

Virtual Soap

A Comedy in Two Acts

By Robert Frankel

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DEDICATION

To Charlie and Hannah, and cousins Gemma and Julian.

Story of the Play

Several years ago, Professor Flitcraft, a band of his college students, and his nephew Charlie discovered how to make holographic characters appear lifelike. They began using them in a local TV soap opera but now the college is getting set to close his lab down unless the Professor can come up with something new — and soon. The pressure builds when his wife Aunt Tilde, (well, not really his wife but that's another soap opera) has been seen doing weird things and a social worker wants to declare her crazy. Charlie and the other students hit upon their newest computer program, IMPROV, which allows the holographic characters to improvise their own scripts. So lights ... camera ... who knows what's going to come out of their mouths, especially at the all-important demo for the faculty! And the trouble doubles when Aunt Tilde and a schizophrenic jewel thief manage to sneak in with the computer characters with the police right on their tails. The result is a sidesplitting, scene-shifting, fast-action comedy. Your actors will love the opportunity to play multiple, wild computer/real characters in this soap opera within a soap opera.

Author's Note on Casting: With the exception of some of the obvious characters (e.g. Charlie, Professor, Lucy, Tyro, etc.), many/most of the characters can be played by either male or female actors, especially the Virtual Characters (or VCs). While a healthy mix of each is always nice, a predominantly female cast, for example, can work just fine. I've indicated suggested genders in parentheses below, with F = female, M = Male, and E = either, where there truly is no preference. In addition, many of the parts can and should be double or even triple-cast, particularly the VCs. See "Double-Casting" at the back of the script for suggested possibilities.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8-12 m, 12-15 f, 6-15 either. Much doubling possible.)

COLLEGE STUDENTS and ADULTS:

SLEEK: (f) Thoughtful student.

DINGY: (f) Ingenious, lacks confidence and stutters.

CRANIUM: (m) Haughty, brainy.

TIC-TOC: (m) Moody.

ROVER: (f) Cocky, fun college student.

CHARLIE FLITCRAFT: (m) College student and "adopted son" of Professor Flitcraft.

PROFESSOR ARNIE FLITCRAFT: (m) Professor of Computer Sciences at a university.

AUNT TILDIE: (f) Charlie's crazy aunt.

LUCY FARRELL: (f) By-the-book social worker.

LADY CHATTY: (f) Dean's wife and obviously chatty.

POLICE #1 & #2: (e) Policemen investigating neighborhood jewel heists.

THIEF: (m) Crazy jewel thief with two personalities named "Andy" and "Otis."

LILLY: (f) Vice President of OCN television.

FACULTY MEMBERS: (e) Extras as part of the "demo party" in Act II.

VIRTUAL CHARACTERS (VCs):

DR. TEEOFF (m)

DR. PLOTZ (m)

NURSE FROTHY (f)

NURSE GEMMA (f)

NURSE SCALPEL (f)

NURSE NURSE (f)

ANESTHESIOLOGIST (e)

JAN (m)

MISSY (f)

TYRO BLANK (m)

STRONGWOMAN (f)

LOUDLIKETHUNDER (m)

COW (e)

ODDBALLS #1 - #3 (e)

MARTIAN (e)

BALLERINA (f)

PARTY GIRL (f)

THIEVES #1 - #3 (e)

VC #1 - #6 (e)

JOURNALIST (e)

BUS CHARACTERS #1 - #4 (e)

PRODUCTION NOTES

VCs (Virtual Characters)

The VCs will always exit in the DSR area from behind a wall, or several set pieces (e.g. a table and a couch) which serve as a wall. The critical point is that the set cover their movements from at least the waist down. This will allow the VCs to slowly “sink” (do a deep knee bend) until, from the audience’s point of view, they have disappeared. At that point, if appropriate, they can crawl behind the set piece and exit SR for a breather or costume change. With the set pieces at least waist high, the fun illusion will be that the VCs have taken some sort of magic elevator down into the ground.

The VCs (except Tyro Blank) should act with a very melodramatic flair for maximum comedic effect. Their movements should be normal and human, but broad. Double-casting some or many of the VCs is highly recommended, as part of the audience’s entertainment is marveling at the different characters and fast costume changes.

Costumes

The VCs wear various shades of green (or any other consistent color) to make it easier to identify them as VCs. Costumes need not be elaborate, and character changes can be effected with a simple hat or other accessory. The college students are generally dressed in everyday school attire, while the adults are somewhat more formal, with the Professor and male faculty wearing sport coats and ties. Tildie can wear something wildly incongruous, and also requires a diamond tiara on her head throughout the show. In Act II, the three VCs who imitate the Thief will obviously need to wear the same mask and/or outfit as the real Thief.

***Additional notes at the end of the script.**

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: We are watching the end of the weekly university production on the local television station called, "Virtual Soap." It is performed by Virtual Characters - "VCs" - in the VC area DSR, and operated by five students seated with various computer gadgets SL. They are SLEEK, CRANIUM, TIC-TOC, ROVER, and DINGY. The SL table(s) are in shadow, with all five techies typing away quietly. The VC area is fully lit. NURSE GEMMA and DOCTOR TEEOFF sit on the couch, and NURSE FROTHY stands nearby. Each holds a glass of water. They are broadly-acted characters with little subtlety.)

DOCTOR TEEOFF: *(Stiffly and full of bravado.)* So, you come here often, Nurse Frothy?

NURSE GEMMA: *(With overdone sarcasm.)* Get a life, Dr. Teeoff. *(GEMMA overdoes a laugh at the put down. HE turns stiffly to her.)*

DOCTOR TEEOFF: Did I miss something here, Gemma?

NURSE FROTHY: *(Neck turns stiffly to HIM.)* Yes. Your brain!

(GEMMA and FROTHY laugh. TEEOFF puts drink down and stands.)

DOCTOR TEEOFF: Well, I guess it's past your bedtimes. I guess I am too much for you.

NURSE GEMMA: Too much for me? Too much for me? Too much for me? *(SHE continues repeating this through next lines as lights come up SR on TECHIES.)*

TIC-TOC: *(Exasperated to ROVER.)* Rover? Come on, will ya?

ROVER: *(Types hurriedly.)* Yeah, yeah. Look I'm trying a new program out here ... there!

NURSE GEMMA: Too much for me? That's a laugh!

NURSE FROTHY: You tell 'em, Gemma. I'm tired of these male boors.

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NURSE GEMMA: Right, I'm outta here. *(Stands up.)* Gotta get up early tomorrow. You know, Mr. Delaley is scheduled for open heart surgery at 8 a.m. I need my rest.

NURSE FROTHY: Oh, Gemma, you're so dedicated.

NURSE GEMMA: Goodnight.

(SHE glances at TEEOFF, slowly squats appearing to disappear elevator-like behind the VC wall or couch. CHARLIE ENTERS SL with a soda in hand and watches.)

DOCTOR TEEOFF: And you, Nurse Frothy? Don't tell me you don't want to stay up for some fun?

NURSE FROTHY: *(Sarcastically.)* Fun? With whom?

DOCTOR TEEOFF: Okay, go if you must. But you know I have an early surgery scheduled too. And — *(HE swoons to floor melodramatically. SHE goes to him.)*

NURSE FROTHY: What is it, Doctor?

SLEEK: Ready commercial.

CRANIUM: Readying.

SLEEK: Roll music.

ROVER: Rock and rolling.

(SFX: Melodramatic music comes up. FROTHY kneels and pulls HIS head onto her lap.)

NURSE FROTHY: Doctor? What is it?

DOCTOR TEEOFF: You ... you remember the aliens that ... that abducted me, Nurse Frothy?

NURSE FROTHY: Yes, but ...?

DOCTOR TEEOFF: Those five days they had me on board their saucer?

NURSE FROTHY: Oh don't tell me!

DOCTOR TEEOFF: *(Gasping and holding HIS stomach.)* Yes! I'm ... I'm pregnant!

(THEY BOTH gasp. MUSIC swells. His head falls back on her lap. She brings her knuckles to her mouth and looks wide-eyed with fear and disbelief at the audience. An ANNOUNCER'S voice is heard. Note: this can also be one

of the techies SL.)

ANNOUNCER: Is Dr. Teeoff really pregnant or is he just lying to gain sympathy from Nurse Frothy? If he is, is it a boy or a girl, or ... something else? And what of Nurse Frothy? Does Frothy still feel for her former friend, Dr. Teeoff? And if Frothy feels for this fella, will Frothy feel enough to fill in as his midwife during birth? And if you miss that frothy taste, come on down to Campus Dogs 'n Suds for a hot dog and a mug of ice cold root beer. You'll know why people say, "Dogs 'n Suds - they've got the best bark 'n bite in town!"

SLEEK: And we're out.

(MUSIC OUT. LIGHTS FADE DSR. TEEOFF and FROTHY rise mechanically, move behind VC wall, and make their standard VC EXIT into the ground.)

CHARLIE: *(Shaking head, smiling.)* Cool. I still find that stuff where the Virtual Characters go up and down in those tubes totally cool.

ROVER: Hey, Charlie. Well, they have to go down in those tubes - the action to create 'em is all downstairs, my friend.

CHARLIE: I know.

SLEEK: *(To TIC-TOC.)* That sound realistic to you? The Virtual Characters are sounding mechanical to me.

TIC-TOC: The VCs? Y'ever hear Professor Morris give his Latin lecture? Now that's mechanical.

SLEEK: I guess.

ROVER: *(Glances at watch.)* Oh man, I don't know when I'm studying for my calc test tomorrow.

TIC-TOC: You wanna hit the pizza halls, then the books, my friend?

ROVER: Yeah, I guess.

CRANIUM: Let's face it, kiddies. We'd have a better show if we had all day to write the dialogue for the VCs. But alas, we don't.

DINGY: C-Cranium s-said it.

End of Freeview

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