

Tinselfish

A new drama series
written by John Garvey

One day he's hand-milking cows on his family's primitive Amish farm. The next—*flop*—he's learning to use a PC and watching reruns on Nick at Nite. One day he's a word processor at a buttoned-down law firm in Philadelphia, the next—*flop*—he's an artist in a noisy studio in Los Angeles where Hacky Sacs and volleyballs fly over his cubicle. One day he's got a spotless police record, the next—*flop*—he's a murder suspect along with a private detective who moonlights as an actor with a reputation for punching cast and crew members. You just never know.

Even before he moves into the room in West Hollywood which he rents from two ultrasleek gender illusionists styled after classic movie queens Lauren Bacall and Rita Hayworth, Zeph meets O'Keefe, a private investigator, and is immediately drawn into an investigation surrounding the disappearance of a porn-studio owner and one of his stars who is also the boyfriend of notoriously jealous "Hayworth."

Both "Hayworth" and "Bacall" perform at the Lorelei, a drag supper club in West Hollywood owned by vaguely menacing "Veronica Lake," another ultrasleek gender illusionist with one eye lurking behind a curtain of platinum hair. They perform old standards like "Lorelei," "Miss Otis Regrets," "Blue Pacific Blues" and "Old Devil Moon." A new investor in the club encourages the performers to branch out, and they mount improbably elaborate versions of Busby Berkeley's "I'm Young and Healthy" and "Hooray for Hollywood."

While growing up in his insular, restrictive Amish community in Pennsylvania, Zeph felt like he was the only one who had to hide his sexual orientation. He came to realize that Amos, his best friend since elementary school, also had the same secret, but because of their commitment to God and their vows to their wives, they never even discussed their secrets with each other. That is, until Zeph turned 30 and realized his sexual orientation wasn't going to change like he'd been hoping and praying. Now he felt compelled to stop living a false life and tried to talk Amos into leaving the Amish community with him. But Amos couldn't leave the responsibility of his growing family, and Zeph, who is sterile and unable to have children, reluctantly left on his own.

A non-Amish family on a nearby dairy farm helped him transition to the outside world, and he then continued on to Philadelphia where he studied computer graphics at a university. But as Zeph approached 40, he had as much trouble finding a niche in the youth-oriented CG industry as he had fitting into the gay community in Philadelphia. Then a job offer from a computer-game studio in L.A. pulled him abruptly "through the looking glass" into a chaotic culture where he now frequently pictures his co-workers as animated characters.

Quick clips from old detective movies sneak into the dialogue here and there because O'Keefe does a spot-on Bogart impression and Zeph, an avid fan of *film noir*, finds that life often imitates art.

Production of a dumbed-down blockbuster and its sequel takes O'Keefe, who drags Zeph along, to soundstages at Sunset-Gower Studios (where *Six Feet Under* was filmed) and on location to the Hollywood Athletic Club (where a young John Wayne tossed golf balls from the roof onto passing cars) and the Imperial Dunes (where *The Empire Strikes Back* and Marlene Dietrich's *The Garden of Allah* were filmed).

An Iranian-American named Ahmad joins the cast at the Lorelei and becomes romantically involved with "Hayworth." Zeph meets an Iraqi-American named Sadiq and they have long Middle Eastern-style discussions, sometimes over a hookah. A Latino LAPD detective, an old college chum of O'Keefe's, tails O'Keefe a little too closely because he was the last person seen with the victim of a drug-related murder. A wealthy German microchip manufacturer, who can hack just about any computer and who amuses himself by evading federal agents, dresses up in SWAT gear and rapes Zeph in a hotel room while his bodyguards hold him. A brawny mixed-martial-arts fighter, who is married to a Norwegian model to keep his sexual orientation a secret from his fans, is stalked by a chameleon-like special-ops veteran who ensures that the fighter's secret is kept safe.