

Tinselfish

TREATMENT FOR SEASON ONE BY JOHN GARVEY
REVISED 09/16/05

In a hallway, George Clooney—y’know, big guy, surplus testosterone?—passes Buster Keaton—solemn endurer of all of life’s indignities. They make brief eye contact and *zzzt* something passes improbably between them.

Picture the young Lauren Bacall in *To Have and Have Not*—“You know how to whistle, don’t you, Steve?” Now, give her the slightest hint of a 5-o’clock shadow. Remember Rita Hayworth in *Gilda*, responding to “Are you decent?” Flings her hair up into the frame. “Me?” Now, picture her with an Adams apple. The two have actually been a couple for several years, only “Hayworth” hasn’t realized it yet and goes from one destructive relationship to another, with “Bacall” always there to pick up the broken plates.

Next time you see footage from the streets of Baghdad on CNN, you’ll see a really cute Iraqi man—not too tall, fine features, mustache—wearing a long *dishdasha* tunic and a prayer cap. Move him to West Hollywood, put him in cargos and a T-shirt, and give him a California accent when he says “Get a life, *dudes*.”

Tinselfish observes this circle of friends through the eyes of the Buster Keaton character, here named Zephaniah Stoltzfus, or Zeph. We see what he sees, but we also see what he thinks, which is a good thing for us because he has a really vivid imagination.

Pilot: “Femmes Fatales”

Zeph is transfixed by the view out the plane window, and his flight from Philadelphia to L.A. becomes a Kubrick-like stargate experience. Soon after starting his new job at a game studio in L.A., Zeph is forced to stand up for himself with a Gorgon of a producer. He discusses renting a room from “Bacall,” here named Slim Chance, and soon crosses paths in the hallway with “Clooney”—a private investigator named Mike O’Keefe—who is on a case and has stopped by to question Slim. Zeph moves into the house in the Hollywood Hills which Slim shares with “Hayworth,” whose name is actually Bar Nothing (“If I’d been a ranch...”). Both are performers at the Lorelei, a drag supper club in West Hollywood.

One evening, Zeph is out in the pool and thinks he hears gunshots in the house, but both Slim and Bar act as if nothing happened. O’Keefe turns up at the game studio the next day, and Zeph learns that Bar’s boyfriend, Ian, a porn model, has been missing for a month and the body of one of the club’s bandmembers was found that morning under Santa Monica Pier. Arriving home after work, Zeph again encounters O’Keefe and learns that Ian’s boss, the owner of the porn studio, is also missing. While O’Keefe questions a friend of Ian’s in the living room, the friend is killed by shots fired through the dining-room doorway.

Episode 02: “The Allegheny Starlight”

Flashback: Zeph grows up in a loving but stifling Amish family. He is a gifted student, but his education is stopped, per Amish custom, after eighth grade. When he realizes his sexual orientation isn’t developing normally, he researches abnormal psychology at the public library. Believing that marriage is the only

viable therapy, he marries at 19 and remains resolutely faithful to his wife for 11 years. Turning 30, however, triggers a series of questions that have a domino effect on his faith, and one Sunday, while driving the buggy to church, he abruptly realizes he no longer believes. He tries to talk Amos, his best friend since elementary school and also closeted, into leaving the Amish community with him, but Amos can't leave the responsibility of his wife and children. Zeph, who turned out to be sterile and could father no children, cannot continue living a false life and reluctantly leaves the community on his own.

Episode 03: "The Death Valley Zephyr"

This episode picks up where the pilot leaves off. Zeph and O'Keefe meet for after-work drinks at Musso's, and O'Keefe explains that the previous night's shooting was revenge for the probable murder of the missing porn-studio owner, who, it turns out, had something on Bar and was blackmailing her. Later that evening, O'Keefe takes Zeph to the illegal casino hidden behind the Lorelei showroom, and Zeph drifts around the roulette tables as O'Keefe has a private chat in the office of the casino owner, Lydeintha Lake, another sleek gender illusionist.

Next morning, while Zeph and O'Keefe have breakfast at a diner, Slim calls on O'Keefe's cell phone and tells him that Ian has been found injured in Puerto Vallarta. She says she's leaving immediately to join him. That evening, Zeph and O'Keefe go swing dancing at the Derby, and Zeph meets an Iraqi-American named Sadiq. The next morning, O'Keefe phones Zeph to tell him he's heading out to Palm Springs. He was able to buy some information about Ian's whereabouts from another of Ian's friends the night before. Zeph later talks to Bar in her room and discovers a note written on the back of a photo of Bar and Ian. The note gives Lydeintha's real name and mentions an unsolved murder in New Jersey. The note was written by Ian.

O'Keefe still has not returned from Palm Springs after midnight that night. Bar asks Zeph to walk her home from the Lorelei, but they are intercepted on the sidewalk by a couple of Lydeintha's bodyguards and regain consciousness in a shabby house out in Reseda, their hands and feet bound. They manage to kick the bodyguards in the head with their bound feet and knock them out. They are just freeing themselves when Lydeintha arrives. Zeph shoots the gun out of Lydeintha's hand with a bodyguard's gun, but she produces a ladies' Derringer from a sleeve, and she and Bar shoot it out, Lydeintha fatally missing every shot with her injured hand.

In Lydeintha's Palm Springs home, a police detective questions Zeph, O'Keefe, Slim, Bar and Lydeintha's boyfriend. The bodies of Ian and his boss had been found earlier in the freezer in the basement. The boyfriend finally reveals that it was Lydeintha who had shot Ian and had set it up so that Bar, stoned at the time, would think she herself had done it out of jealousy.

That evening, Zeph tags along as O'Keefe meets with his agent and a director at the Comedy Store to discuss a role in a teen slasher about vampire Nazis. O'Keefe is disgusted by the offer. A young, smug actor comes up to the table and tauntingly encourages O'Keefe to take the part they'd all turned down. O'Keefe slugs him and sends him into a table which crashes into another table.

Episode 04: "Departures"

Flashback: Zeph learns about the customs of the non-Amish world from the farm family with whom he lives and works and then moves on to study computer graphics at a university in Philadelphia. While a student, he happens to have a brief encounter with Slim at a gay bar. Jobhunting after graduating turns out to be a prolonged, maddening process, and Zeph unhappily observes as his encounters with people

become progressively more hostile. Finally, he gets voicemail from a director at a computer-game studio in Hollywood who is interested in seeing more of his work.

Episode 05: “The Sunset Local”

This episode picks up where episode 03 leaves off. O’Keefe is escorted from the club and he and Zeph go to another club to cool down. Troy, a young hipster, joins them for the evening, and O’Keefe takes him home with him while Zeph opts to go home alone. At work the next day, Rod, an LAPD detective, questions Zeph about the previous night and tells him that Troy’s body was found early that morning, his neck broken. That evening, O’Keefe shows Zeph the script for the teen slasher and they discuss Zeph coming onto the set to watch the production.

On the set, Zeph watches as they film a musical number featuring a Carmen Miranda lookalike. Between scenes, the director tells Zeph that he has an amazingly calming effect on O’Keefe and hopes Zeph can be on the set every day. Piecing things together, Zeph begins to wonder if O’Keefe actually did kill Troy in a burst of rage and if he himself is at risk. Rod and Collins, another LAPD detective, question Zeph again at work and reinforce his suspicion. A masseur tells Zeph about his brief, combative relationship with O’Keefe and advises Zeph not to get in too deep with him emotionally.

While watching a performance at the Lorelei, O’Keefe notices Collins entering the showroom with his wife. O’Keefe is angered at being tailed and hustles Zeph out of the club. At a restaurant with Rod and his wife, Zeph inadvertently mentions being questioned a second time and O’Keefe’s anger begins to rise. Rod and Zeph both tell O’Keefe they don’t think the way Troy was murdered correlates with the brevity of O’Keefe’s bursts of anger, and he calms down. In the car after dinner, Zeph asks O’Keefe to consider medication for what he thinks is intermittent rage disorder. O’Keefe is adamant about not wanting to become dependent on medication.

Episode 06: “Meteor Shower”

Zeph dreams he is in a club filled with vampires sipping blood from martini glasses. O’Keefe’s arm calmly tightens around Zeph’s throat and Zeph struggles and wakes up abruptly. Slim later notices that Zeph is constantly scratching and advises him just to be sensible with O’Keefe and avoid being alone with him in a situation where his anger could erupt. Between scenes on the set, O’Keefe suggests that they take a trip out to the desert just to get away. Zeph can think of no plausible reason for not going and reluctantly agrees. He wakes up the next morning from another nightmare to find O’Keefe in his room wondering what Zeph’s doing still in bed when they had planned to leave on their trip that morning. During breakfast, Rod calls and tells them they got a confession for Troy’s murder from a drug dealer. Zeph’s extreme relief at O’Keefe being exonerated triggers a rage episode and O’Keefe repeatedly slams Zeph into the wall. The anger passes quickly and O’Keefe realizes what he’s done and looks around to see Slim with a gun trained on him. He wordlessly leaves. He is unreachable for several days and returns no calls. Zeph is having a melancholy drink by himself at the Lorelei when he sees O’Keefe in the entrance to the showroom. O’Keefe approaches and shows Zeph the bottle of the medication he has resolutely refused to give in to for so many years. They embrace.

Zeph wanders around Hollywood & Highland by himself beneath the towering Babylonian elephants, and, because he is envisioning himself in D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916), the image is grainy B/W and the musical score is quaint. While he sips a latte at a table in the courtyard, an enormous drag queen named Gorilia Swansong joins him—their dialogue is shown in intertitles—and makes a pass at him. Zeph scurries away. Returning home, he is introduced to their new housemate, a perky Asian-American

gender illusionist named Clara Ho'. Zeph's imagination now puts him in *It* (1927), and the music reflects the change but the dialogue is still shown in intertitles.

At the Lorelei—sound and picture return to the present—Slim introduces Fairbanks, a potential investor, and his lover, Redford, to the gathered performers. They discuss branching out from the club's 1940s-themed entertainment to include the lounge singers from the 50s and the Warner musicals of the 30s to reach different audiences on different nights of the week. The performers are skeptical but agree to discuss it and they soon begin auditioning dancers.

O'Keefe tells Zeph about Gorilia hiring him to find a missing person. Redford hires O'Keefe to buy back a piece of jade from the thief who stole it. Late at night, O'Keefe follows a dirt road in Malibu on foot to meet with the thief. When he doesn't return, Zeph, hiding in the car, goes to look for him and finds him unconscious. They drive to Fairbanks' mansion in Beverly Hills to discuss the jade and the suspects.

Episode 07: "The Woodlawn Starliner"

The Lorelei mounts an improbably elaborate performance fusing Busby Berkeley's "Shanghai Lil" and "I'm Young and Healthy." After the performance, Gorilia comes backstage to take O'Keefe and Zeph to meet with Holden—Redford's previous escort-service employer and the prime suspect for the stolen jade—regarding her missing person. At Holden's, they are drugged and Zeph hallucinates a version of Berkeley's "I Only Have Eyes For You" prominently featuring O'Keefe. When they regain consciousness, they discover Holden's body, his neck broken. When they return home after being questioned by the police, Slim tells O'Keefe what she knows about Gorilia. O'Keefe takes Zeph along as he meets with Gorilia's lover, an eccentric elderly gentleman in a decaying mansion in Hancock Park.

Fairbanks' houseboy tells O'Keefe that he found the jade in a drawer in Redford's room and that Redford is missing. O'Keefe and the houseboy leave to search Fairbanks' house in Malibu. Fairbanks comes to the Lorelei looking for O'Keefe, and he and Zeph drive to the Malibu house in a recreation of the frenzied car chase in *Intolerance*. In the darkened house, Redford, holding a gun on O'Keefe, Fairbanks and Zeph, explains the jade and Gorilia. Abruptly Gorilia breaks a large window and steps through to finally come face to face with her missing person. Redford and Gorilia trade shots and neither is left standing. The Lorelei troupe performs an improbably elaborate version of "Hooray for Hollywood" which cuts between locations in Hollywood and West Hollywood, concluding atop the Hollywood & Highland complex.

Episode 08: "Crossroads"

Vaughn, a former competitive bodybuilder and O'Keefe's ex-lover, returns from Munich, and he and O'Keefe start spending a lot of time together. At a bar, a friend tells Zeph about Vaughn and O'Keefe's violent relationship and contrasts it with Zeph's placid relationship with O'Keefe now that he's on medication. On his own, with time to kill after the big layoffs at the game studio where he worked, Zeph is wandering around Union Station with his camera when he is startled to see O'Keefe and Vaughn walking through the station toward the train platforms, and he drifts in that direction. He runs into O'Keefe in the station concourse and O'Keefe is apologetic about all the time he's been spending with Vaughn. Zeph tells him that he belongs with Vaughn, the two of them are such a matched set of masculinity. The breakup scene plays as the departure scene in *Casablanca*, only reversed so that Ilsa tells Rick he belongs with Lazslo. Tearfully, very conflicted, O'Keefe hurries to join Vaughn on the train before it leaves. Zeph, now single, finds himself in a time-lapse/slow-mo montage recalling the cinematography of *Naqoyqatsi*. Lonely and numb, he wanders around Hollywood landmarks with his camera, works sporadically as an extra and sitcom audience member, wanders like a ghost through

Beverly Center and West Hollywood, languishes in bed, goes to clubs by himself, all in time-lapse/slow-mo.

O’Keefe wakes Zeph one morning—picture and sound return to normal—to tell him, as unalarming as possible, that Vaughn has been killed and the police want to put Zeph in a lineup to see if a witness can identify him. He stands in the lineup, fearful that he will be mistakenly caught in the gears of the legal system, but the witness does not ID him. A detective then grills Zeph on his activities the night Vaughn was killed. At Vaughn’s funeral, Burkhart—a microchip manufacturer from Munich, the lover whom Vaughn left to return to O’Keefe, and Vaughn’s murderer—ironically expresses his condolences to O’Keefe. Later, Zeph notices that Burkhart appears to be in one of his digital photos, although he claimed to be in Munich that night, and calls O’Keefe to tell him he has emailed him the picture. When O’Keefe looks at the image, Burkhart is no longer in the picture, and he has been painted out of the image on Zeph’s computer. Suspecting that he is listening in on their phone conversation, O’Keefe tells him to leave Zeph out of this, and Burkhart calmly agrees to. Zeph burns a copy of the untouched original image file on the camera’s memory card onto a CD on Slim’s laptop and then, while taking night photos along rain-dampened Hollywood Boulevard, draws away Burkhart’s bodyguard, who is tailing him, while Slim takes the CD to the WeHo police station.

Episode 09: “The City of Electrons”

Burkhart appears at the Lorelei and joins Zeph and O’Keefe at their table. They discuss their relationships with Vaughn until federal agents arrive and escort Burkhart and his bodyguards out. The following night, Zeph is crossing a parking lot when Burkhart’s car pulls up and Zeph is hustled inside. Burkhart, released because the witness couldn’t ID him, takes Zeph up to his hotel room, which gives a sprawling night view of the Valley. He cordially gets Zeph drunk and then, after methodically dressing himself in SWAT gear, rapes Zeph while his bodyguards hold him. Immediately afterward, a SWAT team bursts through the door. Burkhart’s gun, aimed at Zeph, is shot out of his hand, and he and the bodyguards are subdued.

While Zeph and O’Keefe celebrate Zeph’s negative HIV test results at the Lorelei, they meet Ahmad, a Persian-American, and take him backstage to meet Bar. When Bar returns home later that evening, she is glowing from having met a perfect gentleman.

Episode 10: “The Musk of the Gardens of Allah”

Ahmad’s afternoon audition at the Lorelei segues into a romantic evening performance with Bar. In her newly Persian-themed room, Bar reads Zeph a poem by the mystical Persian poet Hafiz. Ahmad, now dating Bar steadily, is confused by her wholesale adoption of Persian style until Zeph explains that Rita Hayworth’s brief marriage to Persian Prince Aly Khan is the inspiration. Zeph starts work at an animation studio. Slim, O’Keefe and Zeph discuss the dropoff in attendance at the Lorelei and wonder if the reason is because Ahmad is Muslim. They go to Middle Eastern-themed Club La Zeez to watch Ahmad’s dance performance, and they run into Sadiq again. Backstage at the Lorelei, just before a performance, everyone suppresses their shock as they are introduced to Ahmad’s wife, Nadereh. After the performance, ironically effervescent Bar joins Nadereh and Ahmad’s uncle and aunt at their table. Ahmad is visibly pained by Bar’s and O’Keefe’s cloaked jabs when they learn that he and Nadereh have two young children. At home later that evening, Bar and Zeph discuss Nadereh’s ruse as the unsuspecting wife.

Episode 11: “Under the Crescent Moon”

Sadiq calls Zeph at work and suggests they meet at Habibi Café in Westwood. At the café, while puffing on a hookah, they discuss relationships, Sadiq’s Arab background, his recent first-time exploration of Islam, Zeph’s loner tendencies and his agnosticism. They have a drink at Hollywood & Highland and

decide to go to the Hollywood Spa, a bathhouse. While waiting on the platform for the Metro train, a small explosion flares out from a receding train car and frightens everyone on the platform. It was apparently just by chance, a rat on the third rail, but people begin to look at Sadiq suspiciously. Zeph is uncertain about continuing on to the bathhouse after being frightened like that but, as the train approaches, Sadiq begins singing “Forget your troubles, c’mon get happy” and slim Arab men in *dishdashas* dance around him momentarily before he humorously pushes Zeph onto the train.

Backstage at the Lorelei, Bar taunts Ahmad with yet another hunk-of-the-day, and Slim tells her to behave professionally around Ahmad while at work. Zeph begins to fantasize about Sadiq and to develop strong feelings for him, and he feels conflicted about having feelings for both O’Keefe and Sadiq. Wandering around a strip-mall on Sunset and trying to picture the Garden of Allah Villas in that location, he feels he’s being unfaithful to O’Keefe by thinking about Sadiq. O’Keefe invites Zeph and Sadiq out to the Imperial Dunes location where the vampire-Nazi sequel is being shot, and they spend a few days as extras in Bedouin costumes. Zeph continues to be conflicted about his feelings for Sadiq, and at the end of a day’s shooting, on a high dune as the desert sun sets, Zeph and O’Keefe discuss their strong, if atypical, relationship and where Sadiq fits into it.

Episode 12: “Chameleon Night”

Bar, Ahmad and Nadereh have a confrontation at the Lorelei, and Ahmad unwittingly drops a bomb about Nadereh’s former boyfriend, an American, being single again. Nadereh had broken off her relationship with him because of family pressure to marry a Persian. The news catches Nadereh by surprise, and it offers a means for an amicable divorce as Ahmad finally emerges from the closet. He performs a song based on a poem by Rumi on the Persian-American cable-TV network Jaam-e-Jam.

O’Keefe and Zeph attend a mixed-martial-arts match at the historic Olympic Auditorium. They join one of the fighters, Warfield, O’Keefe’s instructor, in the locker room afterward and attend an after-match party at his home. Warfield’s marriage to a model is camouflage to protect his image with his fans. A tabloid photographer has infiltrated the party and manages to get a photo of Warfield groping O’Keefe. When the photog is discovered, the fight organization’s owner, Corcetti, drags him roughly outside. The next morning, Zeph learns from the paper that the photog’s body was found in a dumpster. At the preliminary hearing, the criminalist presents evidence that doesn’t conclusively place Corcetti at the crime scene, and O’Keefe believes he’s innocent. Later, at O’Keefe’s home, he receives video burned onto a CD from an anonymous source that shows the photog still alive as Corcetti drives away.

Zeph dreams that night that he’s the defendant accused of murdering the photog. The dream then becomes a surreal scene in the fighting ring involving Warfield and a referee grappling with him, O’Keefe singing and a dog barking. Zeph wakes up and realizes that a dog is actually barking outside O’Keefe’s bedroom. Out in the living room, he thinks he hears someone outside, but he sees nothing outside the window.

Episode 13: “Deep Focus”

At the animation studio, the drawing scanner surreptitiously delivers an animation drawing that Zeph had secretly requested. When the scanner learns that the drawing was requested by Warfield, one of his heroes, he gives Zeph two more for him. Zeph delivers the drawings to Warfield’s home and listens as he and O’Keefe discuss the anonymous video.

Ahmad has moved into Bar’s room. Zeph encourages Bar not to be as rigidly possessive with Ahmad as she was with Ian, since the possessiveness itself can be emotionally damaging. That night, Zeph dreams that Bar takes Sadiq for a wild ride on her magic carpet. Zeph then finds himself on the set of Polanski’s

Chinatown. He wakes up to find Ahmad approaching his bed. When he tells Ahmad he doesn't like being a bottom, Ahmad proceeds with penetration anyway and Zeph struggles to get free. His struggling wakes him up from the dream, and he is frightened when he sees Ahmad sitting on the edge of his bed. He begins to relax and they discuss the dream, and Ahmad assures him it won't happen. They begin gently kissing and caressing. Zeph imagines Bar as Gilda in a masked gaucho costume cracking a whip at them.

Rod and his wife join O'Keefe, Zeph, Sadiq and Ahmad at the Olympic Auditorium to watch Warfield's match. In the men's room, Zeph encounters Granger, another of Warfield's students, and Granger becomes a little too intense as they discuss Corcetti's preliminary hearing. Later, O'Keefe tells Zeph that all of Warfield's students are suspects, but he hasn't found anything on any of them and LAPD is convinced that Corcetti is guilty and they've stopped investigating.

Zeph wakes up in his room in a scene in which the colors are oddly shifted around the color wheel. The furniture in the room is different, but for Zeph the room is familiar. He goes to answer a knock at the door of an apartment which is unfamiliar to us but not to him, and he is preceded by his chubby roommate, who accepts the UPS package for Zeph and then hits on the hunky delivery man.

Episode 14: "Shadow and Mist"

As Zeph shaves, he and O'Keefe discuss the only other suspect who would've had time to kill the photog. In a shifted-color scene, Zeph goes to the Lorelei and stands near O'Keefe at the bar, and they don't recognize each other. Normal color: O'Keefe calls Zeph at work and tells him he's going to spend the night at Warfield's. So Zeph won't have to spend the evening alone, he's arranged for Sadiq to meet Zeph at the Hollywood Spa. They meet and strip down to towels, and as they walk through the hallways, they encounter Granger a couple of times. Shifted color: Zeph is alone in the steam room. A couple of guys look in and leave. A chubby guy sits beside Zeph, very interested, but when Zeph gently says that he should lose the weight *before* he cruises, the guy insults Zeph and leaves. Normal color: Zeph sits beside Sadiq in the same steam room. Granger joins them and goes down on Zeph. A couple of other guys join in. Granger begins growling and becomes a little too aggressive but then stops and looks up to Zeph, who shrugs and says he's on an antidepressant. Granger offers him Viagra, but Zeph turns him down and he and Sadiq leave the steam room. He quietly tells Sadiq that he had started to feel teeth. In the shower room, Sadiq inspects the faint teeth marks.

At the snack bar, still wearing only towels, they discuss the Corcetti investigation. Granger sits beside Zeph and subtly shows him a packet containing a variety of pills. Zeph continues to decline and Granger abruptly picks him up by the hips and begins sucking on him in mid-air. Zeph reacts as Granger starts chewing on him and struggles to get free. Granger drops him and walks away, and Zeph and Sadiq go to the shower room to wash it off and check for broken skin. They piece things together and realize that Granger is stalking Warfield and he killed the photog to protect Warfield from being outed and he's jealous that O'Keefe is spending the night with Warfield. Afraid they'll encounter Granger on the way to their cars, they call O'Keefe. Out in O'Keefe's car, Zeph explains his theory and shows him the teeth marks. Zeph and Sadiq follow O'Keefe back into the bathhouse, where O'Keefe asks the guy on the desk to put in a call to LAPD. He goes upstairs and confronts Granger and they slug and kick and grapple in the room and the hallway while guys in towels gather around to watch. O'Keefe and Granger are well matched and the fight is tough, but O'Keefe eventually knocks Granger out. The cops arrive and O'Keefe advises them to search Granger's house and car because the evidence they find will link him unmistakably to the photog's murder.

On leaving the bathhouse, they unexpectedly encounter Burkhart, who has somehow evaded the normal processes of the legal system. He cryptically mentions Ahmad and a lucky number, and O'Keefe, Zeph

and Sadiq head back to the Lorelei where they discover that the illegal casino from episode 03 is back in operation, this time with Burkhart as the owner. Ahmad is one of the croupiers, and Fairbanks is the manager.

In a shifted-color scene, Zeph has never left Philadelphia and is still futilely trying to find work in computer graphics. Another shifted-color scene shows Zeph's Amish parents, years ago, making love and his father falling asleep in the middle of intercourse. The camera pulls away and out of the house and rises smoothly until only stars are visible, an echo of the opening scene of episode 02 in which we see Zeph's parents making love on the night Zeph is conceived.