

The Tunnel Under the World

Screenplay by:

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Based on the story by:

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LOGLINE:

What if the world really is flat?

A chemical company corporate officer discovers repeating days and a tunnel under the city of Tylerton that leads out of town, into the unknown, where creatures lurk that play god with people and technology.

Be careful of the answers you seek for they won't be what you want to see.

Just because we can do a thing, does not mean we must do that thing.

How far is too far?

Groundhog Day meets Frankenstein meets AI, science fiction style...

The ability to do a thing is not nearly as important as knowing when not to do it.

Characters:

Regina Burton

Vera Burton

Gloria Swanson

Aaron Horne

Mr. Barth

Snack Vendor

Ruth Ann Mayland

SYNOPSIS :

Regina wakes from a nightmare twice and finds herself living the same day over and over usually without memory, until she falls asleep in the basement. She again wakes but this time is different. The daily newspaper depicts the date as June 15, the same as the previous day! Confused, she goes on to work, only to find evidence of the day's June 15 date even at work. Confused, growing more irritated by the minute, she agrees to meet with Gloria Swanson, who she barely knows, once Gloria realizes that Regina remembers the date if nothing else. As they get together for lunch, Regina spots a man she met the previous day. Aaron Horne, whom she knew as the representative of Feckle Freezer, is in a different roll, candy vendor at the local diner. She calls out to him but he flees from her. At Gloria's insistence that 'they' are onto them and will arrive shortly, the two women leave the restaurant, make their way through a nearly empty bar, and into a movie theater. Beyond the lounge, the movie room, the lobby, they go through the manager's office into a tunnel, and then to a small room with screens, chairs and table, and no one around.

Regina, determined to find out exactly what was happening to them, to the town, sets out to discover the truth at the end of the tunnel. The first direction leads to a dead end. Before they can explore into the second direction, two people find them. They are robots, amazingly human replicas, but robots just the same. Regina shoots one, admittedly by mistake, but in self-defense. Gloria is more and more terrified by the second but follows Regina this time as they head in the opposite direction. The second direction ends at a closed and locked door. Another robot, this one shiny metal and looking like a robot, traps them at the door. However instead of harming the two women, the robot, Mr. Dorchin in another life, gives Regina exactly what she is looking for: answers.

The robot opens the door and steps back. Regina stumbles through the doorway, across the ground which soon fades into a hard, smooth surface. At the edge of that surface is a yawning, dark cauldron of nothing: no ground, an infinite chasm at the foot of the mountain beside her. When the mountain moves and then speaks in a loud vibrating rumble, Regina has to fight the urge to flee. Dreading it, she nevertheless demanded to know the truth: Were the people of Tylerton human-or not, as suggested by the dying robot back in the tunnel room. If so, what happened to them all? And why?

The mountain, a full-grown man bigger than the entire world, the real Mr. Dorchin, towered over her. The air rumbled when he spoke.

He willingly spoke the truth that Regina didn't want to hear but she asked for it. The world was indeed flat, at least Regina's world. The entire town of Tylerton sat on a tabletop in a technology research lab, the inhabitants, all of them, were robots imprinted by the human mind patterns and memories of the original townspeople, all of whom perished when the Contra Chemical plant exploded! It was not a nightmare, it was a memory of the very last night she was alive. Every day was June 15 because that was the last normal day before disaster struck. The robot computers are reset every night at midnight so no one remembers what day it's supposed to be. The robot inhabitants of Tylerton live the same day over and over, forever. Why did Mr. Barth use technology this way, rebuilding and repopulating with robots an entire town stored on a table in the lab?

Notes: Taglines

Just because we can do a thing, doesn't mean we must do that thing.

Quote from Star Trek 6: The Undiscovered Country

Groundhog Day meets Frankenstein, meets AI meets Gulliver's Travels science Fiction style!

Groundhog Day meets Gulliver's Travels, Science Fiction style!

Teaser:

INT: CONTROL CENTER OF THE CONTRA CHEMICAL PLANT IN TYLERTON

Regina is touring the chemical plant listening to Mr. Barth's running explanation of how the completely automated plant works.

MR. BARTH (VO)

This is the heart of our automated facility-the computer control room. This is where the finest minds control, via the advanced computer system, the entire operation of the plant. How, you might ask.

TOUR GROUP

(dutifully, in unison)

How?

MR. BARTH (VO)

There is not a single human needed in this facility. Except for two people ensuring smooth operation, the entire plant is automated, controlled by the central computer and a series of robots, all of which has been imprinted with the mind patterns and memories of the people who once had to work in the plant.

REGINA BURTON

What? You did what? What happened to the people whose minds you stole? Where are they? I cant believe even you would do such a thing...killing people just to put a brain in a robot computer... taking jobs away from hardworking people...

MR. BARTH

No one was killed. They will be perfectly fine when they wake up. And no one lost a job. Each person gets a monthly salary now and don't have to work as hard. It's perfect.

REGINA BURTON

But...

MR. BARTH

No worries, Ms. Burton. We can
talk about it at a later time.
Now...in here...

Mr. Barth turns toward the next door. Regina mingles with the others as he leads the group out the door:

Fade out: into opening credits rolling over the images of the dream sequence.

DREAM SEQUENCE (NIGHTMARE) slow motion?

Massive explosion of chemical plant-

Shock waves flatten the town-

Regina Burton in her bedroom balcony doorway stares transfixed at the explosion and the shock wave driving dirt and debris toward her. It slams her through the bedroom into the interior wall. She starts to scream but it's too late as metal and wood drill through her, impaling her to the wall. A final piece of metal rebar drills through her forehead, pinning her to the wall.

FADE to BLACK

FADE IN

INT: REGINA BURTON'S BEDROOM, EARLY MORNING,

REGINA BURTON

No! No!

Regina Burton wakes screaming from a nightmare.

VERA BURTON (OS)

Gina! Are you okay?

REGINA BURTON

Um. Yeah.

Breathing harsh and ragged, Regina leaves the bed

VERA BURTON

Breakfast is ready. Are you sure you're all right? I heard you yelling, it sounded...

REGINA BURTON

Just a bad dream. I'll be right down.

INT: BURTON HOME, KITCHEN, MORNING

Regina and Vera Burton sit at the table, not eating breakfast. Vera pushes her food around her plate and Regina ignores her plate.

REGINA BURTON

It was just a nightmare—a dream. I dreamed the chemical plant exploded! Destroyed the town and killed everyone...

VERA BURTON

You did? I had the same dream. No sound. I dreamed something woke me up and then a quick 'bang—something hit me on the head. Was yours like that?

REGINA BURTON

Not exactly...Maybe there really was an explosion and it mixed in our dreams.

VERA BURTON

Maybe. It's nearly 8 am. You'd better get to work.

EXT: BUS STOP AT THE END OF THE STREET.

Regina waits for the bus, looking around the immediate area, and at the chemical plant visible over the rooftops. The bus arrives, stops, and several people exit the bus. Regina gets on the bus and chooses to stand, one hand on the pull handle as she continues looking at the city.

EXT: DOWNTOWN TYLERTON, BUS STOP IN FRONT OF THE CONTRA CHEMICAL CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS BUILDING.

The bus stops and Regina exits the bus, looking once more around the town.

REGINA BURTON
It really was just a dream.

The bus leaves and Regina goes inside the building.

INT: LOBBY, LATE MORNING, A NEWSTAND IS SET UP IN THE CORNER OF THE LOBBY

Regina approaches the newsstand, which sells tobacco and marijuana products, and snacks, as well as newspapers and magazines.

REGINA BURTON
Where's Ralph? I mean, Mr. Stebbins? I have never seen him to miss a day.

NEWSTAND MAN
Sick, Ma'am. He'll be in tomorrow. Snacks, gummies, cigarettes? Something to read?

REGINA BURTON
Gummies and a pack of Newports.

NEWSTAND MAN
Certainly, Ma'am.

The man grabs a pack of cigarettes and a bag of THC gummies and slides them across the counter.

NEWSTAND MAN
WE're out of Newports. Try these Marlins. They have an anti-cough agent. YOU know how regular cigarettes sometimes choke you into a coughing fit. Marlins won't do that.

Regina studies the unfamiliar pack in its black and yellow packaging.

REGINA BURTON
Never heard of them. In a world focused on eradicating smoking, the manufacturer came up with a new brand?

NEWSTAND MAN

Tell you what, since we're out of your brand, try these, on me. If you don't like them, return the empty pack. No charge. If you like them, simply pay it later.

REGINA BURTON

Deal. And I still want the gummies.

INT: CONTRA CHEMICAL BUILDING, ELEVATOR, MORNING

Regina and five other people ride the elevator listening to advertising jingles over the PA system.

REGINA BURTON

More unheard-of product advertising? What are Chocobites?

The other passengers shrug or ignore the question and the commercial jingles.

INT: RECEPTIONIST AREA OF CONTRA CHEMICAL TOP FLOOR, MORNING

Regina steps out of the elevator into her floor's reception area. Miss MaryAnn Mayland sits behind the desk, looking down at her cellphone screen. Regina nods toward the closed door of the boss's office.

REGINA BURTON

Do not disturb. He's busy?

MARYANN MAYLAND

Mr. Barth is out for the day. He will be back tomorrow.

REGINA BURTON

Why? He always comes to the office. He never misses a day.

MARYANN MAYLAND

I don't know why. His home called, that's all. He'll be in tomorrow.

REGINA BURTON

Maybe he went to the plant. It's near his house.

MARYANN MAYLAND

Mmm, I don't know.

Clearly bored with the conversation, Maryann focuses once more on her phone. Regina turns toward her office and spins back around.

REGINA BURTON

Today is June 15! Quarterly taxes are due. He has to sign!

MARYANN MAYLAND

(without looking up)
Can't you sign it?

REGINA BURTON

Yes, but it's his responsibility as Office Manager!

Maryann shrugs, more interested in her phone than the office.

INT: REGINA'S OFFICE ON THE TOP FLOOR, CORNER. MID-MORNING

Regina stands at the floor to ceiling glass window looking out over the town for several minutes and then sits behind her desk, putting the stunning view behind her.

REGINA BURTON

I should call the plant...

She picks up the phone...and drops it back down.

REGINA BURTON

Never mind. I'd rather not go back to that creepy plant-with its machines doing what people used to do.

She turns on her computer and opens the quarter taxes file.

REGINA BURTON

It is a tool. To make things easier not do them for me.

She glares at the computer.

REGINA BURTON

Why not just program the computers and robots instead of the Frankenstein touch? Transferring a man's mind and memories into robots and computers? It's just wrong-they want AI so badly?

She shakes her head and plunges into her work.

INT: RECEPTION AREA, EARLY AFTERNOON.

Regina slides an envelop marked *Quarterly Taxes* on the desk.

REGINA BURTON

Since Mr. Barth isn't here, we'd better take lunch in shifts. You can go first.

MARYANN MAYLAND

Thanks.

She grabs her purse from the desk drawer. Regina slides the envelope toward her.

REGINA BURTON

Drop this in the mail, please, on your way out. Oh, and...I should call Mr. Barth-did his wife say if he could take phone calls?

MARYANN MAYLAND

No. It wasn't his wife. His daughter called.

REGINA BURTON

I thought she was away at college?

MARYANN MAYLAND

She called. That's all I know.

EXT: EARLY EVENING, BUS STOP ACROSS FROM CONTRA CHEMICAL BUILDING

As Regina approaches teh bus stop, someone is screaming about a new deep freezer.

VOICE (OS)

Feckle Freezer! Feckle Freezer
Get yours today.

Regina walks past that bust stop to the next one a block away. A bus comes into view down the street, coming toward her. At the same time, a man runs up to her from around the corner of the nearest building.

GLORIA SWANSON
Regina! Regina Burton!

Regina slows her steps and looks over her shoulder at the dark-haired woman hurrying to catch up with her. She looks back toward the bus stop just as the bus pulls away from the curb.

REGINA BURTON
Yes, Ms. Swanson.

GLORIA SWANSON
Regina Burton?

Swanson stands in front of REGina, watching her expressions closely.

REGINA BURTON
Ms. Swanson?

GLORIA SWANSON
Nothing..

Swanson turns and walks away, shoulders slumped, into the crowd coming out of the nearest buildings.

INT: REGINA BURTON'S BEDROOM

Regina is awake, an electronic reading device in her hands. She keeps looking up, out the balcony window over-looking the whole town. At midnight, she drops the device, slumps to the side, rolls over, and instantly falls sleep.

INT: REGINA'S BEDROOM, EARLY MORNING

Regina wakes, screaming, from a nightmare and sits straight up in bed, breathing fast and heavy. Vera Burton runs into the bedroom.

VERA BURTON
Regina! What's wrong?

REGINA BURTON
(mumbling)
Nothing. Bad dream.

VERA BURTON

You scared me to death! Gave me a heart attack with that screaming.

A wail of sirens, a clang of bells-loud and shocking- the two women look at each other and rush to the balcony window.

They look down on a small panel truck cruising slowly along the street. Two loud speakers on top of the truck blare sirens mixed with loud, rumbling engines.

REGINA BURTON

That's against the law, Vera! They're playing recordings of firetrucks going to a fire!

VERA BURTON

Some kind of a joke?

REGINA BURTON

Joke? Waking up the entire neighborhood at 6 am? It's not funny. The police will probably be here any minute. I'm sure someone already called.

The truck stops in the middle of the block, falling silent for several minutes. Then the speakers crackle to life once more.

LOUD MALE VOICE (OS)

Feckle Freezers! Feckle Freezers!
Got to have a Feckle Freezer!
feckle! Feckle! Feckle!

Loud. Obnoxious, the jingle plays over and over. Faces are now staring out windows of every house on the block.

REGINA BURTON

(shouting over the noise)
What the hell is a Feckle Freeze?

VERA BURTON

Freezer. Some kind of new freezer.

The noise stops. The truck stays still and silent.

REGINA BURTON

This is some lunatic's advertising stunt? Unbelievable!

She yawns and turns away from the balcony.

REGINA BURTON

Might as well get dressed. No time
to sleep more now.

VERA BURTON

Glad they're done. I'll start
breakfast.

LOUD MALE VOICE

Have you got a freezer? It sucks!
If it isn't a Feckle Freezer, it
sucks. If it's last years Feckle
Freezer, it sucks! Only this years
Feckle Freezer is any good!
AJAX Freezer. Triple Cold freezer.
every freezer except a brand new
Feckle Freezer sucks!
Buy a Feckle Freezer right now!
Hurry up, hurry up! Hurry!
Get a Feckle Freezer right now!

The screaming stops again.

REGINA BURTON

I think we need to call the police
about...

LOUD MALE VOICE

Feckle! Feckle! Feckle!
Cheap freezers ruin the food! You
get sick and die!
Buy a Feckle! Buy a Feckle!

Regina closes the balcony sliding glass door but the shrill
voice still penetrates—

LOUD MALE VOICE

Meat from your freezer is rotten,
moldy!
Do you want to eat rotton fucking
food?
Buy a Feckle, Feckle, Feckle!

Regina dials 911 on her cellphone and gets a busy signal. She
calls again and the noise stops. She looks out the balcony
door, up and down the street. The truck is gone.

INT: CRYSTAL CAFE: MORNING: HOT INSIDE: MOSTLY RED AND YELLOW DECOR

Regina sits at a table, an empty milkshake glass in front of
her. The waiter places a second milkshake next to it.

The bell over the front door jingles. A man enters, looks around, spots REGina and crosses the room. Regina stands up, watching the newcomer-well-dressed in casual business attire, he's handsome, with a confident manner.

AARON HORNE

Ms. Burton-thank you for meeting with me after that obnoxious incident this morning.

REGINA BURTON

No problem. Please sit, Mr.?

AARON HORNE

Aaron Horner.

He shakes her hand and sits across from her.

REGINA BURTON

It was annoying-no, it angered me to be woken up and hour early but that-cacophony of noise, Mr. Horne

AARON HORNE

That's a word you don't hear often, Ms. Burton-but, I understand. I would have done more than call the police. Please, call me Aaron.

REGINA BURTON

Regina, please.

AARON HORNE

Regina. A pleasure.

Aaron beckons to the hovering waiter, who immediately comes to their table.

AARON HORNE

Two filet minion dinners with lobster tails.

REGINA BURTON

Oh no, I can't..

AARON HORNE

Please, Ms. Burton-Regina. YOU must let Feckle buy you lunch-though they are getting off lightly in my opinion. The whole neighborhood could have a multimillion dollar class action suit..

REGINA BURTON

It wasn't that bad... a little noisy...

AARON HORNE

I knew you'd understand. It's a wonderful freezer so advertising gets a little carried away.

He clears his throat and leans toward her.

AARON HORNE

When corporate found out, they sent people to every house on the block to apologize. Your sister, Vera, gave us your number. Thank you again for meeting me. Truly, it is a very fine freezer, worth getting excited over. Ah, here comes lunch!

He sits back as the waiter places food laden plates in front of them.

WAITER

Do you need anything else, Sir?

AARON HORNE

No, I don't believe so. Regina?

REGINA BURTON

Uh, no. This is wonderful. Thank you.

They talk as they eat.

Aaron looks around the restaurant as though looking to see if anyone is listening and/or watching. He meets her gaze and leans toward her.

AARON HORNE

I shouldn't tell you, but... Can you keep a secret? I would do virtually anything for Feckle Freezers. It's more than an expression...You think I'm crazy.

REGINA BURTON

Well, enthusiastic, anyway.

AARON HORNE

No, don't pretend. You think I'm nuts. But, honestly, Regina, it's

(MORE)

AARON HORNE (CONT'D)
a great, reliable freezer. Let me
show you this little brochure..

From his inner jacket pocket, he pulls out a brochure with a picture of a chest freezer on front.

INT: CRYSTAL CAFE

Regina signs an order for a new Feckle Freezer. As Aaron Horne leaves, Regina looks down at her copy of the order form.

REGINA BURTON
625.00 for a freezer we don't
need..

INT: BURTON HOME: EARLY EVENING: LIVING ROOM

Regina walks through the front door, order form in hand. Vera comes into the room with a paper in her hand.

VERA BURTON
Do you think we can afford a new
freezer, Gina? There was a man
here apologizing for the rude
awakening this morning. We started
talking and..

She shows Regina the order form. Regina hands her own order form to Vera.

REGINA BURTON
They are persuasive, aren't they?

INT: BURTON HOME: LATE EVENING: TOP OF THE STAIRS TO THE BEDROOMS

Regina flips the light switch. It doesn't click and the lights stay off. She snaps it back and forth hard in irritation and shorts out the circuit. Every light in the house goes off.

REGINA BURTON
Damn it!

VERA BURTON (OS)
Fuse? Leave it till morning, Gina.
Go to bed. Get some sleep.

REGINA BURTON

I'll take care of it, Vera. Just take a couple of minutes. Go back to bed.

Regina gets a screw driver and removes the screws from the switch plate, leaving the switch hanging by its now dead wires.

In the basement, she finds a spare fuse. pushes an old trunk to the fuse box, and changes the fuse. Click. Power is restored and lights come back on. She starts toward the stairs. A shiny gleam gets her attention and she finds the gleaming metal bare spot where the trunk had been. Further exploration shows the entire basement to be constructed of metal covered by thin sheet rock and paint. The interior of the boat hull in the back of the cellar is nothing but metal braces and tubing.

REGINA BURTON

No seats, no engine, nothing. Dad built that boat. It was complete. What the fuck...?

She crawls under the boat for a closer look and abruptly stiffens and drops into sleep.

INT: BURTON HOME: BASEMENT: UNDER BOAT HULL: DARK EARLY MORNING

Regina wakes suddenly, tries to sit up and smacks her head on the low ceiling of the boat hull. She examines the boat, finds it all intact, everything there. As she goes back upstairs, everything appears normal, no visible metal anywhere.

EXT: BURTON HOME: FRONT YARD LOOKING AT THE FRONT DOOR: EARLY MORNING

Regina comes outside, retrieves the morning newspaper, and goes back inside

INT: BURTON HOME: LIVING ROOM: LOOKING OVER REGINIA'S SHOULDER

She unfolds the paper and scans the front page. The date catches her attention. June 15!

REGINA BURTON
Impossible! Yesterday was June
15th!

She looks at her smartwatch time and date.

REGINA BURTON
June 15, 6:25 am. What the hell is
going on? The time system is all
wrong.

Vera's alarm goes off. Regina runs up the stairs and finds Vera sitting up in bed, terrified.

VERA BURTON
Oh, Gina. I had the worst
nightmare! There was a horrible
explosion. Killed everyone, us and
...

REGINA BURTON
Again? Vera, something is terribly
wrong here. Yesterday was wrong,
too. I just can't...

VERA BURTON
Regina?

REGINA BURTON
The cellar. It's just a copper
box. Dad's boat isn't real. The
inside wasn't done...

VERA BURTON
What? Makes no sense. I cleaned
that old trunk out last week. I
didn't see anything. Are you sure?

REGINA BURTON
Of course, I'm sure. You can't
make this shit up! I used the
trunk to reach the fuse box after
the lights shorted out.

VERA BURTON
Lights? What?

Vera looks more confused than scare staring at Regina like she is crazy.

REGINA BURTON

The switch is bad. It shorted the lights. We lost power when the fuse popped. I went to the basement...

VERA BURTON

Gina, the switch is fine. Nothing happened. I turned the lights off when I went to bed!

REGINA BURTON

You did not! Come here and take a look.

She storms up to the top of the stairs and points at the light switch

REGINA BURTON

What the ...I took it off, left it hanging..

She flips the switch up. Lights brighten the stairs and both hallways.

INT: BURTON HOME: KITCHEN: MORNING

Vera puts breakfast on the table, pale and worried. Regina sits at the table, eating. She is confused and angry. Neither speaks, the only sound the scrape and clink of silverware on a plate. Regina stares at the date on the newspaper and then pushes the paper across the table.

REGINA BURTON

Look at the date, Vera. Yesterday was June 15! Not today!

VERA BURTON

That can't be. I remember yesterday being the 14th, Gina.

REGINA BURTON

Damn it, Vera, I know what I remember...but how can it be? A whole town reliving the same day over and over...for how long?

VERA BURTON

No, Gina, impossible, I tell you. Today is the 15th.

REGINA BURTON

Vera... oh never mind. I'm going to work since I don't have the luxury of being able to do nothing and still pay the bills.

INT: RECEPTION AREA AND REGINA'S OFFICE

Maryann Mayland yawns and tears the June 14 page from her desk calendar, revealing June 15 under it.

MARYANN MAYLAND

Good morning. Mr. Barth won't be in today.

Regina goes into her office and sits behind her desk. She grabs the stack of unopened mail and closes her eyes.

REGINA BURTON

Factory Distributors-an order for 20,000 feet of acoustic tile.

She sets the envelope aside and closes her eyes again.

REGINA BURTON

Finebeck and Sons-a complaint

Eyes open, she sets the Finebeck envelope on top of the Factory order.

She pushes the mail aside, some envelopes sliding to the floor. She turns on the computer, accesses the internet, and scans several news articles. Everything shows a date of June 15.

INT: REGINA'S OFFICE, DOOR OPEN TO THE RECEPTION AREA: NOON

REGINA BURTON

Miss Mayland!

Maryann Mayland looks up from her cellphone.

REGINA BURTON

Go on to lunch first, since Mr. Barth is not here.

MARYANN MAYLAND

No, you go on ahead.

REGINA BURTON

Please, go on and enjoy. Take a whole hour.

Regina looks down at the papers on her desk and then at the document on the computer screen. The phone rings and she answers.

REGINA BURTON
Contra Chemical-Downtown. This is
Regina Burton.

VOICE (OS)
This is Gloria Swanson.

Silence lingers until:

REGINA BURTON
Hello?

More silence and then:

GLORIA SWANSON
Still nothing?

REGINA BURTON
Nothing what, Swanson? Is there
something you want? Something I
can help you with? You did this
same routine yesterday!

GLORIA SWANSON
You do remember! Stay put! I'll be
there in half an hour!

REGINA BURTON
What the hell is going on?

GLORIA SWANSON
I'll tell you when I see you.
Nothing else over the phone. Just
wait there. Will you be alone?

REGINA BURTON
No, Miss Mayland will...

GLORIA SWANSON
Shit! Where do you eat lunch? Is
it noisy, crowded?

REGINA BURTON
I gues. The Crystal Cafe. It's
just...

GLORIA SWANSON
I know where it is. I'll meet you
there in half an hour.

A loud click and Swanson is gone.

INT: CRYSTAL CAFE: LUNCH HOUR

The Crystal Cafe now sports a blue and yellow decor. The inside is just as hot as yesterday, much hotter than the June sun outside. Piped in music plays a barrage of commercials after every song, commercials for Frosty Flip milkshakes, Marlin cigarettes...

RADIO VOICE

Choco Bites! Delicious and
nutritious! Your kids will love
them!

At the mention of Choco Bites candy, Regina looks up.

REGINA BURTON

Never heard of them, or Marlin
cigarettes. Or Frosty Flips—they
spend a lot of money advertising
things no one ever heard about.

She glances at her watch.

REGINA BURTON

Been longer than a half hour.

A young man walks through the restaurant carrying a tray of tiny, scarlet wrapped candies.

YOUNG MAN

Choco Bites are tangy!
Choco Bites are tangier than
tangy!

Regina is looking for Gloria Swanson. Behind her, the young man scatters a handful of candies across the next table, smiling at the occupants. Regina turns and recognizes Aaron Horne

REGINA BURTON

Why Aaron Horne!

He drops the tray. Regina stands and starts toward him.

REGINA BURTON

Are you okay? What a surprise!

He turns and flees. The manager glares at rEgina, who sits down and hides behind her menu.

GLORIA SWANSON
Regina Burton

Regina peeks over the top of the menu. Swanson slides into the seat across from her.

GLORIA SWANSON
We need to go! They're onto you
now. IF you want to stay alive,
move it! We have to leave now!

Regina glances at the manager but follows Swanson out the door.

EXT: SIDEWALK OUTSIDE THE CAFE

Swanson grips Regina's elbow and hurries her down the block.

GLORIA SWANSON
Did you see him? Aaron Horne with
his cellphone. Believe me, they'll
be here in 5 minutes. Hurry up!

EXT: STREET/SIDEWALK: AFTERNOON: COOL OUTSIDE

Busy street; vehicles and pedestrians traveling in both directions

REGINA BURTON
Why does it feel more like October
than June?

At the entrance of a bar, Swanson pushes the door open.

GLORIA SWANSON
In here. Go straight through.

REGINA BURTON
I've never been here.

Swanson shoves her through the door.

INT: BAR: DIMLY LIT: NEARLY EMPTY.

Regina rushes through the bar to the back door.

They exit the bar, cross the street to a theater.

GLORIA SWANSON
 Okay, we lost them. Almost there.
 Come on.

INT: MOVIE THEATER LOBBY;

Swanson buys two tickets and regina follows her through the lobby into the lounge as gunfire erupts from the movie room. A bored usher glances at them but turns back to the movie.

Swanson leads Regina through the lounge. Three doors, MEN, WOMEN, and Manager. Swanson listens and quietly opens the Manager door.

GLORIA SWANSON
 It's clear. Let's go.

Regina follows Swanson through the empty office and out through an unmarked door.

INT: METAL-WALLED, BRIGHTLY LIT TUNNEL: EMPTY;

Swanson hurries along the tunnel to a door that opens into another room with chairs, a desk, and television screens.

Breathing heavily, Swanson drops into a chair, wheezing.

GLORIA SWANSON
 We're okay now. They hardly ever
 come in here. If they do, we'll
 hear them and hide.

REGINA BURTON
 Who? Who are 'they'?

GLORIA SWANSON
 Martians?

She sags deeper into the chair, her expression morose.

GLORIA SWANSON
 Or they could be terrorists or
 aliens-I've had plenty of time to
 think about it since they grabbed
 you. Still...

REGINA BURTON

Back up! Start over. Who grabbed me, when?

GLORIA SWANSON

Do we really have to go through this again? Damn it! Okay, two months ago, you banged on my door in the middle of the night...beat up, bloody and bruised, terrified, begging for help!

REGINA BURTON

I did?

GLORIA SWANSON

You don't remember any of it? Just listen. You talked a blue streak about being captured and threatened; your sister being dead and coming back to life. I thought you were psycho. You begged me to hide you. We hid in the darkroom. It only locks from the inside. About fifteen minutes later, midnight, we passed out.

REGINA BURTON

Passed out?

GLORIA SWANSON

Both of us-like being knock unconscious, that fast. Didn't it happen to you last night?

REGINA BURTON

I guess it did.

GLORIA SWANSON

Okay, just as suddenly, we woke up. You said you wanted to show me something wierd. We bought a newspaper-dated June 15.

REGINA BURTON

June 15? That's today! And yesterday...I mean...

GLORIA SWANSON

That's right. It's always today, always June 15!

REGINA BURTON

Then, I'm not crazy, am I. You hid in that dark room for how long?

GLORIA SWANSON

4 or 5 weeks, maybe. Every day is the same, always June 15. Always, my landlady sweeping the front steps. Always, the same newspaper headlines. It gets really monotonous. Oh the little details of things you do and say can change, but when you wake up, it's always June 15.

INT: TUNNEL: THE SAME ROOM

Gloria Swanson is slouched in a chair. Burton stands in the doorway, looking into the tunnel.

REGINA BURTON

We need to find out what, or who, is doing what to Tylerton, to us. There is only one place to look-the end of the tunnel.

GLORIA SWANSON

It's dangerous. What if someone comes by? They'll see us.

REGINA BURTON

What have we got to lose?

GLORIA SWANSON

It's dangerous.

INT: TUNNEL

The two women jog along the tunnel, going more than a mile before the end of the tunnel comes into view.

REGINA BURTON

No one here to see us.

GLORIA SWANSON

The tunnel is only used at certain times.

They turn, heading back to the room.

REGINA BURTON

Always June 15. Why? Never mind how, for a moment. Why that particular day? And apparently, everyone falls asleep at the same time. And no one remembers anything.

GLORIA SWANSON

I was never so glad to see anyone as I was to see you, the next day. You were late getting back. I passed out. When I woke up you were gone. Then I saw you in the street but you didn't remember.

REGINA BURTON

YOU spent all this time looking for me?

GLORIA SWANSON

Like a movie. Hiding in the woodwork at night-sneaking out during the day looking for you-and keeping away from them. I know who they are, the routines...

REGINA BURTON

They? Who? Where?

GLORIA SWANSON

Aaron Horne is one of them. The man at the newstand in your building. There are more. They're easy to spot-they're the only ones that change roles every day. Everyone else, like you-on the bus at 8:51 am-everyone else does the same thing every day.

REGINA BURTON

What do they hope to gain?

They reach the door at the end of the tunnel. |Distant sounds reach them, faint, not dangerous. They leave the tunnel through the door, cross a vast chamber and climb a flight of stairs.

INT: CONTRA CHEMICALS PLANT

Machinery hums, motors rumble, emphasizing the lack of people in the facility.

GLORIA SWANSON

There's no one here...how are-

REGINA BURTON

There never is. The plant is automated-not many people are needed. The machine noise stops. The lights dim to barely visible.

REGINA BURTON

Come on.

Gloria Swanson follows Regina Burton through aisles of stainless steel columns and tanks, slow and quiet.

GLORIA SWANSON

A computer controls all of this?

REGINA BURTON

Not exactly. robots and coomputers imprinted with the patterns and memories of humans. These machiens habve the knowledge of th epeople whoonce worked in the plant. They have the knowledge and thinking ability of humans with out the limitations. they work 24/7, dont require rest or breakks or food. they dont overlook or forget anything. They don't make mistakes.

GLORIA SWANSON

I'm scared.

Faint sounds grow louder, evolve into voices. Regina goes to a door and looks around the door jamb.

INT: SMALLER ROOM, DIMLY LIT

A man or woman sits at each screen dictating notes into a recorder. Viewers dial from scene to scene. One screen shows a store with Aaron Horne demonstrating home freezers. Another displays a montage of kitchen images. A third shows a bedroom, its occupant sleeping.

The women pass unnoticed through the room to a larger room, empty but luxurious. Papers litter a desk, a computer in the center of the dark glass desk top.

Words on one page grab attention. Regina snatches the page and then another, reading them as Gloria rummages through drawers and cabinets.

REGINA BURTON

Damn it.

GLORIA SWANSON

Look!

She holds up a hand gun.

GLORIA SWANSON

And it's loaded!

REGINA BURTON

Good job! That gun will get us out of here. We'll go to the police-not Tylerton police, the FBI, maybe. Look at this!

She shows the first page to Gloria.

DORCHIN VOICEOVER

Test Area Progress Report
Subject: Marlin Cigarette Campaign
Although Test 47-K3 pulled nearly double the number of new users of any other test conducted, it probably cannot be used in the field because of local noise control ordinances.

GLORIA SWANSON

I don't get it.

REGINA BURTON

"They" aren't Martians or terrorists...they're advertisers! I don't know how they did it, but they've taken over Tylerton!

GLORIA SWANSON

What for?

REGINA BURTON

They've got us, all of us, some 30,000 people to do whatever they want.

Regina stalks around the room, waving the papers around.

REGINA BURTON

Maybe they hypnotize us-maybe something else. They bombard us with advertising all damn day. At the end of the day, they see what happened. Then they somehow erase the day from our minds and start again the next day with a different advertising scheme.

Gloria gapes at her, stumbles back, and sinks into a chair.

GLORIA SWANSON

That's crazy-psycho.

REGINA BURTON

If they know in advance what will work, they can drastically cut their advertising costs.

GLORIA SWANSON

So we, the whole town, are just a captive audience? Where's the popcorn?

Regina laughs and in a moment, both women are laughing hysterically.

Reality sets in and the laughter stops.

REGINA BURTON

Not exactly. YOU know how doctors test new treatments? Setting up a series of little colonies of germs and tries each, one at a time, changing it a little each time. That's us. We are the germs. They dont need more than one colony. They can use it over and over again.

GLORIA SWANSON

What do we do about it?,

REGINA BURTON

We go to the police. They can't use us, the entire town, as guinea pigs!

GLORIA SWANSON

How do we get to the police?

REGINA BURTON

This room is the office of someone important. We've got a gun. We'll stay right here until he comes along. And he will get us out of here.

Gloria leaves her chair and sits against the wall, out of sight of the door. Regina is in position behind the door.

INT: SAME LARGE OFFICE

Voices approach the door, growing louder: male and female.

MALE VOICE (OS)

...reason why you couldn't report on the phone? You're ruining a whole days tests! What the hell is wrong with you, James? I'm sorry, Mr. Dorchin. I believed it to be important

MR. DORCHIN

Important? One lousy unit out of 21,000!

JAMES

But it was Burton again, Mr. Dorchin. As quickly as he evaded us, he must have had help

MR. DORCHIN

It doesn't matter, James. The Choco Bite campaign is ahead of schedule any way. As long as you're here, come into the office and make out your work sheet. And don't worry about Burton. Likely she's just wandering around. We'll pick her up and...

The pair step into the room. Regina kicks the door shut and points the gun at them.

REGINA BURTON

That's what you think.

Dorchin stares at her.

REGINA BURTON

I've never seen a man shocked speechless...

James backs up a step. Regina focuses on him.

REGINA BURTON
Aaron Horn- or is it James what?

MR. DORCHIN
Is this the one?

JAMES/AARON HORNE
Yes.

MR. DORCHIN
Looks like you were correct to be concerned. Uh, you, Burton. What do you want?

Gloria Swanson emerges out of concealment.

GLORIA SWANSON
Watch him! He might have another gun.

REGINA BURTON
Then search him.
I'll tell you what we want,
Dorchin. Come along with us to the
FBI. You can explain to them how
and why you kidnapped 20,000
people.

MR. DORCHIN
Kidnap? Ridiculous. Put that gun
away. YOU can't get away with
this!

Regina raises the gun a little higher.

REGINA BURTON
I think I can.

Dorchin looks sick and furious but oddly not afraid.

MR. DORCHIN
Damn it! Listen, you're making a
huge mistake. I haven't kidnapped
anyone, believe me!

REGINA BURTON
Why should I?

MR. DORCHIN
It's true. Take my word for it.

REGINA BURTON

The FBI can take your word if they want. Now, how do we get out of here?

MR. DORCHIN

But you...?

REGINA BURTON

Don't get in my way! I will kill you if I have to! Understand? I've gone through two days of hell...and every second is your fault! I have nothing to lose. Get us out of here!

Dorchin loses all expression and appears about to move. James steps between Dorchin and the gun.

JAMES/AARON HORNE

Please -you don't understand. You must not shoot!

REGINA BURTON

Get out of my way!

JAMES/AARON HORNE

But, Ms. Burton...

Dorchin heads for the doors. Regina, pushed too far, swings the gun and pulls the trigger. James again moves fast between Dorchin and the gun. The bullet slams into his stomach.

Dorchin is out the door and gone.

The door slams shut. Footsteps race away, fading in the distance.

Regina throws the gun aside and hurries to James/Aaron Horne.

GLORIA SWANSON

We're dead now, Regina. Why did you do that? We could have gone to the police! We were almost free!

Regina kneels beside James/Aaron and feels for a pulse, lying flat on his back, legs bent at impossible angles. Only a small hole marks the bullet wound.

There is no pulse, on a rhythmical ticking of the fingers of one hand.

There is no breathing sound, only a hissing sizzling noise.

His open eyes look in Regina's direction. They show no fear, no pain.

His lips writhe erratically.

REGINA BURTON

He isn't dead. But he isn't alive either.

JAMES/AARON HORNE

Don't worry, Regina. I'm... all right.

Regina sits back and stares. A clean break of a substance not flesh exposes a curl of copper wire. No blood is spilled.

REGINA BURTON

You are a robot.

JAMES/AARON HORNE

I am. And so are you.

Gloria Swanson walks over to the desk and sits staring at the wall. REGina rocks back and forth on the floor beside the robot.

JAMES/AARON HORNE

I'm sorry all of this happened.

His writhing lips twist into a sneer until he gets them under control.

JAMES/AARON HORNE

Sorry-the nerve center-right where the bullet hit. Difficult to control this body.

REGINA BURTON

(deeply shocked)

All of us! My sister, my secretary, you, the neighbors-all of us are the same.

JAMES/AARON HORNE

NO! Not exactly the same. I chose this.

A pause, a deep breath.

JAMES/AARON HORNE

I was an ugly man, Regina-nearly 80 years old. My life was over. Mr. Dorchin offered me the chance to live again as a man-a young

(MORE)

JAMES/AARON HORNE (CONT'D)
 man. Believe me, I jumped at it.
 My flesh body is still alive,
 sleeping while I am here. I could
 go back to it, but I never do.

REGINA BURTON
 And the rest of us?

JAMES/AARON HORNE
 Different, Regina. I work here. I
 carry out Mr. Dorchin's
 instructions mapping the results
 of the advertising tests, watching
 you and the others live as he
 makes you live. I do so by choice,
 but you have no choice...You are
 dead!

REGINA BURTON
 Dead?!

She stares at the mangled robot. He meets her stare,
 relentless and unfaltering.

REGINA BURTON
 But... oh, the explosion...it wasn't
 just a dream, a nightmare.

JAMES/AARON HORNE
 the explosion was real. this plant
 caused it. The storage tanks
 exploded. What the blast didn't
 destroy, the fumes killed later.
 21, 000 people died in just a
 matter of hours-including you.
 Dorchin jumped on that chance.

REGINA BURTON
 He transferred people's souls into
 machines!. What kind of monster
 does a thing like that? Why?

JAMES/AARON HORNE
 Why? You were all dead, all of
 you. the whole town...Tylerton,
 exactly what he wanted-a perfect
 slice of America. And you were all
 dead! So, he had to rebuild it all
 and bring you all back...

REGINA BURTON
 But...how...

JAMES/AARON HORNE

It's just as easy to transfer a pattern from a dead brain as a live one. Easier, in fact. The dead cannot refuse.

Swanson turns around, facing the two on the floor, listening, his hands opening and closing into fists. He looks disgusted, opens his mouth, but no sound emerges.

JAMES/AARON HORNE

Oh, it took work and money, the town was completely destroyed. We rebuilt it quickly since we didn't need every tiny detail exactly perfect. And it only had to last for one day, the same day, June 15, over and over. And, if someone finds something wrong, the discovery won't have time to snowball out of control. All errors are canceled out at midnight.

REGINA BURTON

But...

Regina looks like a woman with a thousand question unable to voice any of them, even the one most evident.

JAMES/AARON HORNE

Always June 15, because June 14 is the last day any of you remember alive. The crews go at midnight, draining the memories, effectively resetting each individual system. Occasionally, they miss one of you.

REGINA BURTON

All of this just to sell merchandise? It must have cost millions!

JAMES/AARON HORNE

It did. And he has made billions from it. That's not all. Once he finds the magic words to make people act, do you believe he would stop? Do you think...?

The door opens. Regina bolts to her feet, aiming the gun at the door.

MECHANICAL VOICE

Don't shoot.

The newcomer is not Dorchin, but a shiny metal robot.

ROBOT

Forget it, Ms. Burton. You are not accomplishing anything. Give me that gun before you do any more damage. Give it to me, now!

REGINA BURTON

You...!!

Gloria Swanson slams into Regina, sending her to the floor. The gun flies out of her hand. Swanson drops to her knees.

GLORIA SWANSON

She would have shot you. Please don't hurt me. Let me work for you.

(she nods at James/Aaron)

Like he does. I'll do anything you tell me.

ROBOT

We don't need your help

It walks over, stands looking at the weapon, and abruptly turns its back on the gun, leaving it on the floor.

JAMES/AARON HORNE

I can't hold out much longer, Mr. Dorchin.

ROBOT

Disconnect if you have to.

REGINA BURTON

You're not Dorchin!

ROBOT

I am...not in the flesh, but i am using this body. You can't damage it with the gun, or anything else. Human looking bodies are more vulnerable.

Now, will you stop this stupidity? I don't want to damage you, you're far too expensive. Just sit down and maintenance will adjust you.

GLORIA SWANSON

You won't punish us?

ROBOT

Punish you> How would I do that?

Gloria stumbles back. Regina surges to her feet.

REGINA BURTON

Adjust her, if she'll let you-but
not me! You'll have to do a lot of
damage, Dorchin. I don't care
about the cost or the trouble
you'll have putting me back
together. I am going through that
door! You'll have to kill me to
stop me!

Regina take a step toward the door, then another, and a
third.

The Robot takes a half step..

Regina stands, shaking, in place.

The robot steps aside, between Regina and the gun, leaving
the door accessible.

ROBOT

Go ahead. No one is stopping you.

Regina runs through the door, slams it shut.

INT: TUNNEL OUTSIDE THE ROOM.

Regina runs toward the door at the end of the tunnel. She
stops at a window and stares at Tylerton sprawled out below
her.

REGINA BURTON

(whispering)
City of the Dead

She runs to the door at the end of the tunnel. No one tries
to stop her.

She stops in front of the door and stares at it.

REGINA BURTON

It's just a damn door!

She opens the door and steps into blinding, eye watering,
bright light.

Regina stands on a ledge of smooth, polished metal. The ledge drops into a vast empty dark space.

She leans closer to look down into a bottomless chasm that extends into infinity.

REGINA BURTON

Should have known there would be something weird—even a big deep nothing. Impossible!

VOICE (OS)

Burton!

The thunderous voice echoes in the endless abyss. She looks up, blinking against the bright lights at a hulking, black mass-like a talking mountain.

REGINA BURTON

(nearly a whisper)

Y-yes?

VOICE

I am Dorchin. Not a robot but in the flesh, talking to you on a radio microphone.

Regina stumbles back a step, unable to look away or respond.

MR. DORCHIN

You finally understand. There is no place to go. I could have told you wouldn't have believed me. You had to see it for yourself. After all, why construct an entire city exactly as it was? I am a business man. I count costs. If something needs to be full scale, I build it that way. In this case, there was no need.

A piece of the mountain moves down, becomes an arm and hand.

MR. DORCHIN

Poor lady.

Echos rumble through the vast endless cavern that is only a workshop.

MR. DORCHIN

It must have been a terrible shock to discover you are living in a town built on a tabletop!

INT: REGINA BURTON'S BEDROOM: EARLY MORNING

Regina wakes screaming out of a nightmare-incomprehensible, explosions, shadowy figures that are not men. And pure terror...

REGINA BURTON

Vera! Vera!

A hugely amplified voice howls outside. Regina stumbles to the window, shivers in an out of season chill from the window pane.

A sound truck idles at the curb halfway down the block. Speakers horns are blaring.

MALE VOICE

Are you a coward? Are you a fool?
Are we going to let crooked
politicians steal our country from
us?

No!

Are you going to put up with four
more years of corruption and
crime?

No!

Are you going to vote straight
Federal Party all up and down the
ballot?

Yes! You just bet you are!

