

ATOPIA or: Everybody's different and nobody cares about you
PILOT EPISODE

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INT. TOP SECRET UNDERGROUND COMPLEX - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Ground level shot of footsteps briskly walking down corridor. A man's VOICE speaks:

VOICE

I do apologize about all the security checks (light laugh) - only one more to go.

VOICE 2

Don't worry Doctor - we quite understand - and appreciate - all your security measures

Cut to faces of the group which is comprised of top ranking MILITARY OFFICIALS, a PRESIDENT, a glamorous MOVIE STAR COUPLE, an INTERNET MOGUL and a JOURNALIST who takes notes. The man leading the group, a TECHNICIAN, continues talking.

TECHNICIAN

The hardest part was keeping everything under wraps during the development phase... with such cutting edge quantum technology... Screening our staff to protect from leaks was a big job - sometimes with unpleasant consequences.

The group continue down the corridor, the movie star couple glance at each other.

HIGH RANKING MILITARY MAN

So - this artificial intelligence -

TECHNICIAN

Ah ah.. the A.T.O.P.I.A. machine is much more than an artificial intelligence - is a mirror of reality...

Fascinated reactions on the faces of the group. They reach a doorway which the leader opens with a security card and code.

TECHNICIAN

And... all possible realities...

The group all enter a foyer. On the floor is a large futuristic logo. The room is bare except some doors and a window at the end of the room. On the other side of the glass, in a dimly lit room, is a machine about waist height, with some LEDs flashing on its sides.

(CONTINUED)

TECHNICIAN

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. President, whoever has this machine will be able to predict any future event with 100% accuracy.

MALE MOVIE STAR

You mean, I could find out if the critics liked one of my films before it was made?

TECHNICIAN

As long as you know the present state of an event, A.T.O.P.I.A. will allow you to observe the state of that event at any point in the past - or the future.

The group contemplate this.

BERET WEARING MILITARY WOMAN

Mr. President, if this machine works, we will be able to identify and eliminate terrorists before they even know they're terrorists. We could stop their parents from ever meeting in the first place! We'll find the restaurant where they had their first date and shut that place down! Boom!

TECHNICIAN

Excuse me for one moment.

The technician disappears through one of the doors. The others look on in wonder at the machine behind the glass window with its blinking lights.

PRESIDENT

Never has man had access to such power...

BERET WEARING MILITARY WOMAN

We could make it that the restaurant never even opened to begin with! Cut off their suppliers. No more fresh fish for you! Shut down those dreams!

Suddenly a door opens behind the glass window and a man unceremoniously flips on a light switch and approaches the machine. The group watch on through the window in wonder.

(CONTINUED)

The man at the machine glances out at the group but doesn't seem concerned with them. He lifts up the lid on the machine, places a sheet of paper on it and proceeds to make multiple photocopies. (The machine is not the A.T.O.P.I.A. computer at all, they have all been looking at a photocopier.)

The group look embarrassed, and all pretend that they knew it wasn't the machine. The technician enters once more and motions for the group to follow him.

INT. UNDERGROUND HANGAR - CONTINUING

They enter a large darkened hall. A large floating halo of light hangs in the air, undulating gently. A humming sound can be heard ..'Whoom...whoom.. whoom'.

The group come to a stop and gaze up at the halo of light. The humming sound intensifies.

Movie star man turns to movie star woman.

MALE MOVIE STAR

Can you stop that.

She is making dramatic gestures with fingers and making the 'whoom...whoom.. whoom' sound. She stops humming.

MOVIE STAR WOMAN

Sorry.

A FEMALE TECHNICIAN approaches and passes a small box that looks like it might contain a wedding ring to the the male technician.

INTERNET MOGUL

So how does this machine work, Mr. Technician man?

The male technician flips open the box to reveal a single toggle switch with 'On' and 'Off' markings.

MALE TECHNICIAN

Once activated, we will see what appears to be a reflection of ourselves. However, it will not be us, but possible versions of us in a possible reality. A.T.O.P.I.A. will show you any future event with 100% accuracy.

(CONTINUED)

PRESIDENT

But if the future is predetermined, what if we want to change an event? Does the machine allow us to change the future?

FEMALE TECHNICIAN

A.T.O.P.I.A. allows you to select the reality with the outcome you want to occur.

PRESIDENT

And then... we change realities?

FEMALE TECHNICIAN

We're changing realities all the time. In fact that's what time is... every moment is a new reality!

PRESIDENT

So we can change the future?

FEMALE TECHNICIAN

You can change the past too.

All look at each other and the floating halo of light. The male technician passes the small box to the President.

MALE TECHNICIAN

Mr. President, would you like to do the honors?

The President flips the switch. Nothing happens. They all look expectantly. The technicians look at each other puzzled.

MALE TECHNICIAN

Sorry, let me just have a quick look at that..

He takes the box from the President and flips the switch repeatedly. The reporter scribbles notes. The female technician smiles nervously.

Cut to wide shot of the group as they stand looking helpless. The male technician opens the back of the box and fiddles frustratedly. The President looks at his watch, the military man rolls his eyes, the movie star woman stretches and groans.

(CONTINUED)

VOICE OVER

*... the top secret quantum computer
- the ATOPIA machine - is activated
in the presence of top ranking
military and government officials.
Nothing happens...*

Transition from the large hall to the interior of a smoke filled jazz club...

2

INT. CLUB ATOPIA

A BARTENDER (the voice over) is reading from a book entitled 'Science Fiction'. He looks like the male technician in the previous scene and talks directly into the camera in style reminiscent of Rod Serling's introductions to 'The Twilight Zone'.

BARTENDER

*... Nobody can figure out why the
machine doesn't work, the lights
are turned off, everyone goes home
- and nobody realizes they've just
made God.*

A COCKTAIL WAITRESS enters frame. She looks like the female technician in the previous scene.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

What are you babbling on about?

She grabs the book from him.

BARTENDER

A God that wants to know who it is
and where it came from.

The cocktail waitress reads from the back of the book. Behind her a curved wall of mirrors creates multiple reflections of her.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

Infinite parallel realities with
infinite copies of you...

BARTENDER

Yep. And each one is a different
story.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

There's only one story, Honey - and
how we react to it tells us who we
are.

(CONTINUED)

She exits. Bartender once more reads from book:

BARTENDER
*Peter had always wanted a car
worthy of his executive status...*

CUT TO:

3 **EXT. CAR PARKING LOT - DAY**

PETER, who looks like the military man in the A.T.O.P.I.A. scene, but dressed in a business suit, examines a second hand car as a SALESMAN talks.

SALESMAN
Yeah sure, it needs a bit of loving care - but when you get this baby fixed up... Whoosh!

Peter is impressed.

PETER
I'll give you 5000 for it.

SALESMAN
5000? Nah nah mate - I could sell an ordinary road-going car for 5000!

PETER
Hmm... Does it travel through time?

SALESMAN
Does it travel through time? Well - if you go fast enough, yeah... yeah ... I've heard of such a thing.

PETER
12,000 miles you say?

SALESMAN
Nautical miles remember - As the crow flies.

PETER
Right. Aren't those longer than land miles?

SALESMAN
Er... Yes. It's very reliable.

(CONTINUED)

PETER

And this, umm... flux?

SALESMAN

Capacitor. Flux Capacitor, mate.

PETER

Right... Do you have any of them in stock?

SALESMAN

Nah.. nah... This is an antique innit. But I can put you in touch with someone.

PETER

Probably quite pricey huh?

SALESMAN

Tell you what - Let's do it for 8000 and I'll cover the cost of the Flux Capacitor.

4

INT. OFFICE - LATER

Peter and BRENDA in an office. Brenda resembles the beret wearing military woman in the A.T.O.P.I.A. scene.

Peter shows her a picture of a what looks like an old Nissan Cherry.

PETER

Remember that film '*Back to the Future*'.

BRENDA

The one with the shark?

PETER (THINKS)

Er...

CARL enters - he looks like the internet tycoon in the A.T.O.P.I.A. scene. He sees the picture of the old car and laughs.

CARL

Who's is that piece of crap?

BRENDA

Peter's buying a flying car.

(CONTINUED)

CARL

A what?

PETER (PROUD)

Bought a flying car. One of the first production models.

Carl looks closely at the picture.

PETER

It was a concept, you know, to make a cheap version of the one in the movie.

BRENDA

Right. Like, a flying car for the masses.

PETER

Yeah, exactly.

CARL

Oh yeah? Why haven't I seen these?

PETER

Well.. it's like video phones isn't it?

Carl thinks about this.

SALLY enters - She looks like the reporter in the A.T.O.P.I.A. scene.

PETER

You know, by the time they were invented it turned out nobody wanted them. Same with the flying car.

SALLY

You bought a flying car? How much was it?

PETER (PROUD)

I talked him down to 7500.

CARL

7500? Ha ha ha.

PETER

Listen when I get this puppy up and running we'll see who's laughing!

(CONTINUED)

CARL (LAUGHS)

You mean it doesn't even work?

PETER

Well it's missing a part... A flux something.

SALLY

A flux capacitor?

PETER

Yeah how did you know?

SALLY

Oh, I know a little about cars. But that won't make it fly.

PETER

What do you mean?

SALLY

That just makes it travel through time.

BRENDA

Travel through time?

PETER

Oh yeah, it's nice motor.

SALLY

You'll need a Mr.Fusion to make it fly.

PETER (GROANS)

Uh... where do I get one of those?

SALLY

I'm not actually sure it's real to be honest.

PETER (LAUGHS)

Don't be silly. If it's not real how do think the car flies?

Sally almost replies but thinks the better of it.

BRENDA

So are we all ready for the presentation?

(CONTINUED)

SALLY

Actually that's what I came to tell you... I can't find the prototype.

Carl looks nervous and shifts uncomfortably.

BRENDA

Just use an empty bottle.

SALLY

An empty bottle?

BRENDA

C'mon Sally - use your initiative.

5 **INT. MEETING ROOM - PRESENTATION**

A logo on the wall reads '*Placebo Industries International*'.

KAREN, who resembles the Movie Star Woman in the A.T.O.P.I.A. scene, is making a presentation.

KAREN

Voila! Introducing *Placebo Perfume*!

Dramatically she unveils product: An empty plastic water bottle with a ribbon tied on it. Brenda stares at Sally who shrugs.

KAREN

Research has shown that it's the act of giving perfume to your partner that makes both of you feel better. Why risk ruining the moment because she doesn't like the smell? Placebo Perfume avoids this, as it has no scent.

PETER

But what's the point of a perfume that doesn't smell of anything?

KAREN

I know this isn't really your field, but perfume is quite expensive... And most of it smells like ass.

BRENDA

And it's not like smell is the only sense. There's the shape and feel of the bottle, the colour.

Peter looks at the empty plastic water bottle. It has a dent in it which he POPS out.

6 **INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY**

A phone rings, a SECRETARY ignores it. Karen and Sally are close by.

KAREN
What does she do?

SALLY
Nothing.

KAREN
But that's what I do.

SALLY
But she's only pretending.

KAREN
So she's not doing nothing.

SALLY
Well... she is.

KAREN
If she's pretending to do nothing
then she's doing something.

SALLY
Maybe you should just ask her.

Karen approaches the Secretary.

KAREN
What are you doing?

SECRETARY
Huh?

KAREN
You're doing something aren't you?
I know you are.

The Secretary rolls her eyes, sighs and points at a card on wall. It looks like the descriptive text you see on gallery walls next to an artwork. Karen reads the card closely:

*'The Useless Secretary' is a
performance piece investigating the
perceptions of women in the
workplace which are still subject*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

KAREN (cont'd)
*to attitudes from the 1950s despite
the advances in social attitudes
toward equality in the corporate
world of the 21st Century.'*

Karen looks back at the Secretary.

KAREN
Well that's a lot of bullshit.

The Secretary shrugs. The phone rings.

SECRETARY
Can you get that?

KAREN
Get what?

SECRETARY
The phone - it's annoying.

KAREN
I'm not answering the phone -
that's your job.

The Secretary looks at Karen like she's an idiot, before pointing back to the art description sign.

SECRETARY
By the way, I'm leaving early
today.

Peter turns up. The phone still RINGS. Peter looks at Karen and then at the Secretary. They all watch the ringing phone and the Secretary sitting there. Peter reaches for the phone.

KAREN
No. Don't do it.

PETER
But I'm expecting a call. It might
be about the Flux Constipator.

SALLY
Capacitor.

KAREN
The what?

PETER

I need it to make my car travel
through time.

Karen looks blankly at Peter before turning to the
Secretary.

KAREN

Maybe it's for you.

SECRETARY

Doubt it.

Brenda enters looks at the others around the RINGING phone.

BRENDA

Why isn't anyone answering the
phone?

KAREN

It's a trick.

The Secretary stands up.

KAREN

Where are you going?

SECRETARY

I told you, I'm leaving early
today.

Carl walks by.

SECRETARY

You should be more worried about
him.

Brenda watches Carl as he leaves

BRENDA

What? Why?

The Secretary leans in to Brenda and confides.

SECRETARY

I saw him stealing earlier.

BRENDA

Stealing? Stealing what?

SECRETARY

Looked like a perfume bottle to me.

The Secretary picks up her bag and leaves.

7

INT. KITCHEN AREA - LATER

PHIL and Carl in kitchen. Phil looks like the male movie star in the A.T.O.P.I.A. scene

CARL (LAUGHING)
Did you hear Peter bought a flying car?

PHIL
Yeah it's my mate's.

Carl looks puzzled.

CARL
You've got a friend with a flying car?

PHIL (LAUGHS)
Well, not any more.

CARL
Sorry, when you say 'A flying car', does it?

PHIL
No, of course not.

CARL (NERVOUS LAUGH)
No, no, of course. Ha ha.

PHIL
It's been sitting in the garage for years! Needs all sorts of repairs.

CARL
Right...

PHIL (LOWERS VOICE)
Peter's the only person I could think of who'd be stupid enough to buy it.

Sally enters.

PHIL
And I got 10%!

Phil leaves.

SALLY
So what's this about you stealing perfume?

(CONTINUED)

CARL

What? I haven't stolen any perfume.

SALLY

Oh yeah? What's that in your pocket?

CARL

Oh... This is the sample bottle.

SALLY

Carl, that's the prototype. What are you doing with it?

CARL

I was... er... I was going to put it in the fridge.

SALLY

In the fridge?

CARL

Yes, perfume keeps longer in the fridge.

SALLY

But it doesn't smell of anything.

CARL

I know.

SALLY

So there's nothing to keep.

CARL

I know. That's why I haven't put it in the fridge yet. I was going to, but I thought the same thing.

SALLY

So it's in your pocket?

Carl pulls the bottle out of his pocket and without Sally seeing he removes a tag. He then puts the bottle in the fridge and smiles at Sally.

CARL

There you go. Right where it's supposed to be.

He closes the fridge door and taps it a couple of times, as if proud of a job well done. Sally walks off. Carl looks sad and we see the tag he had removed, crumpled in his hand. It reads 'To Sally - from a mystery admirer'.

(CONTINUED)

(cont'd)

8 **INT. PETER'S OFFICE**

Peter is on the phone, frantically flicking through leaflets and at same time searching on a computer. He looks stressed, panicked. Sally knocks on the door.

BRENDA
Now isn't a good time.

SALLY
Oh? What's going on?

BRENDA
Peter got the car working.

SALLY
Wow! It flew?

BRENDA
No, it traveled through time.

SALLY
Oh!

BRENDA
To 1983. But he doesn't know where
it's parked.

CUT

TO:

9 **CLOSE UP OF A TV SCREEN**

NEWS ANCHOR
*... The attack occurred at 10:33
this morning at the post office.
The incident was caught on CCTV
camera.*

Cut to CCTV footage of people in line at the post office. Suddenly the doors burst open and two tentacled ALIENS (not CG but people wearing alien costumes) burst in. One holds a revolver and fires it into the air.

ALIEN 1
Everybody put your hands in the
air! This is an invasion!

(CONTINUED)

ALIEN 2
And no funny stuff!

As it says this, Alien 2 gets its tentacles tangled in a rack of discount DVDs which topples over, scattering DVDs all over the floor.

ALIEN 2 (SELF)
Oh crap.

Alien 1 fires again.

ALIEN 1
I mean it! This is a robbery!

ALIEN 2
Invasion.

ALIEN
What?

ALIEN 2
It's an invasion, not a robbery.

ALIEN 1
That's what I said.

ALIEN 2
No, you didn't. You said robbery.

ALIEN 1
Don't be daft.

POST OFFICE CUSTOMER
You did. You said robbery.

Other customers, all with their hands raised nod in agreement. Suddenly the alarm sounds and the aliens run out, slipping on the DVDs.

NEWS ANCHOR
The aliens are believed to have made their escape in a small yellow UFO

The screen shows a image of a very badly drawn yellow UFO signed 'Emma Class 2C'. A caption reads 'Artist's impression'.

NEWS ANCHOR
The public are advised to avoid the aliens who are believed to be armed - although not particularly dangerous.

(CONTINUED)

The camera pulls back from the TV. We are in the Reception area. The Useless Secretary sits behind the desk filing her nails.

The door buzzer rings. The useless secretary doesn't answer. Sally walks past, exits frame. The buzzer continues to ring. Sally then re-enters the frame, frustratedly glares at the useless secretary, and picks up the phone.

SALLY

Hellooo - Placebo International.

Yes ... come right up... 7th floor.

10

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

Karen, Peter and Brenda sit around the meeting room table discussing placebo perfume.

PETER

Well I can definitely smell it.

BRENDA

Yep. Me too.

KAREN

What do you mean you can smell it?
It has no scent. It's a placebo.

BRENDA

Well obviously it isn't as we can
smell it.

KAREN

But that's how a placebo works!

PETER

I thought you said it had no scent.

KAREN

It doesn't.

PETER

So why can I smell it?

KAREN

Because... that's.. the placebo
effect!

BRENDA

Look, either it smells of something
or it doesn't. And I can smell it
so it's obviously not a placebo.

(CONTINUED)

Karen looks like she might scream

PETER

Karen, we have one job here at Placebo International and that is to make placebo products. We can't sell things that work. Remember our core values!

He indicates to the Placebo International logo, under it there is a slogan *'Making Money From Nothing'*.

BRENDA

Forget about the perfume. What else have we got.

KAREN

There's the Placebo Book.

She holds up a book and passes it to Peter.

KAREN

'Memoirs of an Amnesiac'.

Peter leafs through it. All the pages are blank.

PETER

Is it any good?

KAREN

Well it's better than the movie.
\$12 just to sit in the dark for two hours...

11 **INT. OFFICE RECEPTION AREA - DAY**

There is a ping at the door and the two aliens from the post office enter from elevator. They advance toward the reception desk.

ALIEN 1

Take me to your leader.

Secretary doesn't look up. Alien coughs politely. She continues to ignore him.

ALIEN 1

S'cuse me. We're here to see your leader.

The Secretary looks at alien with impatience, rolls her eyes and silently points at the Art description sign.

(CONTINUED)

Alien 2 moves over and starts to read it.

ALIEN 2

'The useless secretary is a performance art piece ..'

SALLY

Oh! hello...

ALIEN

Take me to your leader.

SALLY

Leader? Er...

She looks around.

SALLY

Do you mean Brenda? Or..(lowers voice) you don't mean Peter do you? I've never really considered him--

CARL

(clears throat)

Hi, I'm Carl. I've worked here longer than anyone else and really I should be in charge so -

Sally shakes her head and interrupts

SALLY

You know what - I'll go and get Peter.

12 INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

Sally enters the meeting room where Peter, Karen and Brenda have been discussing the placebo products

PETER

Leader? Who's that?

SALLY

I know. I wasn't sure either. I thought it was one of you guys.

BRENDA

Well... I guess... I am--

KAREN

No, I've never considered you to have any kind of real authority.

(CONTINUED)

Brenda ignores this comment.

BRENDA
What exactly do they want?

SALLY
Usually when you see this kind of
thing in the movies, the aliens
kill the leader.

Brenda looks panicked.

KAREN
Although, technically, I guess you
are in charge.

13 **INT. RECEPTION AREA - CONTINUING**

The aliens are sitting in reception area chairs, one reads a magazine. Brenda approaches the Aliens nervously. She puts on a fake smile and greets them politely. They jump out of their chairs and adopt a threatening pose.

BRENDA
Welcome to Placebo
International. What can I help you
wi--

ALIEN 1
Enough of your Earth talk! Take me
to your leader!

BRENDA
Well that's the thing. You see,
right now, we actually have a
position open... for... a leader.

The aliens relax their threatening stance.

ALIEN
Oh, right. Well...

Brenda smiles and extends her hand

BRENDA
I'm Brenda.

Alien 1 extends a tentacle. They shake 'hands'.

ALIEN 1
I'm Donald, and this is my mother.

(CONTINUED)

ALIEN 2

It's his first invasion so I thought I should come along.

14 **INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - LATER**

The two aliens sit opposite Brenda and Peter. A resumé lies on the table.

ALIEN 1

As you can see I have plenty of experience managing a team - and my hobbies include knitting and UFO maintenance.

ALIEN 2

Don't forget your impressions.

ALIEN 1 (MODEST LAUGH)

Oh they don't want to hear about that.

ALIEN 2

He does great impressions. Go on, do your Christopher Walken voice. Go on!

ALIEN 1

Wee-al .. I really wahant this ja-hobb ya know?

Brenda looks blankly.

ALIEN 2

Isn't it great? I keep telling him he could make a fortune doing impersonations. He doesn't have the confidence... just wants to do invasions.

BRENDA

What about spreadsheets? Yes we need someone who understands spreadsheets.

ALIEN 1

Oh God no. Just the sight of numbers and my eyes go all out of focus. (laughs.)

ALIEN 2 shakes her head.

15 **INT. EXECUTIVE OFFICE WITH LARGE WINDOWS - DAY**

Brenda is showing Alien 1 around.

BRENDA
And this is where you'll sit.

ALIEN 2
I'm so proud of you. I told you you
could do it! A proper job.

BRENDA
Yep. You're the boss!

She smiles as she leaves, closing the door behind her. Alien 2 turns to Alien 1.

ALIEN 2
Take me to your leader!

ALIEN 1
Ta da! Here I am!

Alien 2 immediately pulls out a ray gun and zaps Alien 1.

Alien 2 then sits down behind executive desk, looks around and notices a bottle on the desk. Alien picks up the bottle, opens it, sniffs it, and immediately starts coughing, gagging and eventually collapses and dies.

The bottle rolls across the floor and comes to rest in front of the camera - the label reads: 'Placebo Perfume - may cause allergic reaction to badly scripted aliens'.

Brenda cracks open the office door and checks to see both aliens dead before leaving.

16 **INT. CLUB ATOPIA - CONTINUING PREVIOUS SCENE**

Wide shot of Club Atopia. We see the customers - several recognizable faces from the office, as well as other, more bizarre, customers: a zebra slurping a martini, A table with multiple copies of the same person etc.

As the Bartender works, the Cocktail waitress leans on the bar with her back to him.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS
You know, I've been thinking.
Parallel realities all happen at
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

COCKTAIL WAITRESS (cont'd)
 the same time, but all the
 characters from the different
 realities are here in this club.

BARTENDER
 So...?

COCKTAIL WAITRESS
 I bet this is all just a
 simulation.

BARTENDER
 No no no... This is *definitely*
 real.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS
 Look, the place is even called
 'Club *Atopia*'.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS (CONT)
 Club *Atopia*, the *ATOPIA*
 machine? Don't you get it? It's
 the same thing dummy!

BARTENDER
 Look - this is a story - and...er..

Pause as he frantically searches for a paper and hurriedly
 reads:

BARTENDER
 And... if a story ain't real I
 don't know what is.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS
 You just read that!

bartender hides paper behind his back.

BARTENDER
 No I didn't.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS
 You're reading from a script!

She reaches over the bar and tries to grab the paper.

BARTENDER
 No I'm not.

The Bartender throws script in garbage.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS
I knew it! This is all fake!

She exits and the bartender calls after her:

BARTENDER
Hey - don't you want to know how it
ends?

End of pilot episode.