

## Preface

My childhood, as I remember it through the lens of my childhood, was happy in that happy TV family situation comedy way of the early sixties TV shows that I grew up watching: *Leave it to Beaver*; *My Three Sons*; *Father Knows Best*; *The Donna Reed Show*; *Andy of Mayberry*, and others similar, which should explain *TUNA*'s innocent, if not naïve, G-rated humor and sentimental dramas—with a few disturbing and perhaps controversial exceptions. And I was fortunate in my childhood to have been acquainted with more than a few verbose story-tellers (not the least of which my own father), and harmless eccentrics. Every character in the script, including showman Johnny Starbuck, the formattable Mr. Edwards, and even Bob the alien, is based on an actual person I have encountered in my life at one time or another.

Though the idea was to recreate, superficially, a production identical to a 60s situation comedy, a close reading will show that the script—at times unapologetically experimental, bizarre, and a little crazy—is written to be a (post)modern movie.

As one who studies Zen Buddhism and Eastern thought in general, I see existence not in the Grand Narrative tradition of the West; that is, history as a story of progress with a beginning, a middle, and an end, from which the basic plot-structure of most Western story-telling is derived; but instead, as Philip Roth described his novels: as “individuals meshed in some nexus of particulars.” Therefore, *TUNA* does not follow the typical movie script formula in which clear plot points manipulate the audience toward some contrived denouement and resolution. In *TUNA*, performance supersedes meaning. Rather than focusing solely on a protagonist's efforts to get “what the protagonist wants,” the script simply strives to honor each character's unique performance in the noble art of being “human, all too human,”—all within the script's unique “mesh of particulars.”

Also, as a Buddhist, I see the “protagonist” in fiction as an invention, primarily, of the Western mind. The protagonist is a stand-in for human agency and the complex desires of the ego—arriving, arguably, with the appearance of Odysseus, that pro-active and clever man desiring home and Penelope. Although paperboy Tuna may at first seem like the protagonist of the movie, considering his desire for Molly, Tuna's role is actually more akin to David Copperfield's role in Dicken's masterpiece. Copperfield exists as a kind of hub around which Dicken's entertaining characters live out their dramas, high and low. Though some transition in Tuna's world view takes place, and *TUNA*, I suppose, could be interpreted as a coming-of-age piece, Tuna's transition is not the result of any clever and pro-active agency on his part; it is more the result of life's realities, both sordid and sacred (and in that sense Tuna's transition offers a more honest account, I feel, of how our own life lessons emerge).

Though *TUNA* is a character(s)-driven script, the family television also plays a central role. It resides in the Hartley's den like some clandestine, alien creature: colonizing and fragmenting consciousness with its mixed-up stream of absurd commercials, sobering news breaks, passing celebrities, and literati—all within some meshed nexus of 60s American cultural particulars. The channel-surfing, the self-absorbed talking heads, along with Tuna's psychedelic imagination, and Bob's strange “visions,” foreshadow our own, encroaching, device-driven fragmentation into collective psychosis.

Lastly, anyone familiar with professional screenplay specifications will soon notice that *TUNA* does not strictly adhere to those specifications. Realizing that *TUNA* was far more likely to be read in book form than viewed on any screen, I decided to base my format roughly on J.K. Rowling's hardcover version of *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald—The Original Screenplay*. However, after publication a friend suggested that the work would have been more accurately called *TUNA in POODERVILLE: A*

*Teleplay*, due to its serial-like structure. So, if *TUNA* ever is produced, it might play best as a three-to-six-part television series. A dreamer (like TUNA) can always dream.

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