



C.f. Roberts

## **THE HELL OF OTHERS' AMUSEMENT: FAINT PRAISE FOR "KISS IN ATTACK OF THE PHANTOMS"**

Earlier this week I had done with the day's duties and I was staggering off to bed. My wife had beaten me there by roughly an hour. As I entered the bedroom, I noticed that the night's choice of sleeptime white noise on the tube was our copy of "Kiss in Attack of the Phantoms" and at the point of my arrival it was running at about the 45 minute mark. As I readied for bed, my wife sat bolt upright with the remote and flipped the DVD back to the opening credits, mumbling something vague about, "so you can watch the whole thing." Then she promptly laid back down and continued sleeping.

Wow, thanks, I thought---and due to some mad insomnia, I think I did wind up awake through most of the questionable spectacle. Later the next day, she informed me that she had been half-dreaming that the DVD was supposed to be a "special cut" of the film and somewhere in her head it was supposed to be radically different from the original---so I guess it was supposed to be a glam rock "Battleship Potemkin" or something.

This terrible, terrible movie is late night video comfort food in our home, sandwiched somewhere between Something Weird trailer comps, box sets of "Kids in the Hall" and "Mr. Show" and Frankie & Annette Beach epics. This is the stuff we use to lull ourselves off to sleep and it usually runs all night long.

"Attack of the Phantoms" is the theatrical release of the 1978 made-for-TV movie, "Kiss meets the Phantom of the Park"---Gordon Hessler,



who gave us several Vincent Price films as well as “Murders in the Rue Morgue” (Herbert Lom version), “The Golden Voyage of Sinbad” and “The Girl on the Swing”, grinned and bore directorial duties.

“Kiss meets the Phantom” is a bad movie. It’s important to note this. As fringe film geeks, we often find ourselves in the existential and thankless position of defending films others write off as “bad movies”, frequently there’s a “but” involved, because people weaned on the mainstream need a “But” preface to be pulled into our perspective...”sure, It has no budget to speak of...but they did a lot with what little they were given.” “Sure, it seems hackneyed, but you need to remember that they had two weeks to film the thing and then the set was used for this OTHER movie.” “The acting sucks, but the writing is great.” “The story might be derivative, but look at the cinematography!” “It may be awkward and haphazard, but you have to look at these historical perspectives.” “But...but...LOOK AT THAT BADASS LIGHTING!!!!” If you’re waiting for the “But” with “KMTP”, don’t hold your breath. It’s a bad movie.

However...and while there might not be a big cult film “But”, here, there are a few special, pleading “Howevers”---there are a couple of film conventions going on that are worth noting: First and foremost, of course, there are the obvious tips of the hat to “The Phantom of the Opera”---in this case the titular “Phantom” is the Wiz behind all the rides and attractions, who, feeling spurned under economic pressures, goes on a sabotagin’ rampage with his robot creations. Secondarily (and in my eyes, most interesting), there is a common thread at work, here, with a lot of the Mexican Wrestling pictures from back in the day, in which Santo, Blue Demon and other masked wrestling luminaries battled monsters and alien invaders. Not that I think Hessler, Hanna-Barbera or (ESPECIALLY) Kiss and Aucoin, Inc. had any inkling of such delirious schlock---and KMTP is far too canned for such exotic Dada---but the thread is too strong to ignore. Lives hang in the balance and the future of the world is in jeopardy and so the President calls on...a Wrestler?! A madman threatens the lives of thousands and so who else could save the day but the hardest-rocking heroes of Puppetland? The narrative thread, even if unconscious, is staggering.

But these tenuous threads notwithstanding, I’m not gonna blow sunshine up your ass; this is one titanic turkey of a film. Take no other



assessments.

Inna nutshell, the Amusement Park the flick takes place in (And yes--the entirety of the film's action takes place IN A GODDAMN AMUSEMENT PARK) is facing tough financial times--in hopes of boosting attendance, park owner Calvin Richards (70s stalwart Carmine Caridi) books the 70s' favorite cartoon rock band, Kiss, to do a three-night stint. This invokes the ire of his old compadre, Abner Devereaux (world-class character actor Anthony Zerbe, whose exemplary scenery-chewing is the only reason I can scare up to watch this turd--Zerbe scores an A-list ham-job in material that is demoralizing at best. It's obvious that he knows the caliber of the piece he's been saddled with and he plays it like a harp from Hell ). See, Devereaux is the brains behind all the rides and gadgetry in the park--he's especially defensive of the motheaten anthropomorphic figures that delight the kiddies by lurching around in a 3-foot radius over and over all the live-long day. It seems a particular affront to him that all his research and development bucks are being siphoned off to promote this decadent and tacky rock band, just when he's on the verge of a major breakthrough---alas for Abner, the bottom line is The Bottom Line.

Behind the scenes, though, foul play is afoot---park patrons and employees are mysteriously going MIA. Devereaux keeps ranting that he is on the verge of a major breakthrough, but his raging, aggro narcissism finally forces Calvin to pull the plug and fire his old friend. Devereaux descends into his underground lab, vowing to destroy the park.

Roughly an hour into the travesty, Kiss (Stanley, Simmons, Frehley & Criss) enter the film, lip-sync songs like "Shout it Out Loud", "Rock and Roll All Nite", "I Stole your Love" and "Beth" amid a mishmash of concert footage---they wade through wooden soldier through gawdawful dialogue and an idiot plot and fun and laffs ensue.

Devereaux's "breakthrough" is that his silly, anthropomorphic robots have become very lifelike and very dangerous---oh---yeah---and they're essentially cybernetically enhanced slaves—all those folks disappearing? YEAH---Devereaux has taken them and turned them into an army of mindless "Small World" androids.

Enter Sam and Melissa (Terry Lester and Deborah Ryan), a bland, beige-dressed couple who are the Allan Jones and Kitty Carlisle to Kiss's Marx Brothers here. Sam is a new Devereaux lackey who blunders into



an elevator and disappears only to be reconfigured as Abner's favorite electro-zombie. My guess is that he caught Devereaux dressed as Holly Hobby, whacking off over his own genius, and paid the ultimate price---sometimes you see too much. Melissa is a walking plot device---she spends the rest of the film palling around with Kiss, wringing her hands over Sam's whereabouts and screaming breathlessly when the situation calls for it.

Devereaux has sabotaged the whole party by creating a bad robot Kiss---most notably a bad robot Gene Simmons, who runs amok (sometimes accompanied by android redcoats) breaking stuff and terrorizing rentacops (most notably dependable character actor Brion James, squandered here). Kiss, in addition to being the world's greatest cartoon rock band, are beings gifted with superhuman powers. They stalk Devereaux around the park, battling android ninjas, a fat Frankenstein robot, cybernetic albino space monkeys and finally, onstage in front of God'n'everybody, their evil robot doubles---a scenario later copped for "Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey" in the early 90s...not everybody caught the reference in that movie---but I did.

The oddball denouement has Sam being freed of his robot control while Devereaux is revealed, whitehaired and comatose (or dead)---segue to the ending shot---an earlier image of Devereaux wandering around the roller coaster with a facial expression that seems to blend introspection, Luciferian malice and a bad case of constipation---you check it out if you think I'm joking---I've made this face numerous times for Heather and SHE can't argue---while the melancholy "Mr. Make Believe" from Simmons' 1978 solo album plays...this might be to say the angry spirit of Abner Devereaux will always lurk in the park---or it might just be ham fisted editing on someone's part---you can bandy theories about all you want, bucco---my money's on the latter supposition, all the way.

"KMTP" went from TV to a brief run around the driveins, then it unceremoniously disappeared into home video obscurity---and yet it refuses to die. A big part of the blame, of course, is the shameless institution of Kiss, Inc., who are all too glad to milk an abortion for a meal ticket---it's also perpetuated by the Kiss Kult in general---and they're a very scary, non-discriminating bunch---like rock'n'roll trekkies you dare not turn your back on.



I can't say a lot, though, since I own the horrific thing. In some inexplicable, sodden way, "KMTP" takes hold, like a deadly fungus, and it has a perverse kind of resonance.

My cousin recently threw me a "what if" scenario---what if this film had really taken off---not from a Kiss perspective, but from a "Phantom of the Park" perspective? What if a whole franchise of these monstrosities had been produced? "The Captain and Tenille meet the Phantom of the Park"... "The Dukes of Hazzard meet the Phantom of the Park"... "Wonder Woman meets the Phantom of the Park"... "The Bee Gees meet the Phantom of the Park". Personally, I would have liked to have seen how Slade woulda handled the situation.

Twisted, the way this crap worms its way into the brain, eh? Hang tight---I have an even more maleficent brainstorm---"Kiss meets the Phantom of the Park: The Rock Opera". The real action surrounds Abner Devereaux and his inner conflict---Kiss themselves are just kind of a deus ex machina that come in at the end and sort everything out---you could even fold in the choruses to "Shout it out Loud" and "Rock and Roll All Nite" as kind of an ironic, apocryphal Greek Chorus device. I've given this a great deal of thought and I think it REALLY COULD WORK. There's the part of the movie where Calvin takes Abner for a ride on the park monorail to explain the dollars-and-cents reality of his position---all the other happy passengers are unaware that a lifelong friendship is quietly going down the tubes in the back car. Now put this all to a "Tommy"-esque, bloated, baroque rock score and entitle it, "The two Saddest Guys on the Monorail"---TELL ME THAT'S NOT A GRADE-A IDEA. TELL ME THAT WOULD NEVER WORK. KNOCK THIS BATTERY OFF MY SHOULDER, I DARE YA. Think about the stampede of rockers who would kill to play Abner Devereaux in a rock opera! What's Marilyn Manson doing these days? You know he'd eat this up....this is what the younguns refer to as "Post-Modernism".

And after a while, I just get so tired....so tired. It doesn't show, does it? Do I look like I'm tired?

"We found him by the side of the road, Chief, just rambling incoherently about Lil' Abner and Marilyn Manson and sad guys on monorails---then he started screaming about being a misunderstood genius and we just had to haul him in for the general peace...you know,



there's a very nasty strain of Phantom floating around, lately, and this poor bastard's obviously tripping balls...not a lot we can do for him except let him sleep it off...you feel that jitter, buster? Those are the strychnine jitters...you know, that Phantom stuff...you do know they cut it with rat poison, right? Or DID you know? Just relax for a while, pal--- we'll let you post bail when you're calm enough to spell „Mississippi“ ...”

After awhile I have to back off and drag my peepers from the abyss and acknowledge that that way lies madness. But what is it that perpetually drags me to that infernal bottomless well? Why does goddamn Abner Devereaux ride herd over my shattered psyche, and how can I heal myself, or at least score a sizeable profit off the trauma?

Who is this forsaken freak, Abner Devereaux, and how did he come into the possession of every joker in the maniac's tarot? What was his background? What are his hopes, his dreams, his favorite TV shows? Is he a “Lou Grant” guy, or a “Love Boat” guy? Does he read NEWSWEEK? Where does he come from, and what does he want from me? What are his turn-ons and turn-offs? And what's with Fat Frankenstein, anyway?

I have this idea that he doesn't correspond to normal, according-to-Hoyle sexuality. Certainly, he may have vague designs on Beige Oatmeal Girl, but I think it's less a case of wanting to have his way with her and more a case of needing that certain special someone who will squeal with delight at all your impressive inventions...yes, kids, some deeply misshapen part of me understands the mad scientist's wounded ego.

Perhaps it's that, in each and every one of us, the universal truth we'd all like to sweep under the rug is that we are ALL Abner Devereaux--- that this tragic, misunderstood, mad genius lurks in us all, jilted by the bottom line and unable to make his breakthrough and waiting in rapt anger to bring the hammer down on all who've thwarted his dreams.

That's some nice damn fortune cookie rationale, but in the end even my feverish, gibbering mind can't support it...the truth is that Devereaux doesn't come righteously by his actions because the kindling that fires his dreams is PEOPLE. Poor ole Sam, milquetoast though he might be, doesn't deserve a life of mindless slavery---and the juvenile delinquents who vandalize the park, only to become android minutemen in some historical “redemption” dreamt up in Abner's twisted mind? They might



have had their indiscretions, but the problem with the doctrine of Hell---even Devereaux's tinpot purgatory, is that after aeons of suffering and/or robot servitude, even the Hitlers, Stalins and Mansons of the world have to come up square with the house at one point or another.

A world where Abner Devereaux emerges victorious is a world that's not about to do anyone a damned bit of good---let's just be honest, I wouldn't be happy in that scenario, and neither would you. Do you want to spend the rest of your life applauding some clown in a lab coat every time he comes up with the hot new robot? He might land those crucial research and development dollars, but whether it's a clunky mechanical gorilla who lurches back and forth on a chain, a historical figure cobbled from a young ne'er-do-well, evil robot Gene Simmons or a lifelike android Barbershop Quartet harmonizing over their missing body parts, it's a pretty bleak future. Choose your own adventure, chief---do you want to listen to the spare parts quartet warble about how "it must be the look in her eyes" while Uncle Ab stands off to the side nursing a raging stiffy, or do you want to go spend three nights watching the greatest cartoon band in the world blow shit up real good?

Me? I'll take three nights with the cartoon rockers any day. Sorry...it was an easy choice.

One of the saddest memories of my youth is being at the amusement park in Hampton, New Hampshire, watching my younger brother, who may have been 11 or 12 at the time, ride the bumper cars. He was constantly getting wedged up in a knot of cars---I witnessed a sad look of despair and consternation on his face as he haplessly worked the wheel and some rangy carny with a microphone harangued him. "Just back out of the corner, willya, Ace?!" My brother didn't want to be on that goddamned ride...I don't know whose bent, misbegotten idea of fun that was.

In a world designed to amuse the likes of Abner Devereaux, we're all stuck in that lousy bumper car gridlock, fighting the wheel for no good reason and to no good end, while some fleabitten carny of fate mocks our efforts, and it's nice to play "let's pretend", but who really wants to sign on for that ride?

Gawd, I need some sleep.



## **THE HELL OF OTHERS' AMUSEMENT II: CAREENING OVER A CLIFF WHILST JUICED TO THE GILLS ON SOME BAD PHANTOM**

It's 5:40 in the morning and I know most red-blooded Americans in the Central Standard Time Zone are still fast asleep---not me. Our two black cats have designated 5:40 AM Monkey Hour, and they're waging an epic set of loud skirmishes between the bedroom and living room. Sleep ain't happenin'.

The night's endless loop of white noise in the DVD player is, once again, that Golden Turd of yesteryear, "Kiss meets the Phantom"...we've been here before, haven't we? The wife briefly wakes up and expresses concern that she might not be able to get back to sleep. I rationalize that if we can get up (and I'm still on the fence) we might be able to get in a good, greasy southern breakfast at our favorite diner before work. I also confess that the wheels are turning in my brain and I'm back to contemplating transforming "Kiss Meets the Phantom" into a Broadway stage musical.

"Oh, God, of course you are," she groans. Within moments she's asleep again and all hopes of that greasy southern breakfast have been dashed---I'm left alone with my demons.

"We got you again, ripped on Phantom, son---we understand that after a while there's just no going back...but what about those five pedestrians you inadvertently plowed down when it occurred to you that driving on the sidewalk might be a good time? There's no going back for them, either...."

"It's okay, kid---we believe rehabilitation's possible, usually after you're too old and broken down to be a danger to anyone but yourself...you can probably make yourself into a useful, productive member of society again---we'll set you up with a gig bagging groceries at the local supermarket---okay---time to cool your heels for a while...say hello to your cellmate, Mr. Devereaux---try to keep your hands and feet away from his mouth..."





## *1. Welcome to my Breakdown*

There are a few things you need to understand about “Kiss Meets the Phantom: The Broadway Musical/Rock Opera”....wait. Lemme back it up for a sec. Before we even get to the Musical (such as it currently stands) you need to get one thing clear: I’m a goddamn genius. And this statement is not, though it might seem on the surface, simple braggadocchio. It is, in fact, central to the whole thing...the entire gist of my musical is the horror of being a misunderstood genius. So let me just put it out there. I’m a misunderstood genius. Oh---yeah---and you are, too.

The most bare-bones plot synopsis for “Kiss Meets the Phantom” I can give you is this: Mad toymaker Abner Devereaux gets fired from his job making animatronic creatures for an amusement park. Unbeknownst to his superiors, Devereaux has been turning hapless victims into android slaves. He vows revenge against the park, and against the cartoon rock band Kiss in particular. Kiss are playing a three night stint of concerts to boost sagging park revenues. Devereaux tries to sabotage the concert utilizing an evil robot Kiss. Kiss, however, are actually super powered beings---they beat up a bunch of robots and bad Abner is defeated. The End.

In my musical version of “KMTP”, Abner Devereaux is the hero of the story---the whole epic is a tableau of psychodrama that takes place in his addled, deluded, adulation-starved brain. Ever read Joseph Heller’s SOMETHING HAPPENED? THAT kind of thing. You are never given any reprieve from the mental torture of Abner Devereaux, because you are trapped within his brain from the beginning to the end of my production---you are subject to the way he personally colors his relationships and experiences and you are given no respite from his madness and desperation.

ANOTHER CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT POINT: The rock band Kiss---including any past or present members---never appear in the play. They are an abstract---often referenced but seldom seen---not unlike the great, white whale in MOBY DICK---they are technically the villains of the piece, although they are less characters and more of a plot mechanism---their influence is felt throughout, although the band themselves never actually appear.



THE MUSIC OF KISS (and again---this is crucially important!!!!) is never directly used. All the songs (this is a musical, of course) are original---the disembodied “Greek Chorus” device of Kiss might be folded into the organic tissue of the story---snippets of “Rock’n’Roll All Nite” and “Shout it Out Loud” might be incorporated into the musical scheme in an apocryphal way---almost as postmodern jabs to the psyche of the main character. The only exception to this would be the (hopeful) inclusion of the Gene Simmons solo song, “Mr. Make Believe”, which is used so effectively in the “Attack of the Phantoms” edit of the film...one of the secondary characters in the story will be Devereaux’s android replica of Gene Simmons. I envision the Simmons robot as possibly being played by former “American Idol” contestant Adam Lambert in Simmons greasypaint (tell me that wouldn’t be a goldmine of an idea!!!!!!!--early in the production the Simmons-android would serenade Devereaux with the song as kind of a soft, affectionate tribute (the story does, after all, take place in the character’s deluded mind)---later in the production, a reprise of the song would take on a more sinister, mocking tone (the misunderstood genius’s psyche turns on him and self-doubt reigns...how many of us have experienced that?)

This is a Grade-A idea, to quote Willy Loman. Our main goal is to get Gene Simmons in on the ground floor. COME ON---you know he’d do it!!!! It’ll be even hotter than Nickelback’s projected “Elder” tribute!!!! We just need to convince him that it’ll be titanic, and of course, it will (in a striking-an-iceberg-and-sinking-kind-a-way). It’s bound to rake in ten, mebbe twenty bucks----GENE----are you getting this????? There’s gold in them thar hills!

So you’ve got nostalgia, you’ve got psychodrama, you’ve got total *wink-wink-nudge-nudge* action----ain’t that a great basis???? We’re off and running.

#### THE CAST:

ABNER DEVEREAX---Hero of the tale----think “Phantom of the Opera”. Abner is a pariah, the misunderstood genius that dwells within us all. Abner spends most of the play’s action sequestered in his underground lair, turning people into androids and plotting the downfall of those who have wronged him.



**CALVIN RICHARDS**---Owner of the park, admitted bean counter, old friend of Abner's

Who ultimately takes a hard look at his friend's deteriorating mental state and is forced to fire him. This, coupled with his promotion of Kiss to boost park revenues, destroys their long friendship and sends Abner into a megalomaniacal rage. Calvin (and the amusement park) become the primary focus of Devereaux's machinations.

**SAM**---A faceless park flunky who sees things that he shouldn't. Abner turns Sam into a mindless android slave---as the play progresses, android Sam begins singing songs of longing for his freedom and his fiancée, and Abner has increasing difficulty silencing him.

**MELISSA**---Sam's bland fiancée who is searching for him---she also becomes a secondary object of obsession for Abner.

**CHOPPER, SLIME AND DEE**---A trio of delinquents who vandalize the park and harass customers. They are captured by Abner, who turns them into androids and dresses them up as historical figures in a twisted, humiliating form of role play.

**EVIL ROBOT GENE SIMMONS**---the other members of Evil Robot Kiss are only seen in passing---they're walk-ons, and they might be seen partially assembled on work tables. **EVIL ROBOT GENE** is the only one who speaks, sings, actively participates in the action and interacts with other characters. **ERG** is Abner's enforcer, his instrument of destruction. His character is not unlike the Fool character in **KING LEAR**...he plays devil's advocate with Abner---sometimes coddling him and soothing him, mocking him at other times.

**RENT-A-COPS**---They mainly run around, frightened and bewildered, and are menaced and abused by **EVIL ROBOT GENE**. My wife has helpfully suggested Flo and Eddie for the singing roles, and I think this is a fine idea.

**THE BARBERSHOP QUARTET**---Android Barbershop singers in Abner's lair. They are in varied stages of construction---some are



without legs---one is simply a singing head on the table. The Quartet tend to sporadically break into song for no reason whatsoever.

VARIOUS ROBOTS AND ANDROIDS---Including but not limited to: Simon the Gorilla, Fat Frankenstein, The Mummy, Ninjas, albino weremonkey warriors. Their primary function is to dance during the musical numbers.

LIBRETTO (Such as it is....presently under construction):

## ACT I

“Overture”

An orchestrated medley of the major numbers in the soundtrack segues to a lively production number on the park midway, where most of the major characters are introduced.

“Wait for Me”

Park flunky Sam and his fiancée, Melissa, have just gotten finished riding the roller coaster and he must report to work in Abner’s robot shop. He asks her to wait for him and she promises she will in this love song that reprises several times in the production.

“Chopper and Slime don’t hurt Nobody Unless they Want To”

Chopper, Slime and Dee, three young ne’er-do-wells, fool around on the midway, committing acts of petty vandalism and playing cruel pranks on park-goers (mostly children) until they are stopped by Calvin Richards and Abner Devereaux. I see this song as being jaunty and sardonic---



perhaps similar in tone and style to “Consider Yourself” from “Oliver”.

#### “A Strange Interlude”

Sam is working, sweeping up in Abner’s shop. He blunders into an unguarded entry, looks aghast at some unseen tableau and plunges through a trapdoor.

#### “That Grotesque Kiss Cutup”/”The Two Saddest Guys on the monorail”

Abner is upset with Calvin because one of his animatronic exhibits has been replaced by a Kiss Standee...he begs for more research and development funds and Calvin is unmoved, urging Abner to spend more time doing maintenance work on the rides, which are malfunctioning and falling apart. They ride in the back car of the monorail together and a song breaks out----it’s a powerful musical number that might bring to mind “Go to the Mirror” from the Who’s rock opera, “Tommy”. None of the happy amusement park attendees are aware of the communication breakdown and the dissolution of a longtime friendship taking place in the rear car. This tragedy plays out in song and dance.

#### “Chopper and Slime (Reprise)”/ “Simon”

Off on their merry path of destruction, Chopper, Slime and Dee vandalize a pathetic, motheaten animatronic gorilla called Simon, which jerks back and forth dully on a chain. Abner, on his way back from the sad experience with Calvin on the monorail, tries to stop their disrespect. He offers them free passes to the Chamber of Thrills. They insult him, humiliate him and spit on him, but accept the free passes and wander on. A dejected Abner serenades his broken-down animatronic friend with a musical condemnation of the cruelty of the human race. “I’d rather be with my machines,” he laments.

INTERLUDE---The Kiss Army Marching Band marches onstage for a rousing routine to break things up. At the end of this performance our attention is drawn across the midway to the Snack Bar.



### “Wait for Me” (Reprise)

Melissa has been waiting for Sam at the snack bar for hours! She whines their song and wonders what might have happened. Finally she asks some security guards where Abner’s workshop is. They tell her it’s under the Sky Tower.

INTERLUDE—A bunch of acrobats come out to wow the crowd, forming pyramids and doing somersaults. They are all wearing Kiss Army Tee-Shirts and Kiss makeup.

### “It Must be the Look in her Eyes”

Melissa goes to the sky tower and after badgering Abner over the intercom, is allowed into Abner’s workshop. Goofy robot creatures and half-built, lifelike androids are everywhere. Melissa is looking for Sam. Abner tells her he doesn’t know where he is but seems fairly unsympathetic...instead he’s reveling in his gadgetry, proudly showing off his inventions, including a singing, robotic barbershop quartet. Melissa is mildly amused but concerned about Sam. Abner stonewalls and sends her along, but not without a brief musical number...we see the beginning of an obsession with Melissa as Abner turns his attention to The Chamber of Thrills.

### “Heart Attack Time (Chamber of Thrills)”

Chopper, Dee and Slime go to the Chamber of Thrills. They run out all the other customers with their antisocial antics. They are then converged upon and captured by animatronic monsters.

### “My Buddy Sam”

Sam re-emerges in Abner’s lab...he has become an android, completely devoid of personality---not that he was overflowing with personality beforehand. Abner taunts his android slave for being nosy as Sam stumbles around mechanically, performing menial chores. Abner tells Sam he will never snoop again, but be a model employee. He sings about



Melissa, and tells Sam she might one day join him in mindless servitude.

He receives a call from Calvin telling him he must meet with him immediately. He leaves Sam puttering around, tinkering with animatronic figures.

“I’ve Gotta Let you Go”/”Phantom of the Park”

Abner meets Calvin in the parking lot, with a panoramic backdrop of the roller coaster against the sunset. Calvin fires Abner, “for your own good”. Abner tells Calvin he’ll regret his decision. Alone in the shadow of the roller coaster, Abner swears revenge, declaring himself “The Phantom of the Park”.

END ACT I

INTERMISSION

ACT II

Act II opens with a malevolent swell of music and it’s obvious we’re not in Kansas anymore. Much of the action takes place in Abner’s lab, which now has many more androids and animatronic figures in it. The lighting is now mostly lurid reds and greens. As the first scene opens, Abner emerges from the shadows wearing a black cloak. The prevalent sound is a crowd, rhythmically chanting, “we want Kiss! We want Kiss!” It rises and falls throughout the next couple of numbers.

“Method to my Madness (The Secret Ingredient is People)”

As Abner the Phantom descends into his lair we see that Sam is hard at work tweaking the circuitry of a number of androids, some of which resemble Kiss. Abner sings his anthem of revenge and destruction, finally revealing his great scientific breakthrough----enslaving humans



with electronic circuitry as he did Sam. He unveils his three latest creations, Chopper, Slime and Dee, now automatons, dressed as Revolutionary War figures. He plays with the three hapless androids, and some of his abuse has sexual overtones. At one point he partially disrobes Dee and gussies her up as Marie Antoinette. He tells her he has something that's "really going to make you lose your head" when he is suddenly distracted by all the chanting.

"You Wanted the Best, you got the Best".

In a frenzy, Abner unveils his "Secret Weapon"---a fully operational evil Gene Simmons robot that sings and breathes fire.

"Rip and Destroy"

Song-and-dance with Abner, Evil Robot Gene and a now very nimble Simon the Gorilla as Abner details his manifesto of annihilation. As the song hits its crescendo, the crowd's chant has changed from "We want Kiss" to "Rip and Destroy". The whole thing grinds to a halt as Melissa buzzes, once again, at the entrance. Abner sticks Sam in a broom closet, throws a sheet over Evil Robot Gene and lets her in. She expresses her belief that everyone is lying to her. Abner gives her a pass key to the entire park. Momentarily satisfied, she leaves.

"It Must be the Look in Her Eyes II"

Melissa has now unwittingly become Abner's pawn and he, the Barbershop Androids and Evil Robot Gene sing a sinister paen to Abner's designs for her. Somewhere midway through this, Android Sam finds his way out of the closet. Briefly/stiffly joins them in song but ends up blurting a few lines of "Wait for Me". Perturbed by this, Abner readjusts Sam's circuitry and he falls back into his obedient robot self.

This malfunction results in a change from Abner's manic state to a crash into heavy depression.

"Heavy is the Head that Wears the Crown"/"Mr. Make Believe"





Abner sings a grievous soliloquy about the loneliness of misunderstood genius. Before he can succumb to depression, however. Evil Robot Gene bolsters him in song.

“Rip and Destroy”/”Phantom of the Park” (reprise)

Abner reaffirms his plan of destruction. Massive Android singalong, lots of dancing.

The unseen crowd is now chanting, “Ab-ner! Ab-ner! Ab-ner!”

END ACT II

INTERMISSION

ACT III

NOTE: Act III is the sketchiest part so far...I haven’t got it quite squared away, yet, except that it details Abner’s downfall.

OPEN ON THE DARKENED MIDWAY.

Several Security guards are assaulted by a rampaging EVIL ROBOT GENE.

“When Rock Stars Attack Part 1”

“Another Strange Interlude”

Melissa sees Sam walking across the darkened midway. As a mindless android, he fails to recognize her. She screams.

“ Must Have the Talismans”

Looking at the oncoming threat of Kiss, Abner decides he must steal the



talismans that give them their super powers. He expresses this in song and this is an elaborate stage number like the ones in the last act---but where those were focused and cohesive, this one is less so and this problem grows throughout the final act. Abner is losing control of his androids. Sam sporadically launches into stilted versions of “Wait for Me” and the Barbershop quartet break into random, unwarranted song, usually clashing with whatever may be going on musically.

### “When Rock Stars Attack Part 2”

Evil Robot Gene goes on another midway rampage while Sam steals the Talismans.

### “It Must be the Look in her Eyes Part 3”

Abner is now plotting to take control of Melissa, but is conflicted as to whether he wants her as an android slave or as a living, breathing, willing partner. Sam continues his musical malfunctions, causing another depressive episode .

### “Mr. Make Believe (Reprise)”

The evil Gene Robot serenades Abner again, but this time there’s a more cruel, mocking tone to it. It doesn’t do a lot for Abner’s esteem.

Things are a little dodgy after this---there will be a lot of fussing over The Kiss Robots and a lot of ranting about the Talismans.

The basic gist is that the Evil Robot Kiss (in my version) succeed in starting a riot (offstage, never seen) but are defeated (again, offstage, never seen) and only Evil Robot Gene, severely damaged, makes it back to the lair.

I’m contemplating an additional “catalyst” move which could incur the wrath of numerous fanboys---sure, most fans will readily tell you that “KMTP” is a bad movie, but Kiss fans are also insane---I would personally never want to risk buying a used car from one, and neither should you.



ANYWAY, in a plot-changing move, my thought is to have Melissa killed during the riot. A ferris wheel comes unhinged and crushes her and a number of other park goers. This is never seen, just alluded to---if anything it might send Abner's revenge fantasy into a downward spiral by seeing his pseudo-obsession girl die due to his negligence regarding the upkeep of the park rides.

At this point, all bets are off.

“Shout it Out Loud”

NOT the Kiss song, of course, but it could fold the chorus, in a clever-clever, postmodern kinda way, into the lyrics. Abner suffers a complete breakdown and his android friends (led by Sam, Evil Robot Gene, Chopper, Slime, Dee---possibly headless at this point, Fat Frankenstein and even Abner's beloved gorilla Simon) all turn on him---“shouting it out loud”---pointing and accusing and converging upon him like an angry lynch mob. In a crushing finale, Abner disappears screaming under the throng of android persecutors and the stage goes black. When the lights come back up, the lab is empty and in ruins. An enthusiastic crowd is heard cheering and stomping, with an almost Nuremburg feel. A huge banner is unfurled that covers the entire stage. It is a gigantic version of “That Grotesque Kiss Cutup”, basically a replica of the cover of the band's “Love Gun” album. The hammer of justice---or mediocrity, anyway, from Abner's vantagepoint---has been brought down. This is not unlike the end of “Cabaret”, when the glass partition reveals a pervasive Nazi presence in the audience (wanna steal? Steal from the best!). The lights go out once again and the play is over.

## ***2. Every Piece of Equipment has a Shakedown Period***

There's still some wiggle room as far as writing this thing goes---a little tweaking here and there. I'm doing what I can, but at this point I'm averaging, maybe, 3 or 4 hours' sleep a night.

It doesn't show, does it?

Damn phantom just keeps floating around my veins like ground glass...it's just part of the overall experience. You try to deal with it---



some hardcore freaks learn to love it.

“You do know they cut it with rat poison, right? Or *did* you know?”


Heather and I have come to loggerheads over this---it’s not that she’s adverse to changing the story---she just wants Abner to win at the end.

I can’t do it, though---the logical arc to me is loss, doom and destruction. I’m just a Tragedy Pimp, I guess. You watch that whole damn movie---you don’t want Carlito to take that bullet, but he always does. Billy Bibbett always commits suicide and Mac always gets the lobotomy. The stoopid Titanic always sinks and our hearts go on, Cornelius and Zira always get gunned down---that errant Tralfamadoran Scientist always drops the ball and ends the universe and every time it comes around the damn Tralfamadorans let the whole sordid chain of events occur. Sure, I might be a Tragedy Pimp, but I’m not the only one.

It’s hard to tell what might invoke the ire of Kiss fans more, though, and I’ve explained my generalized wariness of fanboys already. Killing Melissa might push some buttons, I’m sure---I’m still on the fence with that---but what’s a worse tragedy---Abner going down a la Joe Spinell in “Maniac”, or Sam and Melissa being reunited and running off to a boring house in a boring suburb, where they play racquetball, listen to their old Kiss records and have equally beige-clad, boring babies? “I was once an android flunkie. Kiss played the park I was working at, but I was oblivious to it at the time---you know---the whole android slave-thing.” Yeah, that’s one helluva story to wow the grandkids with, buster.

Fandom gets so weird when you mess with a classic, or even pseudo-classic text, though...I’m old enough to remember all the comic geeks who cried “foul” because Zack Snyder “changed the ending” to the “Watchmen” movie---never mind that he didn’t change the ending, just a plot device---fanboys are an unforgiving bunch, and they’re not big on drawing fine distinctions.

I’m sure the most furious wing-beating will be reserved for the complete absence of an According-to-Hoyle Kiss or even a passable tribute band---no real Kiss songs, and so forth. Tough. Sometimes you’ve gotta be a fascist, fanboy---open up your mouth and eat your gruel, I’ve got a big ole spoonful right here to shove down your throat. Don’t try and tell *me* what has cache and what doesn’t---this is post-modernism, babies---it’s edgy and it’s clever, and you’d better enjoy it, ,cause I’m a genius, whether you understand me or not!



### 3. *That's the Kind of Sugar Poppa Likes*

Another possible brickbat in my direction might be the amping up of Abner's designs on Melissa. I really could see some misdirected insubordination from "Kiss Meets the Phantom" Purists (both of ,em) but I'm sticking to my guns. It heightens the level of drama and conflict, and love triangles make for good musical theatre---everybody knows that.

This is bank, man---it's the difference between "Kiss Meets the Phantom: The Overblown, Pretentious Broadway Production" making ten bucks at the box office and thirty. You've gotta trust me. Nobody cried at the end of the TV movie except for the suicidal network execs who greenlighted the damn thing. Everyone will cry at the end of my "Phantom". The furniture will cry. I'll cry. You'll cry. Your Aunt Tilly will cry.

You've gotta trust me on this---I am a card-carrying member of the Misunderstood Genius Clubhouse, you know...next week we're gonna perform "The Barber of Seville", and I am personally greasing up my cowlick in preparation....

In the very neutered film there may be the slight suggestion that Abner might want Melissa for his own but for the sake of a big-budget, quasi-Andrew Lloyd Webber Faux Rock Extravaganza we need to take that all the way. An old buddy joked to me once, "I didn't know you had desires or urges---I thought you just existed."

Well, aren't we foolish not to think likewise of our Phantom? Misunderstood Genius is a lonely calling, after all. Abner might have some misplaced priorities, but he's still a man. He might be conflicted as to whether he wants an obedient automaton or a lover and partner, but that's a problem of perspective. That part of us that wants Kong to get Fay Wray, wants Quasimodo to get Esmeralda, wants Hannibal and Clarice to live happily ever after eating people, cheers on the notion that Abner can overcome his damage and carry Melissa off to a magic castle where he can impress her with his neat inventions and they can birth an army of brilliant Brazilian Hitler Babies.

My afformentioned Street Cred as a Tragedy Pimp, of course, makes such outcomes impossible---but the natural desire for such an outcome is one that will keep audiences riveted---and that, as previously crowed, equals B-A-N-K, the most beautiful four letter word in the world.



This also reinforces my theory that Melissa has to die. For shit's sake, people---you can't expect Rima in GREEN MANSIONS to grow old gracefully---nor can one expect this of Melissa. She and Abner are a love that can never be, as much as you think you might want to see it. We Misunderstood Genii™, of course, understand Abner's needs; He needs a captive audience who will clap and cheer and adore his every work of mechanical art---he wants someone who will love the Android Barbershop Quartet as much as he does...someone who will treasure Evil Robot Gene in spite of his concession stand-smashin', rent-a-cop-bone-snappin' proclivities.

What does Melissa want? It's hard to tell----sometimes I'm not sure she knows. My wife surmises that she wants Coulots. I'm not sure what Coulots are.

"It's a type of clothing," she tells me. Fine. What else does Melissa want out of life? Something else..."Asperdiddles?"

Heather's face goes into a sarcastic sneer. "Yeah," she snaps, "she wants Asperdiddles!"

After some clarification, I come to understand---Esperdrills---not Asperdiddles.

I don't know what that is.


You see the problem here---right?

#### ***4. Fractured Mirror: The Sad Psychology of Abner Devereaux***

A major point is that the movie, "Kiss Meets the Phantom of the Park", is all surface action. There's no (intentional) nuance going on there, outside what psychotics like me will insinuate.

My "Phantom", as you might guess at this point, is a layered beast, rife with allegory, symbolism and introspection. Bow before the Master, bitches.

None of the play is meant to be taken literally, of course---it's a tale told by a misunderstood genius, full of sound and fury signifying nothing. The entire narrative is informed by Abner's neuroses, delusions and mood swings---and you're stuck having those things inform you from beginning to end---it's not a pretty neighborhood, and you know



what? Only a chump would want to buy property there.

Yeah, in real life (the counterfeit Real Life of the fiction) there might be a struggle between a good guy cartoon rock band and an evil scheme--but that only concerns us on a contextual level.

The action you see going on in the course of the play is the rising and falling of Abner's brainwaves. You go through its highs and lows and you share his moments of elation, disappointment and defeat.

The attack of the androids at the end shouldn't be seen as an actual event---it's merely the machinations of Abner's mind betraying him---we have an unreliable narrator and what the audience has been witnessing the entire production is just an elaborately staged nervous breakdown. So another misunderstood genius bites the dust, right?


Not necessarily---the catatonic, white-haired epilogue of the original film is the worst kind of copout---I know it, you know it and the people who made the damn movie know it. So you grab your coats and you leave the theatre and you get to go someplace to discuss the whole sordid matter over espressos or something.

Is there anything else?

Okay---misunderstood genius goes rogue, enslaves a few people, does some property damage and perhaps there is some degree of life and limb to answer for. Fine. He's made some bad choices and ultimately he must pay his debt to society. But how harsh is his punishment gonna be? You're talking about a guy whose best buddy is a singing, dancing, evil Gene Simmons robot.

In short, there's an eventual out for our hero---he may not be able to hide in an underground lair and build evil robots, but he's not above rehabilitation. . .there's always hope. Think about the kind of fake finality of "Requiem for a Dream"---sure, dude may have lost an arm, but he'll bounce back from that---he'll learn to live with it, he can clean up his junk habit and reassess the messy life he's lived. Jennifer Connelly doesn't have to keep hooking and the Wayans kid? He ain't gonna be in jail forever. It's a kind of false hopelessness that the movie chooses to leave you with.

Abner Devereaux---you know him. . .sure, he may have a past life we don't know about but that's somewhere in a forgivable past. . .you know Abner, Skippy---you even like him. He's the pleasant old man with the vague smile who bags your groceries every Saturday down at the A&P.



He might be an ex con or something, you're not sure, but those days are long over for him. He always asks you what you want---plastic or paper--and whichever one it is that you want, he'll tell you, each and every time, without fail, "that's my most favorite selection!" He bags those groceries like an artist, too, with military precision---some bag boys don't care where things land in a bag---not Abner! The heavy things are always on the bottom, the light things are more toward the top so they never get crushed, and Mom's eggs are always placed perfectly so that they never get damaged. Oh, we'll never forget nice old Mr. Devereaux---there's just something about him---it must be the look in his eyes.

It's survival, innit? Might seem like an obscure and inglorious outcome for a misunderstood genius, but it's not all bad...the cards are terminally stacked against us, you know. That's the danger with us---we don't speak the language. People don't want to hear our barbershop quartets---they aren't impressed by our quaint, animatronic gorillas. They want Coulots. They want Asperdiddles. We don't understand that.

I don't even know what those things are.

### ***5. Rock'n'Roll Over: A Denouement of Sorts***

The Lady Goodwife is not amused by all of this. "First of all," she says, "you're comparing ‚Kiss Meets the Phantom“ to ‚Requiem for a Dream“! Second of all...NO!"

There's a pregnant pause, and I'm waiting for her to elaborate on this point, but instead she just emphatically reiterates, "NO!"

It's 7 AM...the cats are still roughhousing and I'm not sure I've slept much at all.

The average person doesn't want to hear it, but there is a kind of existential beauty to these simple, redemptive acts. Paper or plastic---regardless of what they want, it's the right choice. And making sure the light things are toward the top of the bag and the heavy things are on the bottom is an important function in our society. We'd have wholesale anarchy without our smiling bagboys. And at the end of the day, taking special care to make sure Mrs. Johnson's eggs are safe is a perfectly fine surrogate activity to substitute for wreaking revenge on those who have wronged you.

It's my dream. It's my nightmare.





My wife has gotten up and is pulling on her shirt. “It might be your nightmare,” she grouses, “but I’m living it!” She heads out to the kitchen to make coffee.