



STORY DEPARTMENT SUBMISSION SHEET

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Title: MARS ATTACKS

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Circa: Future Location: Chicago, San Francisco,
Washington D.C. & Mars.

Drama Category: Science-Fiction/Comedy

Elements:

THEME: A disorderly but dedicated group of rebels defies the Martian invaders who have colonialized Earth, turning the planet into a dumping ground for surplus Martian consumer products.

SYNOPSIS: In the late Cretaceous Period when gigantic dinosaurs roamed the land, Martians in flying saucers arrived, incinerating the reptiles into dust. Zap! In a blink of an eye, a proud species which had dominated the Earth for over eighty million years is reduced to ashes. And now, in their stead, the Martians release glowing pods from which emerge mouselike marsupials. The Age of Mammals has begun...

Roughly one hundred million years later in Chicago, blonde, square-jawed SKIP and ROY, nerdish to the max, arrive unannounced at a Public Relations firm where they want the company's friendly, intense President JOHN YOUNG, 45, to represent all publicity and advertising for a mysterious foreign power. That power is not of this Earth, however, and the first clue is when Roy produces a tiny microcassette recorder which sprouts legs and ambles towards Young. Outside Martian saucers gather like flies. They've arrived. The Martian invasion is accompanied by a telecommunications blackout as American and Soviet military monitors transmit commercials for Martian beer. Roy and Skip reveal they're the representatives of the Martians, and they claim that Earth is in grave danger--not from the Martian invasion but from the imminent attack by invaders from the Pleides. Roy and Skip insist that the Martians want to help Earth resist the invaders, but to do so they need Young--a brilliant media mind--to support the Martian

PREMISE

CHARACTERIZATION

DIALOGUE

STORY LINE

EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR

RECOMMENDATION _____

BUDGET

 X HIGH MEDIUM LOW

cause by serving as their appointed representative in the media. The Martians also need markets for their surplus goods which run the gamut from useless beverages to a variety of services. Young's black, gorgeous assistant and companion YOLANDA MACKENZIE, 23, opposes Young representing the Martian cause, fearing the publicity campaign would end up as awful as the firm's campaign for South Africa's image. Outside the building, American military jets attack the Martians, but an invisible force field protects Young's building from damage...

Meanwhile, at the Oval Office, military GENERAL HACKETT advises the PRESIDENT to join forces with Russia to nuke the Martians off the planet. Gigantically-brained Martian GENERALS and BUSINESSMEN in a gothic command ship high over Earth eavesdrop on the Oval Office via a football-sized hovering monitor. When the President falters in his resolve to nuke the Martians, a MARINE GENERAL shoots and kills the President, leaving the military free to pursue its destructive path. Chicago's crowds are transfixed as commercials for Martian products materialize in the sky. Boom! U.S. military forces nuke Chicago in a display of force to the Martian invaders. The Martians, however, protect Young from the blossoming mushroom cloud. As Young is about to sign the contract with the Martian representatives Skip and Roy, Yolanda pulls a gun on him, convinced that by siding with the Martians Young will betray the human race. As Yolanda fails to get off a shot, Young signs the document, then vomits as the saucers descend in droves...

Several years pass. The Martians, now in total control of Earth, use tripedal walking machines and the Friendship Police to maintain order. Chicago, now a burnt-out shell full of homeless people in rags, gives its populace a steady diet of Martian commercial advertising for such useless products as Anodyne. These goods are purchased at Martian stores known as Marso-theques. Young's former OFFICE BOY, now in rags, screams when a Martian SHAPESHIFTER lands on him. Young, older and grayer, supervises a Martian commercial for a new product called Syntho-Drek. The ACTORS, afraid to sample the new stuff, refuse to recite their lines. Young is summoned to Friendship Center One (formerly Washington, D.C.) by Martian leaders, including Field Marshall QUAAARGGG, who reveals a contingent of REBELS fighting the Martian presence have stolen Martian weapons, accessing Martian television to broadcast the event. Young, held responsible for this breach of security, is dispatched to San Francisco to ferret out the rebel camp and the satellite dish. The Martians will destroy Frisco if Young fails...

Young, arriving in San Francisco, gets shitfaced on a Martian hallucinogenic cocktail, enlisting a group of his MINIONS to help him uncover the rebel camp. There is a heavy black market trade in real Earth goods in Frisco, and imagine Young's surprise when he discovers that his former love and assistant Yolanda is head of black market operations. Yolanda's still royally pissed at Young betraying the human race by collaborating with the Martians. Yolanda claims that Young is the most hated man in the world. After a series of investigations, Young dis-

covers the hideout of rebel leader WHITEY ALVARADO and his sidekick BETSZY. Whitey spouts patriotic passages from Tom Paine, but what disturbs Young most is that Whitey and Yolanda may be romantically involved. Young's plan is to infiltrate the rebels under the assumed name of DAVISON, but before he can do so he is teleported back to Washington where the Martians listen to Young's appeal that they retract their decision to level San Francisco. As an alternative, Young persuasively offers a program which will enable the Martians to more effectively dump their surplus products on Earth. After Young's impassioned speech in which he promises "a chicken in every pot," the Martian Generals and Businessmen give Young a standing ovation...

Young and Skip are teletransferred back to San Francisco to complete their task of infiltrating the rebel stronghold. Of late, Young has suffered nosebleeds from too many teleportations. Skip reminds Young that the Generals are concerned about the imminent visit of Prince ROYBLOTTO, a great Martian leader who is at odds with the Martian Generals. Royblotto, an ardent environmentalist, is a good dude who wants what's best for Earth. Young, having successfully infiltrated the rebels as Davison, is hustled down a manhole by Betszy when a Martian walking machine nearly zaps them dead. Underneath the city, Young stumbles on the rebel's satellite dish located near an ash dune. Betszy forces Young to repeat the rebel oath of allegiance in which he pledges to abstain from all Martian imports and drugs. Young listens to Whitey's moving rendition of a protest song attacking the Martians...

Now Young, having successfully infiltrated the rebel stronghold, calls the Mars Snitch Hotline and spills the beans to Martian operators, revealing not only the location of the rebel hideout but the existence of the satellite dish. Young's location is immediately registered, and it isn't long before a Martian car with metallic tentacles scoops him up and takes him away for interrogation. Shortly thereafter, Friendship Police capture a group of rebels, and Whitey and Betszy find themselves cornered by Martian metallic spiders. Betszy, convinced she's a goner, begs Whitey to shoot her, but before he can do so, both Betszy and Whitey are grabbed by tentacles and thrown into the bowels of a spidery tank...

In the presence of a Martian General and Friendship police, black android KEN interrogates Young about the rebels. They don't buy that Young is who he says he is--a "class A" person. The only help for Young is through Skip, but his programmed android tapes have been removed. In an android holding bay, Young recovers Skip's tapes, slipping them into a sexy, beautiful woman android. Skip's voice emerges from the sexy android, and SKIP 2 aids Young to escape the custody of the cops. In a flash Skip 2 and Young are teletransferred to Mars where they discover Prince Royblotto gorging himself on Martian junk food. Young appeals to Royblotto to save San Francisco as an automated suitrack provides the Prince with a fashionable pinstripe. Royblotto puts Young's mind at ease, insisting that Young has done a fine job of safeguarding Martian business interests during the rebellion. Young insists the re-

bellion was a phony story manufactured by the Martian Generals. There was never any threat from the Pleides. Young, fearful of his life once the Generals get their hands on him, is offered aid by Royblotto, who promises to protect Young when he returns to Earth...

Skip 2 and Young, teletransferred back to Frisco, are met by a contingent of Friendship COPS determined to take them both back into custody. Royblotto, true to his word, sends wacky Ambassador XAXOLOTTYL to Earth by teletransferring him via a McDonalds Hamburger arch. In a flash Xacolottyl whisks Young and Skip 2 to safety. Shortly thereafter, Young learns of an assassination plot to murder Royblotto when he arrives on Earth for a visit. In truth, it's really the Martian military Generals who plan to waste Royblotto and blame his death on the rebels...

Skip 2 hatches a plan through which Royblotto can be saved-- Young will be the keynote speaker at New York's Martian Friendship Center where Royblotto is due to make his appearance. Young, of course, will put his life in jeopardy by doing so, since word has it that terrorists working for the Martian military will infiltrate the building. If the plot of the military comes off, it will mean the end of business for the Martians. Why? Young learns that there are in existence only 5,611 Martians. That means it would be impossible for the Martians to consume all of the surplus products generated by their boom economy. Thus the Martians need a dumping ground for their useless consumer trash. The dinosaurs were wiped out by the Martians to make way for an intelligent race which would appreciate the finer things a consumer culture could offer...

Young, hopelessly drawn to Skip 2, makes passionate love to her at the Holiday Inn. On the saucer express to New York, Young is reunited with Yolanda, who congratulates him on his success at saving Frisco. Yolanda's carrying a bottle of booze in the hopes that she can wean U.S. President SMITTY off Martian substances, all addictive. Whitey and Betszy, who have escaped custody by the cops, trail Young in another saucer, having been programmed by the military to kill Royblotto...

Young suggests that they save Royblotto's life by masterminding a coup d'etat and blaming the takeover on the Generals. At New York's Friendship Center, Young welcomes President Smitty and his eccentric twin SNUFFY. Prince Royblotto glides out with the aid of an anti-gravity chaise--a cactus atop his head. Whitey and Betszy, both armed, wait for their chance to kill Royblotto. Young stalls for time, making speeches and singing a love song to Yolanda. As Whitey and Betszy take aim at Royblotto, their aim is blocked by a bunch of KIDS, and the shots go haywire, missing their mark completley. Field Marshall Quaaarrgg, enraged, takes it upon himself to kill Royblotto by splattering Royblotto's brains across the room. Whitey, coming to his senses, shoots and kills Quaaarrgg. Now Young takes to the mike and congratulates the rebels as being the true heroes on Earth. Whitey becomes U.S. President as the Martian Generals are arrested and hauled away. There's still

an incredible surprise in store when it's revealed that instead of killing the real Royblotto, Quaaaarrrgg shot his android double. Everyone's amazed when a second Royblotto android-- actually one of many in existence--appears and waves to the crowd. But what of Young's fate? Skip 2 insists that Young knows too much about the Martian soul, and that his presence on Earth would pose a danger. Zap! Young's teletransferred to an isolated tropical paradise teeming with lobsters and, you guessed it, marsupial mice. And guess what? The tropical island is inhabited by gigantic dinosaurs...how's that for deja vu...

Although Young lives an isolated life on the island, he hopes that one day he will be reunited with Skip 2 and Yolanda. Young keeps watching the skies for a sign...

And then he sees a shooting star...

MARS ATTACKS
Alex Cox

COMMENT:

This draft (dated May 1, 1989) is a joy and a pleasure to read, a fine blueprint upon which to base a film which is satirical, action-oriented, fun, and, most importantly, carries a strong and viable social message about the effects and origins of consumer culture. In many ways, MARS ATTACKS can be read as a metaphor for American consumerism and imperialistic exploitation in the service of extending capitalism. The fact that this message is hidden in a comic-book, Fifties-style science fiction form makes it all the more compelling and interesting. The screenplay reads like one of those old comic books about alien invasions, but what makes it contemporary is the story's veiled social and political criticism of American values. The draft, however, still suffers from a host of problematic issues which, nevertheless, can be easily resolved in revisions. What's important is that the basic concept of the piece remains a timely and viable one, and in the right directorial hands I suspect audiences would line up for this one.

This new draft has come a long way towards being clearer, less cluttered, and stronger in terms of its characters. There are some major changes from the 2nd draft (please see attached coverage dated 5/6/86). Missing from this draft are the characters of black marketeers POODLES and DIRK, whose roles seem to have been assumed by Young's assistant YOLANDA. Rebel Leader PACO O'BRIEN has become WHITEY--also king of the rebel force. In the earlier draft, Paco put greater pressure on Yolanda to join the rebel cause, a point which is still obscure in the new draft. What, exactly, is Yolanda's role here? Although allied with the black market, her connection to and relationship with Whitey and the rebels deserves additional clarification. In the last draft, BETSY was a suburban teen raised in a conservative household who swears allegiance to the rebels. She, in this new version, has become BETSZY, an older, more street-wise type whose allegiance to Whitey is more clearly etched out. In some ways I like the earlier scenario--it makes a comment and satiric response to Sixties middle class kids who joined protest movements. One aspect of this script is its potential richness to evoke and comment upon various aspects of American cultural history: Whitey, Betszy and the rebels should be more clearly etched out as Sixties "radical types" attacking consumer culture.

This new draft jettisons the various scenes involving gigantic insects. For example, the gigantic fly no longer attacks Betsy's pop. President SMITTY and others are no longer victims of the Martian shrinking ray, and the Martians no longer use huge bees as weapons against the rebels. In this new version, the conflict between the Martian and the rebels is more direct with a cleaner throughline for the plot. There are still, however, problems in sorting out the storyline of this new version. The rebels Whitey and Betszy are apparently brainwashed to assassinate ROYBLOTTO, but the reasoning for this is obscure. We've lost the entire section in which Yolanda uses a vat of molasses to distract the insects. Also gone is a following scene in which

Paco and Betsy lure a miniature saucer onto some electrical cables. Betsy, hit by a Martian ray, wakes up to discover she's a muscle-bound hulk with a neck like a bull. Her weapons have also melted into her flesh--she's half human, half-machine. Gone is Betsy's attempt to rescue the DOG, and her rescue of Paco and Yolanda from the spider. I might mention that while this newer draft attempts to forge a cleaner throughline, it sacrifices some of the funny and richly visual material of the earlier version. Another case in point in the subsequent scene in which Young and Smitty(shrunken) are strapped to chairs with Young's funny line about Smitty's days "as a bon vivant being numbered."

Royblotto has assumed corporeal form in this new version instead of the Martians bringing his brain in inside a belljar, although in the earlier version Royblotto was telepathic. In this later draft, I think things are improved by having Royblotto emerge as a character with a social conscience who is directly opposed to the agenda of the military. Royblotto has become a conservationist--much more of a sympathetic and vulnerable figure. Royblotto's transformation also enables Young to fight for something positive. It gives him an agenda, although my sense is that Young joins the rebel cause too late. Martian trader FAARQUAHAAR has also receded into the background as a character. Young's role here--in the newer version--is less one of a mediator. Also, Royblotto's encased grey matter gets blasted by the Rebels while in the newer version he survives.

The newer version has Royblotto clones appearing at a New York function attended by the military, who have clearly become the heavies in the piece instead of the rebel force. The ending, by the way, is completely changed. Instead of Young escaping with the rebels across an arid landscape, Betsy dying alone, and Yolanda becoming President of the U.S., Young joins forces with the rebels against the military. However, Young is dispatched to an isolated existence on a deserted island where he awaits Yolanda and Skip's return. Skip has been fleshed-out as a very funny character indeed, assuming the form of a woman with a man's voice and giving Young a bit of romance. I might add that the romantic entanglements in this new draft seem muddled and confused. At one point, Young is allied with Yolanda--at another with Skip II. The ending, which I find unsatisfying(since I don't get it that Young is sent away because he "knows" the truth about the Martians) might be bolstered if either Yolanda or Skip 2 accompanied Young to the island. Young would be on a desert retreat with a gorgeous woman--in the case of Skip 2 a gorgeous woman with a male voice.

I suggest we consider the following points for revision:

- 1)
Yolanda's allegiance needs to be clarified, not only vis-a-vis the rebels but towards Young himself. She is still, in my mind, a murky character without motivational anchoring. Their love affair should perhaps be picked up at the end. Another vague point is Yolanda's relationship to Whitey--are they lovers and if so where does this lead? What's the relationship of the black market to the rebel movement? Are they separate movements?

2)

Young's motivation and allegiance with the rebels should be more clearly articulated earlier on in the draft. Ditto Yolanda. As a general note, while the first and last acts of the draft are clearly etched out, something strange happens in the middle sections of the script. One loses the thread of the story entirely as Cox attempts to balance too many characters and situations. The overall impression is of a messy middle section--the characters and throughline get unravelled and confusing. More should be made of Young's experiences in Frisco and his decision to join forces with the rebels earlier on. The brainwashing of the rebels (presumably by the military) is confusing and isn't developed out enough. In short, too much happens in the middle with the end result that we lose sight of what these characters are doing. One suggestion would be to tease out and develop Young's visit with Royblotto on Mars--suppose we got a good and deep insight into Martian culture and the idea of consumerism. This might go far in streamlining the second act and creating a bit more clarity. In addition, devoting a bit more space and energy to Royblotto would make him a far more sympathetic character. Ditto for the way in which we set up the rebels Whitey and Betsy. Make Young the consummate yuppie achiever and flesh-out his materialism.

3)

This script is funny, but it's not yet funny enough. Cox needs to go a long way still to tease out the satirical potential of this material. More, much more, needs to be done with the Martian consumer products and their influence on the people of Earth. What about credit card culture? Why has Mars developed a boom economy? A closer link needs to be drawn between using contemporary American consumerism in a satirical way with Martian culture so the audience gets it. SMITTY, hooked on Martian stuff, could be dispatched to Betty Ford Martian-style (or his wife). Royblotto should be more Dixie Lee Rayish--more identifiable as a wacky "save the bay/whales figure". Yolanda should be more radically like Angela Davis--spouting Panther slogans. Ditto for Whitey as a rebel--let's make him Abbie Hoffman. The idea is that all of these characters need: funnier and closer analogues to American culture. The Martians, too, should ape consumer culture. This is what makes this script funny, offbeat, and eccentric, and we should exploit these aspects for all they are worth.

4) It doesn't work very well to have Young snitch on the rebels because we're never sure--at most points in this draft--where he stands. The result is that he becomes unsympathetic and unlikable.

5)

Ending is a letdown unless it's funny (see above reference) and it would be better perhaps not to ship Young away unless we can treat it comically a la Crusoe. (& having Skip 2 join him).