AND CLUNKS UNDER THE FOLLOWING, SO WE GET THAT IT'S SHUT.)

- HANNAH You wanted to see me? My PA said it was urgent ...
- BENNY You might say that. I've been going through some of your current output, visiting the sets, trying to get hold of - haven't you *seen* what's been going on here? How many people are being hurt?
- HANNAH Well, I ... Suppose there have been a number of unfortunate accidents ...
- BENNY I'm not talking about the accidents as such. I'm talking about the way things are sliding into insanity. Do you realise that you're actually recording a game show where the contestant has to guess which limb an amputee has lost? 'Tell me, Cripple A, what would happen if you tried to juggle knives?'
- HANNAH Well, uh, the Drome produces product for any number of different markets ...
- BENNY Well forgive me if I'm wrong, Ms Glass, but how could you think even the *worst* and product-hungry cable channel out there would pick up something like that?
- HANNAH Actually, we've had an option taken out on it by GalNet Men and Motors Channel Four Hundred and Ninety-seven.
- BENNY How could I not have known. The fact remains, though, that things are going mad by increments and none of you seem to be aware of it. It's as if it's feeding off itself, like cabin-fever ... it takes an outsider like me or Jason to see what's really happening.
- HANNAH And have you spoken to Mr Kane about this?

BENNY

That's the other thing. I can't get through to him. Nobody would put me through - and your security people wouldn't even let me *into* the support-staff quarters. I want to know what's happening there. I want to -

A WEAKLY DESPERATE POUNDING ON THE
OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR.

BENNY

What's that?

THE HOTEL-TYPE DOOR OPENS.

BENNY

Jason ..?

JASON

Benny ..? Is that ..? I don't feel, I don't feel ... very well ...

A BODY SLUMPS TO THE LUXURIOUS
CARPET.

BENNY

Jason! Oh God, what is it, it's ...

HANNAH

What's happening?

BENNY

Oh dear God, look at this. We have to get him to a doctor or something! He's been brutally stabbed!

SCENE FIFTEEN

CHANNEL-CHANGE STATIC.

A SNATCH OF 'BAZAL PRODUCTIONS' PLONKY
SYNTH MUSIC SUCH AS YOU'D FIND IN A
CHEAPO GARDENING/COOKERY
PROGRAMME. A JAUNTY LITTLE TRACK
CONTINUES ON UNDER:

CHEERY FEMALE PRESENTER

Good afternoon and welcome to A Larder in the Garden. Now as you can see, I've just driven Charlie Slorley's head in with the flat end of a shovel. Once the remains have decomposed sufficiently, of course, they're just the thing for bringing up a lovely crop of rhubarb - but for the moment, it would be a positive crime to leave all that fresh juicy meat go to waste. We'll be showing you how to prepare the choicer cuts later, but a personal favourite of mine is something you might not have thought of: boiled head stuffed with giblets. For this, you must first remove the head from the carcass, using the dismembering implement of your choice. I prefer to use the trusty chainsaw, myself ...

SOUND OF A CHAINSAW STARTING UP. THEN
FADE.

CHANNEL-CHANGE STATIC.

SCENE SIXTEEN

WE'RE BACK IN 'REAL LIFE' AGAIN. AMBIENCE OF A SEEDY ROOM - PIPES GLOP-AND-GLUNKING QUIETLY IN THE WALLS, DRIPPING TAP, ETC.

A DOORKNOB RATTLES AND A RATHER CHEAP-SOUNDING DOOR OPENS. TWO SETS OF SPIKE HEELS ON A HARD FLOOR.

BENNY So this is what you assigned Jason? He was certainly right about the support-staff quarters being less than exactly salubrious.

HANNAH Do we have to do this now? I'm supposed to be in Studio One, dealing with the setup for the show - the one you're supposed to be appearing on, remember? The official reason why you're here?

BENNY I needed you to get past your security people. They couldn't very well stop their CEO coming in and looking around. Jason's on a drip-feed in that infirmary of yours, and with him still unconscious, the only way we're going to find any clue as to what happened to him is by looking through his things.

GENERAL SEARCHING-THROUGH SOUNDS AS CLOTHING, PAPERS AND PERSONAL ITEMS ARE TURNED OVER.

HANNAH Can't say much for the state of his underwear - or his, uh, choice in reading matter.

BENNY Well, he's probably doing research for the things he actually writes.

THE CLATTER OF A CASSETTE TAPE ON THE FLOOR.

HANNAH What's this?

BENNY Hm. It's an old-style dictaphone tape.

HANNAH Dick-ta-fone? I've never even heard of that. Is there anything around here that can possibly play it?

BENNY Possibly, but it doesn't matter. *I've* got something I can play it on.

A CASSETTE IS INSERTED INTO A PLAYER.

THE GABBLE OF A TAPE BEING REWOUND.
THEN:

JASON (on tape) I'm gonna have to be careful, here. I've been talking to some of the technicians and there's something weird about them. I mean, of course they hate the performers and loathe the management - but there's something more happening here. Something bigger. The animosity's off the *scale* - like they're on different sides in a *war* or something. God alone knows what would happen if they found me doing this - string me up as a spy, or brutally stab me or something, probably ...

(POSSIBLY THE TAPE IS STOPPED HERE WITH AN APPROPRIATE CLICK. OTHERWISE, JASON'S VOICE CONTINUES INDECIPHERABLY UNDER.)

BENNY Your support-staff think they're at war? Tell me you'd have noticed something like that.

HANNAH I haven't, really. I haven't come much into social contact with them ... but now I come to think, the way that some of them have been acting ...

BENNY Cabin-fever. You don't notice it's happening until somebody points it out.

(CLICK OF TAPE-PLAYER BEING STARTED.)

JASON ... first thought was that the people here were suffering from a form of cabin-fever, or coming it a bit with the Wicker Man scenario - but the effects, again, are too extreme. This wasn't some gradual slide into madness, it was sudden, like a switch being thrown. I've been able to hack into some of the deep-level systems here and ... Benny, if you're listening to this, this is for your ears only. Make sure you're alone and use an earpiece or something, okay?

CLICK OF TAPE BEING STOPPED.

BENNY Well, you heard the man. This is for my ears only.

HANNAH

But ...

BENNY

Go and deal with the set-up for this show of yours. I'll let you know what I find out.

SCENE SEVENTEEN

CHANNEL-CHANGE STATIC.

BRASH, THUMPING GAME SHOW MUSIC AND
AN AUDIENCE GOING WILD WITH APPLAUSE,
WHOOPING, ETC.

GAME SHOW ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, it's time to play ...

ANNOUNCER AND AUDIENCE

Whose Stool is This!!!

EMPHATIC CHANNEL-CHANGE STATIC.

SCENE EIGHTEEN

FADE UP ON THE GENERAL AMBIENCE OF A CROWDED TV STUDIO: GUESTS AND AUDIENCE MURMURING TO EACH OTHER, TECHS SETTING THINGS UP, ETC.

WE VAGUELY HEAR THE ACTOR WHO PLAYED INSPECTOR WEMBLEY (NOW A PLUMMY-VOICED, ALCOHOLIC THESP) DEMANDING DRINK, AND THE DISTINCTIVE TONES OF SEVERAL OTHER OF THE CHARACTERS, MALE AND FEMALE, WE'VE MET.

DIRECTOR (the same one we've encountered throughout) We're taping in minutes, Hannah, love, so where's this Professor Summerfield of yours?

HANNAH Any minute now. She had something important to deal with first for ... and here she is.

BENNY Am I late? Sorry. I've got something to -

DIRECTOR Pay it no mind, love. Let's get you up to speed, yeah?

BENNY (cold) Love?

DIRECTOR (all oblivious) Now, Tarkwell's going to come out and do his bit to camera, then once around the special guests, then straight to you. You're up on what the show's about, sweetheart?

BENNY Um ... Listen, it's quite important that I -

DIRECTOR Don't worry about it, darling. I'm sure you can wing it. And if you fluff, what the hell, tape is cheap. Just have fun with it, and don't worry about questions from the audience - they're all Drome Productions employees and they're up on their lines. Hmm. Looks like you've picked up a bit of a smudge, there, somewhere or other - makeup!

FADE OUT. THEN -

SCENE NINETEEN

A BRIEF 'QUESTION TIME'-LIKE CURRENT-AFFAIRS SIGNATURE TUNE AND FAIRLY RESTRAINED AUDIENCE APPLAUSE.

TARKWELL ('Kilroy'-type presenter) Good evening and welcome to Late Night Issues. I'm Tarkwell Groke. Tonight, Archetypes of Abomination. Does the portrayal of simplified characters on the holo-vid screen contribute to a rising culture of dehumanisation? Joining me in the studio, Jeremy Timson, the eponymous star of Inspector Wembley ...

APPLAUSE.

TIMSON (plummy, alcoholic old thesp) Greetings, Tarkwell. It is most felicitous to be here with my ...

TARKWELL (hurriedly) And to his right, Lona Wom from the Feminist Lesbian Alliance against Derogatory Stereotypes ...

LONA (an incredibly deep, bass, masculine voice) Good evening.

APPLAUSE.

TARKWELL And beside her is the new CEO of Drome Productions, following the tragic death of her father, Hannah Glass. Welcome, Hannah.

APPLAUSE.

HANNAH It's, uh, good to be here.

TARKWELL And finally, our visiting expert from the Braxiatel Collection, with expertise in Particle Physics, Biophysics, Parapsychology, Practical Ontology and Comparative Anthropology, Professor Bernice Summerfield ...

SLIGHTLY MORE APPLAUSE THAN FOR THE OTHERS.

BENNY Hello. I'd just like to say that -

TARKWELL So, Benny, the question is, does the portrayal of simplified characters on the screen contribute to a rising culture of dehumanisation? Do you want to

play it safe and gamble one item of clothing on that - or will you bet four and guarantee yourself a place in the next round with a correct answer?

BENNY

What!?

TACKY 'CLOCK-TICKING' MUSIC STARTS UP AND CONTINUES UNDER:

TARKWELL

One or four items, Benny? And remember ...

TARKWELL AND AUDIENCE

Spectacles and shoes don't count!

BENNY

What in God's name *is* this, Hannah? What the hell's going on?

HANNAH

I ...don't know! This isn't what we were supposed to -

TARKWELL

Time's running out, Benny ...

BENNY

Well you can just let it. I've had quite enough of this. Give me that bloody microphone!

SOUND OF A HAND-HELD MIKE BEING FORCIBLY GRABBED (YES, I KNOW THAT IN REAL LIFE BENNY WOULD HAVE BEEN MIKED-UP ANYWAY.)

TARKWELL

Wha ..?

THE TICKING-CLOCK MUSIC IS ABRUPTLY CUT OFF. THERE IS A QUIETLY-STUNNED MOMENT OF SHOCK FROM ALL PRESENT, AS IF A SPELL HAS BEEN BROKEN.

VARIOUS CONFUSED-CROWD AMBIENCE UNDER THE FOLLOWING:

DIRECTOR

(off mike) Cut! Reset! Just what the hell do you think you're -

TIMSON

I say, so is the damned girl going to get her kit off or what?

BENNY

Stop this! Stop this now! Can't you see what's happening to you?

TARKWELL

Look, this isn't what ... you can't ...

BENNY

And you can shut up. I had a friend. He's in the infirmary, now, in critical condition - someone tried to kill him to prevent him passing on what he knows. It didn't work.

UNDER BENNY THERE STARTS A KIND OF PULSING THROB, SO QUIETLY THAT INITIALLY IT CAN'T BE CONSCIOUSLY HEARD, BUT SLOWLY GETTING LOUDER SO THAT WE BECOME AWARE OF IT AT MORE OR LESS THE SAME TIME AS BENNY DOES.

BENNY

My friend left me a tape. On it he talked about what's known as the Singularity - a kind of information-overload that hit the planet Earth in twenty-first century and radically altered the way reality was perceived. The self-enclosed nature of the Drome has replicated that process, reproduced the conditions for it in microcosm. And something has taken control of those processes.

(beat)

It's been bombarding you with electromagnetic pulses and subsonics from the equipment that surrounds you. It's been feeding you subliminals from monitors and VDU's and from those liquid-crystal screens that cover the walls. It's been controlling you, causing you to hallucinate - to such an extent that it *literally* changes your reality. Marvin Glass, for example, believed so completely that he had been shot with a flintlock that his body psychosomatically ... what's that? Can you hear that?

THE THROBBING PULSE IS NOW PLAINLY AUDIBLE.

HANNAH

It's coming from ... it's coming from the walls. It's everywhere, it's ...

THE THROBBING ACCELERATES AND RISES IN PITCH, TAKING ON MULTIPLE AND SHRIEKING HARMONICS. THIS CONTINUES AS BACKGROUND UNDER ...

BENNY

Agh! What the hell is -

TARKWELL

(dazed zombie voice) We must ... I ... we must ...

TIMSON

(similarly zombified) Yes, we must ... I ... the woman is a threat. She must be neutralised. We must kill her ...

(WHEN THE CROWD SHOUTS THEY'RE ALSO
ZOMBIFIED, BUT WITH A SLIGHTLY
INAPPROPRIATE UPBEAT TONE, LIKE
THEY'RE A CHORUS-LINE.)

ZOMBIE CROWD

Yes we must! Kill her we must!

THE GENERAL SOUND OF ZOMBIE-CROWD
LURCHING, MUTT ERS OF 'KILL, KILL' ETC,
CONTINUING ...

HANNAH

Oh God, what's ... what's happening? They're coming for us! What are we going to do?

BENNY

What do we do? I think, on the whole, what we do is run.

AN EXCITINGLY PUMPING MUSICAL
SEQUENCE TO CONVEY DESPERATE
RUNNING AND PURSUIT.

THEN ...

SCENE TWENTY

FADE UP CALM AND TINKLY BACKGROUND MUSIC (THE SORTA MUZAK WHICH IS INTENDED TO BE CALMING BUT AFTER TWO MINUTES HAS ONE WANTING TO HIT SOMEONE WITH A PLANK.)

POSSIBLY THE QUIET GROANS OF THE WOUNDED, UNCONSCIOUS OR OTHERWISE, IN AN INFIRMARY.

- JASON (regaining consciousness) Unh ... mhn ... where am I? Tsk. I promised myself that I would never, ever say 'where am I' under any circumstances whatsoever, even if I really wanted to know where I was ...
- JANE (the tech from earlier) Try to settle down. From what I can gather, you've lost a lot of blood. Possibly it's all those bloodpacks and stuff plugged into you. You're probably delirious.
- JASON Am I? I feel - hey! You keep away from me! You're one of those Technical Services people, aren't you?
- JANE Look, I'm not going to hurt you ...
- JASON That's what that Turner guy said, right up until the point where he dragged me along to what he called a General Meeting. It was like Nuremberg with packed lunches. The next thing I know, he's denouncing me as a fifth-column spy and several of the buggers were closing in on me with knives. You just stay away from me!
- JANE Listen, I don't know what you're talking about! That had nothing to do with me, whatever it was. I came up here to the infirmary with Ron the hideous mutantoid, and I've been here ever since. helping out, you know? They're getting a bit short-handed.
- JASON Ron the hideous mutantoid?
- JANE Don't ask. Jane Peters.
- JASON Jason Kane. So I'm in the infirmary, yeah? What's been happening while I was out?

JANE I ... don't know. The comms went dead a little while ago. I tried the doors and they were bolted electromagnetically. I was just about to try and access the transputer systems ...

JASON Hmf. So, we have access to a terminal in here?

JANE Yep.

JASON So let's get at it. And the first thing on the agenda is to get rid of that bleeding muzak.

THE MUZAK STOPS LIKE A RECORD-NEEDLE
BEING FORCIBLY LIFTED, LEAVING A BEAT OF
SILENCE.

THEN -

SCENE TWENTY-ONE

THE 'CHOFF' OF A COMPUTER-ROOM
HERMETIC DOOR.

AMBIENCE OF THE COMPUTER-ROOM
CONTAINING MARVIN WE ENCOUNTERED
EARLIER.

HANNAH (out of breath) Did we ... did we lose them? I think we must have lost them.

BENNY (out of breath too) I don't think so ...

A HEAVY THUMPING BEGINS ON THE OTHER
SIDE OF A HERMETICALLY-SEALED DOOR.

HANNAH I think you might be right. (thoughtful) Something just took control of them. Took control of them all. So why didn't it affect me?

BENNY Because there's a way in which you're unique - one thing that sets you apart from everyone else here - and that's why we're *here*, in transputer-control. We need to access it, now. I need you to access MARVIN.

COMPUTER MARVIN (automatic) Good afternoon, Professor Bernice Summerfield. Professor Bernice Summerfield has no access privileges. Session ends.

BENNY I need you to access the damned thing and *give* me some bloody privileges!

(THE THUMPING FROM OUTSIDE IS STILL
GOING ON.)

HANNAH But why would you want to ...

BENNY Just do it! MARVIN can't hurt you, because he was created to *serve* you! First your father and now you. You have power over it and I need that power.

HANNAH Um, okay ... MARVIN, this is Hannah Glass.

COMPUTER MARVIN Good evening, Hannah Glass. Hannah Glass has no access privileges. Session ends.

HANNAH What?

BENNY What's happening? What's wrong?

HANNAH He - uh - it's not responding to me. The screen's just showing garbage. MARVIN, this is -

COMPUTER MARVIN Good evening, Hannah Glass. Hanna Glass has no access privileges. Session - bzzt -

MAD LITTLE COMPUTER VOICE
(supplanting Computer Marvin) ... doing over my dead dog, Rover, that I overcooked before ... -bzzt-

JASON (over comms-link, supplanting) Hello? Can you hear me? Benny, can you hear me?

BENNY Jason?

JASON That's me. Listen, I've managed to access the Drome control systems via a remote terminal. There's some incredibly freaky stuff going on in them, but I can't shut things down from here. The orders need to come from Central Control. That's where you are, right?

BENNY Yes, but access seems to have been wiped. We can't get in. is there anything you can do about that?

JASON I don't know, I ... no, yes, hang on. The command keys are still there, but they've been locked off. Keys locked up inside their own boxes, you know what I mean? Let's see if I can't ... there you go. See if you can access now.

BENNY Hannah?

HANNAH (urgent) MARVIN, this is Hannah Glass!

MARVIN Good evening, Hannah Glass. Preference of personal address: Hannah. Is there anything I can help you with, Hannah?

HANNAH Yes you can. Copy *all* my access privileges to the user Benny Summerfield, would you, MARVIN?

COMPUTER MARVIN Access privileges copied and stored.

BENNY And thank the Lord for that. Thank you. MARVIN, this is Benny Summerfield ...

COMPUTER MARVIN Good afternoon, Benny Summerfield. Preference of personal address: Hannah. Is there anything I can help you with, Hannah?

BENNY Well, for a start you can call me Benny instead of Hannah.

COMPUTER MARVIN Stored. Is there anything I can help you with, Benny?

BENNY Well, now you come to mention it, yes you can. I think its time we had a little talk ...

CROSSFADE:

WE'RE 'OUTSIDE' THE COMPUTER-CONTROL ROOM. A CROWD OF ZOMBIFIED PEOPLE HAMMERING ON THE DOOR.

(REMEMBER THAT THE CROWD CONTAINS DISTINCTIVE VOICES OF SOME OF THE PEOPLE, MALE AND FEMALE, WE'VE MET - THOUGH AT THE MOMENT THEY'RE PRETTY MUCH A HOMOGENOUS MASS.)

ZOMBIE CROWD The woman Professor Summerfield must be neutralised. She must be removed. The woman must die ... etc.

CROSSFADE TO BACK INSIDE THE COMPUTER ROOM.

(THE POUNDING FROM OUTSIDE CONTINUES THROUGHOUT.)

BENNY Jason was talking about the way in which the equipment here could house the world's first fully-operational God Box - and that's what happened isn't it, MARVIN? You woke up. You're a sentient entity, with dominion over all you survey?

COMPUTER MARVIN That would appear to be the case, Benny, based on the available data.

HANNAH Look, what is this ..? This is just ...

BENNY And furthermore, MARVIN, I suspect that you've been getting creative. You've been using your influence, taking control of people, moving them around like puppets to tell stories.

COMPUTER MARVIN That is my function, Benny. That is the function of the Drome. The Drome must produce stories. I have performed my function. I have made stories up.

BENNY And has anybody bothered to tell you that is wrong? Has anybody some much as *mentioned* that you shouldn't?

COMPUTER MARVIN Those data are not on file, Benny.

BENNY Well, I'm here to tell you now. You're not human, and I don't expect you to understand what it means to a human to be hurt and die. I'm not talking about the people who were hurt or died. What I'm talking about is imposed control ... MARVIN, Hannah gave me total access to you, yes?

COMPUTER MARVIN You have full access to my core facilities, Benny. You are logged in as root.

BENNY So what if I were to use that access to shut you down. Tell you to wipe all files and switch yourself off. How would you feel about that, MARVIN?

A BEAT OF COMPUTERY CONSIDERATION.

BENNY Marvin?

COMPUTER MARVIN I ... do not think that I would like that, Benny.

BENNY Well, there we are, then. So I'd stop it right now, if I were you. Find a way of telling stories without treating people as things.

COMPUTER MARVIN I will try to do that, Benny.

QUIETLY DESCENDING SOUNDS OF SOME ELECTRONIC PROCESSES SHUTTING DOWN.

BENNY (rather smug) There we are. Problem solved. It's a bit of an anticlimax, I suppose, but then you can't have everything ...

HANNAH Um, Benny ...

THE POUNDING FROM OUTSIDE HAS CONTINUED THROUGHOUT THE ABOVE. NOW IT COMES UP A BIT TO BE MORE NOTICEABLE.

HANNAH They're still out there. They're not stopping. It's not stopping ...

CROSSFADE TO OUTSIDE THE DOOR AGAIN,
THE ZOMBIFIED CROWD HAMMERING ON IT.

ZOMBIE CROWD She must be removed. She must die. The woman Professor Bernice must die ... etc.

CROSSFADE TO BACK IN THE COMPUTER-
ROOM AGAIN, WITH POUNDING FROM
OUTSIDE.

COMPUTER MARVIN The final programme is still in operation. It must iterate itself towards catharsis before reversion.

HANNAH Do what?

BENNY I think it means that the story MARVIN made has a life of its own, now. It has to reach some sort of ending.

HANNAH Yes, well, the only ending I can *think* of at the moment is when all those sods outside burst in and tear us limb from limb.

BENNY There has to be some other way to end things. There has to be ... oh no. Oh dear God, no ...

HANNAH What? What is it?

BENNY I can't believe what I just thought of. It's horrible. It's the worst thing in the world. And the horrible thing is that it would probably work.

HANNAH What are you talking about, Benny?

BENNY I'm talking about the only way I can see of getting out of this with our skins intact. I just *know* I'm going to regret this. MARVIN?

COMPUTER MARVIN Yes, Benny, how may I help you?

BENNY We need to end this now. I need you to fire up your control-processes one last time ...

SCENE TWENTY-TWO

CROSSFADE TO OUTSIDE THE COMPUTER-ROOM AGAIN, ZOMBIE CROWD HAMMERING ON THE DOOR.

ZOMBIE CROWD The woman must be removed. Professor Bernice woman must die ... etc.

A BRIEF REPRISE OF THE THROB-AND-SHRIEK WE ENCOUNTERED EARLIER, TO CONVEY THAT MIND-CONTROL PROCESSES ARE CUTTING IN AGAIN.

A SORT OF KRRKZ-ZAP! SOUND TO CONVEY THAT THERE HAS BEEN SOME ACTUAL TRANSITION IN THE ZOMBIE-MINDS.

A PARTICULAR CROWD-MEMBER

(the best singer) The Professor Bernice woman must die. The head must be removed from her ... hang on.

CROWD The Professor Bernice woman must ... er, what?

SINGER (speaking, for the moment) I've had a thought.

CROWD What thought is that?

(FROM THIS POINT ON THE CROWD BECOMES A MUSICAL-NUMBER CHORUS LINE.)

AS THE 'GOOD SINGER' DOES HIS SPOKEN-INTRO IN THE FOLLOWING, A PIANO STARTS TINKLING OUT THE QUIET INTRO TO A BIG-PRODUCTION MUSICAL NUMBER ...

SINGER (spoken intro) Well, I just really have to say,
That as I wend my weary way
Trough the world, I find the going very hard.

CHORUS LINE Ain't that the truth!

SINGER (spoken) All the people that I meet,
Filled with lies, hate and deceit,
Are forever trying to cheat with a marked card.

CHORUS Say it isn't so!

SINGER (spoken) But whenever I feel low,
And I despair of where to go,
There's one thing guaranteed to pull me through ...

CHORUS What's that, then?

SINGER (goes into song) With a little bit of luck, and not a little
perseverance, there is something that just anyone can
doooo ...

THE MUSIC COMES UP! BIG FAST
RAZZMATAZZ HAPPY UPBEAT NUMBER!

SINGER (sings) I'm putting my face in a Happy Place,
A place filled with butterflies and cake!

CHORUS And cake!

SINGER A place where no one's wives
Cut them up with big sharp knives
And you'll have all the fun there you can take!

CHORUS Yes sir!

SINGER A place where there are diseased rats
And people puking in their hats
Is really not the kind of place for me!

CHORUS You know it isn't!

SINGER So if you'll all take my advice
You won't do things that are not nice
And fill the world with jollity and glee!

CHORUS (singing, naturally enough, the chorus)
Yes, we're putting our face in a Happy Place
A place full of butterflies and cake ...

SINGER You know I mean it!

TIMSON (in old-thesp mode) With a little drop of claret
And my athletic young friend, Barratt ...

SINGER Just think of all the fun that we can make!

DANNI CONSART (completely out of her depth and nervous)

And if I think of ... things that I ... don't really know the name of ...

SINGER We'll all be there to help you, never fear.

POLLY AND MR DUNKSTROM
And if we feel we need a little time behind the sofa -

SINGER We'll all stand round to help you on and cheer!

A FAST AND REALLY TACKY MUSICAL TAP DANCE ROUTINE, WITH ONE PERSON DOING A BIT, THEN THE CHORUS LINE FOLLOWING SUIT. BACK AND FORTH FOR A BIT AND THEN BACK TO THE SONG ...

CHORUS Yes, we're putting our face in a Happy Place!
No happier place anyone will see ...

SINGER And we're never gonna kill someone with great big hammers
Cause we're putting our face ...

DA-DA-DA-DAH-DA!

CHORUS Yes we're putting our face ...

DA-DA-DA-DAH-DA!

CHORUS Yes we're putting our face ...

SINGER We're appending facial features!

CHORUS Yes we're putting our face ...

DA-DA-DA-DAH-DA!

SINGER, CHORUS AND EVERYBODY ELSE
(big finish) We're putting our faces in a Haaaaapeeeee
Plaaaaaaaaace!!!

ORCHESTRAL CLIMAX AND STING. STORMS OF APPLAUSE. THE CAST WHOOP AND HOLLER.

SINGER (Elvis) Thank you very much.

FADE OUT TO A BEAT OF MERCIFUL SILENCE. THEN ...

A BURST OF CHANNEL-CHANGE STATIC.

SCENE TWENTY-THREE

MUSICAL TAG TO CONVEY WE'RE NOW BACK HOME AGAIN ON THE BRAX COLLECTION.

'NEWSCAST' MUSIC, SLIGHTLY TINNY AS THOUGH FROM A HOLO-VID SPEAKER, WHICH CONTINUES UNDER:

NEWSREADER

... and in news closer to home, employees here in Drome Productions itself were assaulted in what has been described as an unprovoked terrorist attack. The terrorists released an illegal variety of nerve-gas which caused mass hallucinations. A number of people were injured in the confusion, but there were no fatal casualties. Here's Tom Grobley with the full story ...

THE HOLO-VID IS SWITCHED OFF.

JASON

Looks like they're going with the, uh, official explanation.

BENNY

Just as well, I suppose. Nobody would have believed the truth.

JASON

What, that you contrived to have a mind-manipulating transputer-system with a God-complex set the population of an entire planetoid singing and dancing around like epileptic, hallucinating loons? Where the hell did that come from, anyway?

BENNY

It was the only thing I could think of! Marvin's story had to end, somehow – and the only kind of story I could think of where people don't die was a whacky old musical! I can only thank the goddess it never occurred to him to do something like *Sweeny Todd* or *Les Mis*.

JASON

You know, it strikes me, things would have been a lot less complicated if we'd just thought to call in the Sector Security Service when things got really hairy ...

BENNY

It just never occurred to me. Simple as that. It was the nature of the Drome, I think - spend any time there and it rapidly becomes your whole world. You never think to remember that there might be a wider world outside. And I think, in the end, I ended up participating in the story in ways I didn't notice, bound up in its structure ...

JASON And that's the last thing we need. (beat) Oh well, I suppose I'd better check and see if we got any messages while we were away.

ANSWERPHONE-BLEEP.

MUFFLED GABBLE OF VOICES FROM THE ANSWERPHONE.

OMINOUS MUSICAL TONES COME UP.

JASON Oh no ... oh dear God no ...

BENNY What? What is it?

JASON While we were away, the population of the collection were hit by a Zardoxian love-beam. Half of everyone we know has kidnapped the other half, and they're holding them hostage until they requite their obsessive passion. There's a Golonian ship in orbit, demanding Peter stand trial for destroying several hundred of their religious artifacts the last time he screamed. Brax has shut himself away in his rooms and does not wish to be disturbed until, quote, 'I've completed certain nefarious plans that could very well destroy the known universe' ...

BENNY (gloomy) You're right about not wanting to get involved in any more stupid stories, Jason. It's the last thing we need. We get *quite* enough of all that at home.

THE END-THEME COMES UP AND PLAYS OUT TO ITS END. THEN –

A BURST OF CHANNEL-CHANGE STATIC.

THE END.