

PERUSAL SCRIPT



A Theatre for Young Audiences Musical
by
David Crespy

With Music by
Meg Phillips Crespy



Newport, Maine

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THE ZENITH ESCAPE

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THE ZENITH ESCAPE

CAST OF CHARACTERS (7 ACTORS -- 2 MALE, 2 FEMALE, 3 EITHER GENDER)

HANK HUNTER -- *overweight ten-year-old boy*

CICI HUNTER -- *his sister, bespectacled and undernourished eleven-year-old girl*

MOM -- *their mother*

COUCH POTATO 1– *a Creature of Zenith*

COUCH POTATO 2– *a Creature of Zenith*

NEATO KEEN -- *the Evil Game Show Host*

FERDY BEAR -- *a Cartoon Bear (can be played by actress playing Mom, or an additional performer, M or F)*

The Zenith Escape takes place in Hank & Cici Hunter's Livingroom in Suburbana, USA, and in Zenith, the world behind their television screen.

The Zenith Escape – Songs

There are songs that we have written for the show, and sheet music is provided for each song. Piano Accompaniment is encouraged, though a recorded track is fine as well.

#1–**Screens, Screens, Screens** – Hank & Cici

#2– **We Wanna be Entertained** – Couch Potatoes 1 & 2

#3– **Softie** – Ferdy Bear (in two keys in case he is played by a separate actor other than MOM)

#4–**Ferdy's Story** – Ferdy Bear

#5–**I am Keen** – Neato Keen

#6–**There's a Storm a' Comin'** – Neato Keen, Couch Potatoes 1 & 2

#7–**Vegetable Song** – Ferdy, Hank, & Cici

#8–**The Big Turn Off** – Ferdy, Hank, & Cici

#9–**Happy Endings** – Full Cast

NOTE: *The Zenith Escape* won the 1st Place Prize at the 2017 Jackie White Memorial Playwriting Contest at Columbia Entertainment Company competition in Columbia, MO, and received a staged concert/reading at CES.

THE ZENITH ESCAPE by David Crespy. Music and Lyrics by Meg Phillips Crespy. Either 6 actors: 2m, 2f, 2either., OR 7 actors: 2m, 2f, 3either. Simple or elaborate settings as desired. Works well in a found space. Contemporary costumes, and anthropomorphic costumes/props. (***Perfect for TYA companies with Professional, Amateur, College/University or High School aged actors.***) In this madcap interactive children's musical comedy, Hank & Cici Hunter are two kids sucked into the mysterious land beyond the TV screen: Zenith! Unless they save their Mom from the evil game show host, Neato Keen and his henchmen, the Couch Potatoes, they'll be turned into couch potatoes themselves! Many opportunities for the audience to be coached into the action onstage through Creative Drama techniques. **ORDER #3196**

A NOTE FOR THE PERFORMERS AND DIRECTORS – SUGGESTED AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

The Zenith Escape was created for Creative Theatre Unlimited in Princeton, NJ, and Laurie Huntsman, its artistic director encourages children's interactive participation in the show through improvised theatre games and creative drama exercises. The show works with or without improvised participation, but I encourage children's theatre makers to consider using creative drama exercises to get the kids up and involved with the play.

Smaller children watching *The Zenith Escape* may be prepared for their participation by actors performing the play (which can be played by performers as young as high school age). Depending upon which improvisations are selected, an hour or two should be set aside to prepare the children's participation. Some of these improvisations can be done on the spot, by the entire audience, depending on the size of the group. My suggestion is that a cafeteria or gymnasium be used, with the play taking place in the middle of a circle of children, seated on the floor or with mats, and aisles left for the actors to enter through the audience.

There are a number of points in the script where the children may portray the physical environment of the scene. These parts - sticky trees, growling animals, gigantic boulders, thorny bushes, flowing water, etc. - should be performed by younger children. More advanced improvising, such as the Tunnel of Dead TV Shows (have fun with that!) - might be more suitable for older children. The actors working with the children in the play should be the ones to prepare them for their work in the play. A scene listing follows:

- #1 Hank & Cici's Initial Descent Into Zenith
- #2 Mom & Neato Keen - Hank & Cici's Escape in the Woods
- #3 Hank, Cici, and Ferdy - Cliff-hanger Peak Journey
- #4 Hank, Cici, and Ferdy - Tunnel of Dead TV Shows
- #5 Hank & Cici Song to Turn off the TV

SEQUENCE #1 HANK & CICI'S INITIAL DESCENT

In this sequence the audience moves HANK & CICI through a whirlwind as they fall through the TV screen. They could be picture tubes which make strange noises and moans. They might lead HANK and CICI through a winding path around the room. If the children are old enough and can support the actors weight, HANK and CICI may be the center of trust circles or body rafts.

Children may be prepared by working on specific images and recreating them with their bodies. They might pretend to be the innards of a TV - perhaps by setting up a moving mechanism. In addition, trust exercises may be useful. Ideally the children must understand exactly how they should respond and feel secure in what they are doing.

SEQUENCE #2 MOM & NEATO KEEN - HANK & CICI'S ESCAPE IN THE WOODS

The audience portrays lollipop trees, sticky cereal briar patches, candy bar bushes, hooting birds, and other various gummy creatures. The idea here is to impede HANK and CICI in their

escape from the EVIL GAME SHOW HOST.

Children could work on sensory exercises in order to recreate the various forest objects, then give them a fun cartoonish or TV aspect. For example, the exercise might be first to portray a tree, then a tree made up of lollipops or sticky candy or made of licorice sticks. The trees could melt, transform, and be something else. However, the children should eventually choose a particular forest object, perfect it, and be able to reproduce it when called upon to do so.

SEQUENCE #3 HANK, CICI, AND FERDY - CLIFF-HANGER PEAK JOURNEY

HANK, CICI, and FERDY must struggle over 1) a rickety bridge, through 2) a terrible hurricane and 3) an earthquake. COUCH POTATOES 1 & 2 and the EVIL GAME SHOW HOST set up each improvised "crisis" FERDY calls out, while the COUCH POTATOES and NEATO KEEN sing song #6: "There's a Storm a Comin'." Each improvisation requires some coordination – the rickety bridge is two lines of children holding hands, and moving back and forth to create the sway; the terrible hurricane is created with the children vocalizing the noise of the wind, and waving their arms and legs like limbs of trees blowing in the gusts; and the earthquake is basically created with the children shaking and hopping up and down, as the little animals and forest tremble and shake with the ground.

Though essentially not different from the previous sequence, most of the audience participation moments in #3 are slightly more advanced. Thus the first three participatory sequences may be done with younger students and the last three with older ones. They might also be used in a progression of difficulty for a single age group. In preparation for this sequence there should be practice runs of the bridge, the hurricane, and the earthquake, with the intent of creating a certain effect instantaneously during the play. Of course certain points of any sequence may be cut for time purposes.

SEQUENCE #4 HANK, CICI, AND FERDY - TUNNEL OF DEAD TV SHOWS

This sequence is perhaps the most difficult, but the most fun in the humor department. Dead TV Show characters attack FERDY BEAR, HANK, and CICI. This sequence gives the children a chance to share their favorite TV characters and lampoon them as they like. Each of the characters should be different and evoke different effects in FERDY BEAR, HANK, and CICI. Preparation for section includes selection of known (or made-up TV characters), quick characterizations using easy physical posturing or popular character phrases, and practice. Once again the children must be able to do a character as quickly and as clearly as possible. Some shows are suggested in the script, but use the most updated TV shows you can!

#5 HANK & CICI SONG TO TURN OFF THE TV

This final sequence is a combination of vocal and acting skills in which both younger and older age groups may participate. FERDY encourages the audience to sing a song which turns the EVIL GAME SHOW HOST back into a TV character and turns him off as well. It is necessary that the actor portraying FERDY have sufficient vocal music skills work with the kids to teach them a short song. Perhaps part of the use of the song could involve dynamics, speed, and the use of consonants & vowels - in order to create specific effects.

THE ZENITH ESCAPE

(The play takes place in the center of a circular audience laced with clear aisles. Five actors race to the center from all sides talking, bleeping, buzzing, whirring, singing a collage of ad-lib TV commercials, cartoons, soap operas, game shows, or their opening theme music.)

(Two of the actors turn into a TV set and continue their banter sotto voce. One actor dashes offstage in a video frenzy - she will later become MOM. Two of the actors become HANK and CICI HUNTER.)

(HANK & CICI perform opening SONG #1 dancing around with their smartphones, pads, computers, TVs, etc.)

SONG #1 SCREENS, SCREENS, SCREENS

CICI:

WHEN I AM ALL ALONE, THOUGH FREQUENTLY I'M NOT
I TAP ON MY PAD AND THE SCREEN GETS ALL HOT
I LOOK INTO THAT WORLD, AND IT'S MAGIC AND IT'S KEEN
IT'S MY OWN HAPPY SPACE, MY OWN HAPPY SCREEN

HANK:

I DON'T NEED A FRIEND, I DON'T NEED A CONFIDANTE
I DON'T NEED A MOM OR DAD OR AN UNCLE OR AN AUNT
ALL I NEED IS A SCREEN WITH A WICKED LITTLE GAME
OR A MOVIE OR A BROWSER OR A VID THAT ISN'T LAME

BOTH:

OH, SCREENS, SCREENS, I LOVE SCREENS,
THEY COME BIG, LITTLE AND IN BETWEEN
SOME ARE GIANT LIKE MY DAD'S, SOME ARE TINY LIKE MY MOM'S
BUT THEY ALL ARE SO FANTASTIC, THEY ARE THE TOTAL BOMB.

CICI:

WHEN I'M WITH MY LITTLE SCREEN, I DON'T HAVE TO THINK OR SMILE,
I CAN CLOSE THE WORLD OFF LIGHTLY, I CAN DO IT WITH A SMILE.

HANK:

BUT THE THING THAT MAKES ME SAD IS TO HAVE TO INTERACT
WITH GOD, HUMANITY, OR NATURE – IT'S PAIN, AND THAT'S A FACT.
IF I COULD GO THROUGH LIFE, NEVER SEE A SINGLE FACE,

NEVER SEE A GRIN OR GIGGLE OR A MEMBER OF THE HUMAN RACE

CICI:

OH, I COULD BE SO HAPPY, I WOULD FEEL SUCH SELF-ESTEEM
IF THE ONLY THING I LOOKED AT WAS MY SHINY LITTLE SCREEN.

BOTH:

OH, SCREENS, SCREENS, I LOVE SCREENS,
THEY COME BIG, LITTLE AND IN BETWEEN
SOME ARE GIANT LIKE MY DAD'S, SOME ARE TINY LIKE MY MOM'S
BUT THEY ALL ARE SO FANTASTIC, THEY ARE THE TOTAL BOMB.

(HANK wields a remote controller, watches the set, a disgusted look on his face. CICI moans ecstatically.)

CICI: Isn't he...you know...just...awesome!

HANK: Oh yeah, yeah. Kissy, kissy, kissy. I love you, my dear!

(HANK gives CICI a nasty wet one)

CICI: Ewww....! Stop that!

HANK: Aw, come on Cici, this luvy-duvy vampire stuff is driving me crazy. I want to bite you in the neck, but first I'll whine about it for ten minutes and look all gooey and mopey.

CICI: Then don't watch it.

(Suddenly)

Don't do it, Alison! Don't do it!

HANK: This stuff has got ta go!

(HANK flips the remote)

There.

CICI: *(turns around, furious)* Hank! That was not fair. It's my turn to choose. I watched that stupid Tokemon Show.

HANK: Tokemon is a good show. Your show is dumb.

CICI: But Alison was about to succumb to Troy Swellness, debonair vampire brother of Norma Snodgrass who was killed in a car crash with a yoga teacher who was dying of liver disease.

HANK: Cut me a break, Cici. Can't you forget these mushy shows?

CICI: Who's the oldest around here?

HANK: Just because you're older doesn't mean you get first choice. I should choose, since you pick shows with all that kissy kissy kiss stuff. Let me kiss you, muwa, muwa, muwa...!

CICI: Eeeeeewww! And YOU pick better shows? Tokemon? Pakuton? Pokemabutt? Give me that remote.

HANK: It's my remote.

CICI: Oh yeah? Well, look out Hank, I got braces! It's time for the sinews!!!!

(CICI goes to bite Hank's ankles)

HANK: Help! Mom! Mommmeeee!

(HANK & CICI struggle over the remote control with CICI occasionally poking Hank in with ribs & tickling him. The two TV actors [COUCH POTATO 1 & 2] improvise the

following sequences as the channels are switched.)

CP 1: *(romance sequence)* Oh, Alison, I have always loved you. Always, always loved you!

CP 2: Yes, but will you love me after the operation?

CP 1: What operation?

CP 2: I've got a terrible case of...

CP 1: *(military sequence)* Hot dogs? You mean you brought hot dogs when you know the troops are starving here?

CP 2: But Sergeant Reilly, that's all the company cook had! I tried my best..but...

CP 1: Well, boy, it's okay this time, the men will have to be satisfied, but next time I want you to

CP 2: *(Southern fried chicken commercial)* act like a chicken and pick only the finest! Captain Cluck's Fried Chicken--the lightest taste for the most calories!

CP 1: Mmmmm. And I like it too!

CP 2: *(romance)* Please, don't force me to choose! I love you!

CP 1: *(Military)* It's either hot dogs or nothing, I guess!

CP 2: *(News)* Details at 7, 11, and midnight. Good afternoon and have a

CP 1: *(Alka Selzer Commercial)* spicy meatball! And boy is my stomach killing me! And I got this terrible

CP 2: *(Military)* Nerve Gas! It's poisoning us! Help! Quick get some

CP 1: pimples. You've got them, and you're probably wondering how to get rid of them. Well now it's time to try...

(Television continues quietly)

MOM: *(dashes onstage, soup ladle clasped in one hand)* What's going on! What's going on! Your father's asleep! Can't we have one Saturday afternoon in peace? Why don't you two go play outside?

CICI: *(dumbfounded)* What? You mean go out there? In the grass?

HANK: And move around?

MOM: It's beautiful outside! Don't you want to climb trees and play games in the warm sun?

CICI: Mom, it's windy out there!

HANK: Moving around? No way.

(HANK & CICI struggle over the remote control as before)

MOM: Stop it! Oh, that awful boob tube. That's always the instigator! And if it isn't TV it's a pod or a pad or whatever. That's it. The TV is off for a week!

HANK & CICI: *(freeze in abject terror)* OFF! NO TV? WE'LL DIE!

HANK: What'll we do for entertainment?

(The TV shakes in an electronic seizure. The TV actors frenetically scream language, throw TV tubes and circuits out to the audience)

CICI: *(ominously)* I don't think the TV wants to be shut off, Mother.

MOM: Well, for goodness sake, what's wrong with it this time? We just had it at the Repairman's. I'm going to throw this thing out in the...

(The TV makes TREMENDOUS SUCKING NOISES. MOM is drawn closer, miming the suction action of the TV)

Hank! Cici! Get your father! Call the Repairman! Help! Hellllllllp!

(MOM disappears into the TV. HANK & CICI silently look into the set)

HANK: I guess dinner's gonna be late tonight.

CICI: Hank! Mom's been sucked into the TV set! ... You shouldn't have switched the remote so fast.

HANK: Are you saying it's my fault?

CICI: Flipping channels like a maniac was not exactly the best thing to do to the TV!

HANK: You did it too!

CICI: Did not!

HANK: Did too!

CICI: Did not!

HANK: Did too

(Sucking noises begin again)

CICI: Did not!

HANK: *(another tremendous suck of the TV set)* Did tooooooooooooo!

(HANK & CICI fall into the TV set)

SEQUENCE #1 - Hank & Cici's Initial Descent -- *TV actors turn into COUCH POTATOES 1 & 2. They move the audience as they have been prepped.*

HANK: Look out, we're gonna get caught in all the whirligigs and wires and circuits in the TV!

(The audience members spin and crowd HANK & CICI)

CICI: Hank, watch out, you're getting stuck!

HANK: Wish I hadn't eaten all those doughnuts!

CICI: Hank, I can't see! Something is moving me!

(COUCH POTATOES 1 & 2 blindfold HANK & CICI and the AUDIENCE leads them along the space, moving and spinning them around in trust circle. AUDIENCE slows down the spinning, and gently plops HANK & CICI on the FLOOR)

CICI: I feel sleepy.

HANK: Yeah, sleepy...very sleepy.

(HANK keels over, dead asleep, as does CICI. AUDIENCE returns to their seats. COUCH POTATO 1 & 2 roll over and bump into HANK and CICI. HANK & CICI remain still a moment, then suddenly awaken, startled. CICI looks at the potatoes dubiously. A tropical sign states "Couch Potato Isle")

CICI: Hank?

HANK: Yeah, Cici?

CICI: Is it my imagination, or are two gigantic potatoes lying next to us?

HANK: Two gigantic potatoes are lying next to us.

CICI: I wonder what Alison would do in this situation.

HANK: Fall in love with them, AND have angst about it.

CICI: *(reads)* "Couch Potato Isle." Do you suppose they're edible?

HANK: I hope so. Think of all the potato chips you'd get from this baby.

(HANK touches the POTATO ever so slightly)

We just need a really big potato peeler...

(HANK touches the POTATO more firmly. The POTATO gets up, gives HANK's hand a tremendous slap, and puts its hands on its hips)

CP 1: Hey, buster, what's the big idea!

HANK: Yeooooow!

(HANK grabs CICI's hand and runs with her around the audience, the POTATO's in hot pursuit)

CICI: *(suddenly stops)* Why are we running? Potatoes can't hurt anything.

CP 2: I thought we were having a race.

CP 1: Cartoons are always so funny!

HANK: We're not cartoons. We're real kids.

CP 1: *(bursts with laughter)* Oh...ho, ho, ho, ho! Real kids!

CP 2: They're very funny!

CP 1: Let's clap, shall we?

(CP1 & CP2 frenetically clap and laugh)

CP 1: Entertain us, Cartoons!

CP 2: Showtime!

SONG #2–WE WANNA BE ENTERTAINED

CP 2:

IT'S A MOONLIT NIGHT ON A TROPICAL ISLE,
THE BREEZE IS BLOWIN, WHY NOT STAY A WHILE?

CP 1:

GOT NO TV HERE, WE ONLY GOT PALM TREES
BUT WE SEE YOU THERE, SO DON'T BE NO TEASE.

CP 2:

DON'T MAKE US WORK, WE LIKE TO LIE DOWN.
DON'T MAKE US UNHAPPY, WE DON'T LIKE TO FROWN.

CP 1:

GOTCHA CLEVER SMILES, GOTCHA SMARTS IN YO BRAIN,

CP 1 & CP 2:

COME ON NOW, BABY, WON'T YOU ENTERTAIN?

CP 2:

WE WANNA BE ENTERTAINED BY YOU

CP 1:

WE WANNA BE ALL SMILES

CP 2:

TICKLE OUR FANCY AND OUR INTEREST, TOO

CP 1:

WE LIKE YO' STYLES

CP 1 & CP 2:

WE WANNA BE, OH DON'T YOU SEE, WANNA BE ENTERTAINED BY YOU
(*Dialogue interlude*)

HANK: But we're real kids!

CP 1: (*laughing*) This is Zenith, nothing is real here!

CP 2: (*still laughing*) Nothing is real - not us...

CP 1: And most certainly not you.

CICI: What kind of potatoes are you, anyway?

CP 2: Why we're Couch Potatoes!

CP 1: We like to watch cartoons.

CP 2: And lounge on a nice soft...

CP 1: Overstuffed...

CP 2: Comfortable...

CP 1 & CP 2: COUCH!

(*End of interlude*)

CP 2:

WE WANNA BE ENTERTAINED BY YOU

CP 1:

GONNA GET US ALL RILED

CP 2:

MAKE US GIGGLE AND CHORTLE TOO

CP 1:

MAKE US GO WILD

CP 1 & CP 2:

WE WANNA BE, OH DON'T YOU SEE, WANNA BE ENTERTAINED BY YOU
WANNA BE ENTERTAINED BY YOU
WANNA BE ENTERTAINED BY YOU!

(*End of song. COUCN POTATO's maniacally chase the HANK & CICI again, but are soon out of breath.*)

CP 2: I can't run any more! I need a couch.

CP 1: And a nice fat pillow.

CP 2: And a nice shiny screen to watch!

CP 1: And mounds of chips! And dip!

CP 2: Corn chips, of course.

CP 1: We aren't cannibals, you know.

CICI: You sound...kinda...like us.

CP 1 & CP 2: We used to be just like you...

(*COUCH POTATO's giggle maliciously*)

CICI: (*looking closer at CP1*) You...your face! You look like my friend Tony...

CP 1: Don't be ridiculous! Potatoes don't have faces.

CP 2: Of course we have eyes.

CP 1: Oh, loads of those.

CICI: You are Tony! You're Tony Stein!

CP 1: Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, don't say that! Don't say that name to me!

CP 2: Too real!

CP 1: TOO REAL!!!

CP 2: You're not cartoons! You should go!

CP 1: Go now –

CP 2: Before Neato Keen comes.

HANK: Neato Keen? Who's that?

CP 1: The Evil Game Show Host, Our Lord of Zenith!

CICI: How do we get out of here?

CP 2: A very good question.

(Both COUCH POTATO's clap)

CP 1: Most provoking.

CP 2: And challenging

CP 1: A Jeopardy question!

(they chortle merrily)

HANK: You guys talk too much. Just tell us how to get out of here.

CP 1: No need to get huffy!

CP 2: No need to get stuffy!

CP 1: All you have to do is...

CP1 & CP 2: Stop watching.

HANK: We aren't watching TV.

CP 1: No, not now...you *are* the TV!

CP 2: And the Show is you!

(The COUCH POTATO's laugh hysterically. There is a loud blast of game show music)

CP 1: Too late!

FEMALE ANNOUNCER: *(played by Mom)* It's time for...THE SQUEAL OF FORTUNE! The show that's always fun, always exciting, loads of laughs, and has very, very high ratings. Now here's your charming host himself, Mr. Neato Keen!

HANK: Cici, we're on Squeal of Fortune!

CICI: Awesome! I always wanted to get on this show! Look, it's him!

(NEATO KEEN jogs on smartly waving to the audience, smiling stiffly. His suit shines, his make-up glows, his hair is literally made of plastic. NEATO KEEN waves APPLAUSE signs which he pulls out of his suit pocket. The COUCH POTATO's encourage the audience to applaud as well.)

NEATO KEEN: Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

(as the audience dies down)

No! Don't...stop! Don't...stop! Don't...stop! Don't stop, don't stop, don't...

(Audience continues to applaud)

SONG #3–I AM KEEN

NEATO KEEN:

I AM KEEN! I'M NEATO KEEN!
I'M A SMARMY, SWANK CHAP WHO LOOKS AWFULLY SNAP AS I HAPPILY PREEN.
I AM KEEN! I'M NEATO KEEN!
AND I'LL GIVE YOU YOUR DREAMS, THEN I'LL TAKE THEM AWAY,
YES IT'S SLIGHTLY OBSCENE.
I AM KEEN! I'M NEATO KEEN!
AND MY WORLD'S FAKE AND FALSE, AND IT'S LOUSY WITH SCHMALTZ,
AND IT HAS A PECULIAR SHEEN
I AM KEEN! NEATO KEEN!
YOU WANT WHAT YOU WANT. YOU'LL GET WHAT YOU WANT.
AND THEN I'LL MAKE YOU SCREAM!
OH, I HAD A VISION SUBLIME WHEN I WAS EIGHT OR NINE
THAT THE WORLD WOULD BE FILLED WITH CANDY AND CAKE
AND ALL OF IT, ALL OF IT WAS MINE TO TAKE
AND LOTS OF TV, MY FAVORITE SHOWS
WOULD BE ON ALL THE TIME, WOULDN'T THAT BE SO FINE?
BUT NO – NO IT JUST COULDN'T BE, I WAS TOO SMALL, TOO SQUEE
SO THEY TOOK IT FROM ME
THE GROWNUPS, THE TEACHERS, THE PEARL-CLUTCHING PREACHERS,
THEY TOOK IT FROM ME!

(Spoken) But I swore to myself that someday, when I grew up, when I became the big dog, not the pup, I would make my own world guaranteed to appeal, filled with sweets, treats and TV, but nothing too real!
WELCOME TO MY WORLD!

THE WORLD OF KEEN! I'M NEATO KEEN!
I AM SMART AND MY EVIL IS ART BUT MY PRIDE DOTH OVERWEEN.
I AM KEEN! I'M NEATO KEEN!
I HATE PRISSIES, DO-GOODERS, AND POSERS,
EXCUSE ME WHILE I VENT MY SPLEEN!
I AM KEEN! I'M NEATO KEEN!
I AM WEASLEY, ATROCIOUS, I'M BEASTLY, FEROCIOUS,
AND I HAVE HAD TOO MUCH CAFFEINE!
I AM KEEN! NEATO KEEN!
BE FAKE, DON'T BE REAL, YOUR SOUL I WILL STEAL,
BECAUSE I'M REALLY MEAN!
I AM KEEN! I AM KEEN! I AM SUPER DUPER NEATO KEEN!
MWAH HA HA HA HAH!!!

(End of Song)

NEATO KEEN: Thank you, thank you, thank you, and welcome to The SQUEAL OF FORTUNE! The show where two lucky, contestants beat the clock in a test of courage, daring, and pure mindless competition. Hey! We're ready to have fun now, aren't we, everyone! No more reality for this crew! Tonight, these two children, Cici and Hank Hunter from [insert local town] are going to try their best to save their mother from...get this...that handsome guy...TROY SWELLNESS.

CICI: (squeals) You mean Troy Swellness, the star of The Young And The Useless?

NEATO KEEN: That's right, Cici – Troy Swellness!

(CICI squeals again)

And just listen to that little girl squeal! That's what we want to hear on THE SQUEAL OF FORTUNE.

Cici, we all know how important your Vampire soap operas are to you - but are they as important as YOUR MOTHER'S LIFE?

CICI: What do you mean?

NEATO KEEN: Here's the dealio, kids. You have just 45 minutes to get to the top of Cliff-hanger Peak and save your mother from being killed by Troy Swellness.

HANK: What happens if we don't find her in time?

NEATO KEEN: (*puts his arm around HANK*) Well, Hank, here's the catch. If you don't save your mom by Prime Time, you'll both be TURNED INTO COUCH POTATOES AND BE MY SLAVES.

CICI: Just like Tony Stein!

HANK: But we don't want to be Couch Potatoes!

NEATO KEEN: You've been acting like couch potatoes for years now – I'm just making it official! As I was saying, you will become my couch potato slaves...and your mother will be written out of the show forever!

(encourages the audience to cheer using his cards)

HEY! HEY! ALRIGHT!!!

(NEATO catches his breath)

What an audience! What an audience!

(The COUCH POTATO's fan the audience in applause. NEATO KEEN holds up his applause signs.)

Over the next forty-five minutes, you two will hear three tones. After the third tone you will become COUCH POTATOES.

CP1 & CP 2: Just like us!

CICI: We only have forty-five minutes? We don't even know where she is!

NEATO KEEN: Your mom is WAY UP OVER THERE - ON CANCELLATION MOUNTAIN, BEHIND RE-RUN RIVER!

MOM: (*offstage, faintly weakly*) Help! Help! My children couldn't stop watching television and now I'm going to be written off the show forever...ever...ever...ever...

(cheesy echo effect)

NEATO KEEN: So good luck to you two contestants - you're going to need it!

CP 1: And to get to Cliff-hanger Peak you have to go through the TUNNEL OF DEAD TV SHOWS!!!!

HANK & CICI: DEAD TV SHOWS?

NEATO KEEN: Yes! Shows that were cancelled because of bad ratings! How are my ratings? Couch Potatoes! My ratings!!

CP 1: (*grabbing a computer printout*) Oh, very good, your evilness! Your ratings are up!

CP 2: Way up, your sliminess!

HANK: We're gonna get our mother back and we won't be your couch potatoes!

CICI: Yeah, and you know, you don't look anything like you do on TV!

HANK: You wear too much makeup! You're plastic!

CICI: And what's that big button on your back?

NEATO KEEN: (*genuinely horrified*) What are you little beasts saying? This is national television. We're all having fun, fun, fun, get it? Fun! Where's my mirror! My MIRROR! Now!

(The COUCH POTATO's bring him a gold mirror with his photograph in it.)

Ah, perfect as always! You look mahvelous! You do, you really do!

HANK: But that's not a mirror...

NEATO KEEN: Quiet! It prevents aging. It's magic! Muwhahahah!

CICI & HANK: We want our mom!

NEATO KEEN: That's right! Use up that time clock! All right Everyone! Hey! Hey! You're a marvelous audience! I love you all!

(The COUCH POTATO's encourage the audience to applaud as Neato Keen holds up his little signs. He dashes offstage.)

CICI: We have a lot of work to do!

CP 1: It sounds exhausting. Maybe you shouldn't worry about it.

CP 2: Just relax! Look, we've brought you a nice stuffed chair!

CP 1: And corn chips! MMMMMMMMMMMMM!

CP 2: You look tired, Hank, wouldn't you like to watch Tokemon?

CP 1: Watch!

CP 2: Watch!

(HANK is drawn sleepily to the chair. He smiles sickly as he accepts his corn chips and positions himself in the chair)

CICI: Hank, No! Something is very wrong!

(CICI crosses to HANK, pulls him up and out of the chair)

We've got to save Mom. We've got to get out of here!

HANK: (*As he is pulled away - in a daze*) Captain Kirk...Crispy Critters...Tasty chips...Gummy Yummies...Use the Force, Luke...It's grrreat!...50% off!...Buy now...Have a Life Saver, kid...Tokemon!
I HAVE THE POWER!

CICI: (*pulling him along*) I wish you'd HAVE THE POWER to move, HANK! Run!

SEQUENCE #2 - HANK & CICI's Escape in the Woods

CP 1: Stay here with us! We need company!

(To audience)

Everyone - become a forest...

CP 2: of Freeze-dried Trees and Candy Bar Bushes!

CP 1: Sticky Cereal Briars and Gummy Creatures of the Night!

(The audience grabs, hangs on CICI & HANK as they make their way through the audience. HANK & CICI finally collapse)

HANK: No, no, let me become a couch potato. I can't go on anymore!

CICI: Hank, you've got to keep going! We've got to save Mom!

HANK: I can't get through, everything sticks to you in this forest.

CICI: That's because everything in this forest is made of rancid sugar.

HANK: I'm so weak. I should have joined the soccer team when they asked me to, but...

CICI: How could you when your favorite TV shows were on? We're never going to get to Cancellation Mountain. It's so far away.

FERDY BEAR: *(O.S.)* Growlllll! Yo! You don't want to go to Cancellation Mountain - that place is haunted like crazy! Snarl!!!!

CICI: Hank, how do you know that it's haunted?

HANK: I didn't say anything. And are you snarling?

CICI: No. And if you didn't say anything ...who did?

FERDY: *(O.S.)* Growlllll! Snarf! Yalp! Growlllllll!

(FERDY, a scruffy looking bear, jumps them)

Hey! I did! Don't worry, you two, I'm not gonna

(snaps at them)

bite cha! Tee Hee.

(serious)

Okay, you guys - now listen, you want to hear my a new commercial?

(FERDY does an awkward pirouette and sings:)

SONG #4 – SOFTINE

FERDY:

SOFTINE, SOFTINE, MAKES YOUR CLOTHES SMELL LIKE A TANGEREE, EEN!

SOFTINE, SOFTINE, MAKES YOUR CLOTHES SAY WA, WA, WOW!

IF YOUR CAR IS DRIVIN' KINDA TIRED AND SLOW,

A LITTLE SOFTINE IN THE TANK 'LL MAKE IT GO, GO GO

AND IF YOUR SALAD'S WILTIN' DON'T FEEL TOO DOWN

SOFTINE WILL KEEP YOUR LETTUCE FROM TURNIN' BROWN

SOFTINE, SOFTINE, MAKES YOUR CLOTHES SMELL LIKE A TANGEREE, EEN!

SOFTINE, SOFTINE, MAKES YOUR CLOTHES SAY WA, WA, WOW!

(smiles a beatific TV Smile)

USE SOFTINE FABRIC SOFTENER FOR EVERYTHING. AND I MEAN *EVERYTHING!*

(CICI and HANK applaud. FERDY BEAR bows, but rises sadly)

But it'll never make it past the censor. Let me introduce myself. The name's Ferdy. Ferdy Bear - if you couldn't guess. You can call me Ferdy, all my buddies do.

CICI: I'm Cici, Cici Hunter.

HANK: And I'm Hank Hunter.

FERDY: Hunters?!! GROWWWWLLLLL!

(HANK & CICI back away)

HANK: No, no, that's just our last name.

FERDY: In that case I'm pleased ta meetja, I'm sure. So why Cancellation Mountain? Don't you know there's scary things crawlin' around up there?

CICI: We have to go. The evil game show host told us...

FERDY: Whoa! Hold it! Mr. Keen? Does this have anything to do with that game show, The Squeal of Fortune?

HANK: Well, yeah...

FERDY: Well, I'll be seein' ya...

(FERDY backs away)

CICI: Don't leave, maybe you can help us.

FERDY: That Neato Keen is a pretty rough cat to be playin' mouse with.

HANK: He took our mother and now he's going to throw her off of Cliff-hanger Peak.

FERDY: You guys don't know what you're up against. Neato Keen is the Lord of Zenith - no TV Character can tell him what to do - even me!

CICI: We're not TV characters! We're real!

FERDY: Real? Oh, come on, nothin's real around here. Lemme look in your ears.

(FERDY peers intently into CICI's ears)

HANK: Why are you looking in her ears?

FERDY: Well, I'll be! No daylight. There's brains in there! Cartoon Characters have nothin' between our ears - so you see daylight. Look in mine.

(CICI and HANK look through either side of FERDY's ears.)

CICI: You're right! I can see Hank! Hello!

FERDY: I used to have brains, but I didn't use them like I should have.

HANK: So you're not real either?

FERDY: I was. Once.

SONG #5-FERDY'S STORY

FERDY:

ONCE I WAS A REAL BEAR, I LIVED IN THE WOODS
MY MAMA WAS A SHE BEAR, SHE DID ALL SHE COULD
TO RAISE ME LIKE A BIG BEAR AND CLIMB LOTS OF TREES
AND EAT LOTS OF HONEY AND FIGHT LOTS OF BEES.
THEN CAME THE SHOWMAN WHO SAID, "BEAR, YOU'LL BE A STAR!"
HE GAVE ME LOTS OF PROMOS AND A LIMO CAR.

I THOUGHT THE WOODS WERE BORING AND DIM.
AND HOLLYWOOD WAS CALLING, MY CAREER COULD NOW BEGIN.

SO I LEFT MY DEAR OLD MAMA, LEFT HER IN THE WOODS
AND TRUSTED MR. SHOWMAN TO SHOW ME ALL THE GOODS
AT FIRST I WAS A BIG STAR, HAD MY OWN BIG SHOW.
I WAS BIG TIME, BUDDY, BRINGING IN THE DOUGH,
BUT THEN I BLEW IT BIG ON AMERICAN IDOL – OH....
AND THEN, WHEN I NEEDED A FRIEND, NO ONE CAME TO MY SIDE, WELL,
I WAS ALL ALONE, HAD NO MONEY, DOWN AND OUT, BINGED ON HONEY
THEN THIS GUY APPEARED; HIS NAME WAS NEATO KEEN. HE SAID:

NEATO KEEN: *(spoken)* I've got a job for you, Bear, you can sell Softine!

FERDY:

HE TOOK MY HEART AND SOUL, AND HE CHANGED ME TO A 'TOON
NOW I SELL SOFTINE ALL MORNING, EVENING, AND EACH AFTERNOON.
BUT AT NIGHT I DREAM OF MAMA AND ALL THE PRETTY TREES,
JUST ONCE TO BE A REAL BEAR, AND CHASE THOSE RASCAL BEES
THE MORAL OF MY STORY IS LOVE THE WOODS YOU GOT
OR YOU'LL END UP IN THE GUTTER, AND THAT AIN'T NO HONEY POT.

(End of song)

CICI: It must be tough being a TV character, after you've been alive in the woods.

FERDY: The worst part is that there's no chance of getting to see my Mama Bear again.

HANK: Why not?

FERDY: Ya gotta do something real to get out of the Forest of Forgotten Characters. You have to do something that counts, if you ever wanna escape.

CICI: The Forest of Forgotten Characters. How sad. Wait! Why don't you save a princess from a dragon?

HANK: Or fight off a gang of galactic storm troopers?

FERDY: That's too unreal. There's a million scripts like that. Gonna be an intergalactic space war at 2:15. There's one one around here all the time. Boring if you ask me.

CICI: Why is that boring?

FERDY: Because it's always the same! TV characters don't have lives beyond the screen – we just follow the script and do what we're told. You two are lucky – you can do what you want to do - think what you want to think. You can make up your own stories. You have friends, a family that cares about you.

HANK: We do?

FERDY: Sure, I think that's the trick to gettin' out of here, as a matter of fact.

CICI: Well, whatever you're thinkin' of, you better come up with it fast, cause we've only got (fill-in) minutes left.

HANK: Won't you help us get there? We might lose our way by ourselves.

CICI: And then we'll become couch potatoes.

HANK: And our Mom will get tossed off a cliff.

FERDY: Really, I feel for you guys.

HANK: So you'll come?

FERDY: Nah. That's messed up.

CICI: Please!

FERDY: Well....all right. On one condition!

HANK: What's that?

FERDY: That you do what I tell you to do - no matter how strange!

CICI: Okay!

FERDY: No matter how weird.

HANK: *(nervous)* Okay.

(CICI & HANK look at each other grimly, then nod solemnly.)

FERDY: Let's get goin' then!

12 more pages to the end of the cliff-hanging, nail-biting fun!