

LAUGHING ALIEN

An Original Screenplay

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT - DAY

A barren yard, enclosed by high adobe walls. A blindfolded man, ZACK HUNTER, young, bearded, is brought into the yard by a trio of Native American men. They stop, untie his blindfold.

NEW ANGLE

Zack blinks in the bright sunlight, then his eyes widen. A green hand with four slim fingers comes into frame in the foreground, seeming to wave. A strange LAUGHING sound - "Nit, nit nit" - is heard.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - DUSK

Zack hunkers down in a rock outcropping overlooking a desolate mesa. A phone bud in his ear, he peers through a high tech video camera.

VIDCAM POV

Roving the landscape.

ZACK  
(whispering)  
You with me, Jas? Good. This is  
where he said to come. No, they  
wouldn't let me photograph him...

Zack hears something, pivots the camera toward the sheer wall of a distant bluff. A perfectly camouflaged oval doorway silently opens.

Moments later, two saucer shaped discs emerge, hover in the air.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Holy shit! You getting this  
Jasmine?

The saucers zip laterally, then execute an amazing ninety degree turn, vanish.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Sure, there's no such thing as  
UFO's, or secret bases...

Suddenly the image through Zack's viewfinder goes black. He looks up to see two men in black suits. One wags his finger at Zack, shaking his head.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Uh-oh.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A posh downtown watering hole, where movers and shakers finish their day.

Sitting alone with an empty glass is TOMMY STONE, early 40s, loosened tie. He glances at his glass - a bartender pours a generous shot in response.

Just then, a sharp-dressed DUDE walks by, claps Tommy on the shoulder.

DUDE

Hey Stone! Nice piece on the Mayor fixing his kid's little league games. Earth shattering shit, man!

TOMMY

Dirt is where you find it.

DUDE

I get it. Try anything to get back on prime time.

Tommy nods as the Dude walks off, laughing.

TOMMY

(sotto voce)  
Asshole.

Tommy tips his glass. An attractive WOMAN takes a seat next to him.

WOMAN

(to bartender)  
Cosmo, please. You know how I like it.

TOMMY

Put that on my tab.

WOMAN

Thanks, Tommy. How's it going?

TOMMY  
Next question.

WOMAN  
Oh come on, being a famous  
muckraker can't be all bad.

TOMMY  
Am I still famous?

WOMAN  
You are in my book.

TOMMY  
I want to read that book of yours  
one of these days.

WOMAN  
How about tonight?

Tommy glances at her, considers the possibilities.

TOMMY  
Hon, you're fabulous. Give me a  
rain check. Ciao.

Tommy throws a bill on the bar, takes off.

INT. TOMMY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

An upper end bachelor residence. Tommy wanders in, checking  
his phone voicemail.

WOMAN (V.O.)  
Hey Champ. Me again. In case you  
change your mind, I'm up late.  
Bye.

Tommy reconsiders, shakes his head. Another message.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)  
Tommy, this is Jasmine, you know,  
with Zack Hunter? They got Zack.  
Check your email - I'm sending you  
a clip.

TOMMY  
They, whoever they are, got Zack.  
That's messed up. I'm messed up...

Tommy crashes onto his bed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TOMMY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Tommy, groggy, wakes up as a gray tabby cat nudges his face.

TOMMY

I know you're hungry, Max. Give me  
a minute, will ya?

Tommy shuts his eyes, reaches over, checks voicemail again.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)

(urgent)

Tommy, Jasmine. Where are you?  
Check your email and get back to  
me. It's important.

Max nudges again. Tommy rises slowly.

TOMMY

All right already.

INT. TOMMY'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Tommy sets down a bowl for Max, plops in front of a laptop.

ANGLE - SCREEN

A clip plays. It's Zack, in the desert, speaking to camera.

ZACK

In the peace and silence of the  
high desert, what secret mysteries  
lurk? Zack Hunter, with the Hunter  
web cam, here with the skinny on  
stuff you'll never hear about in  
the corporate media.

SHOT of the UFO's emerging from the mesa, doing their fancy  
maneuver, until the screen goes black.

Tommy plays the clip back while dialing a number on his cell.

TOMMY

Jasmine? Yeah, I saw it. Nothing  
some teenager with the right FX  
program couldn't work up. Of course  
I believe you, but I get stuff like  
this all the time, and it's always  
bogus. How do I know Zack isn't  
playing one of his pranks? Ok, ok,  
listen, I'll call someone, see what  
I can do... yeah, ciao.

Tommy looks at the screen skeptically. Max rubs his chin on the monitor's edge.

INT. DOWNTOWN PRESS CLUB - DAY

LAURA RYAN, mid-30s, attractive, professional, makes a presentation to a press contingent.

LAURA

Some say there's no difference between candidates, that they all serve the same master. Well, that may have been true in the past, but Senator Carlsen has demonstrated that she truly is a candidate of the people.

JANET CARLSEN, 50s, sympathetic, no nonsense, sits behind Laura, smiling a bit self-consciously. In the audience, Tommy shakes his fist over his crotch.

LAURA (CONT'D)

It is my pleasure to present to you the woman who will be the next President of the United States - Janet Carlsen.

Cameras click, notebooks poise as Carlsen takes the dais.

CARLSEN

Thanks for the kind words, Laura. I trust you'd say the same, even if you weren't my press secretary.

Carlsen smiles - the press corps overlaugh - she's got them in the palm of her hand.

INT. DOWNTOWN PRESS CLUB - LATER

The event is over, people mingle. Tommy snares Laura for an aside.

TOMMY

Hey hotshot, looks like you've hitched your wagon to a rock star.

LAURA

Tommy, hi. It's not just that she's going to win -

TOMMY

I know, Laura, you believe in her.  
How delightfully quaint.

LAURA

Still the cynic, I see.

TOMMY

Still the ever-hopeful idealist, I  
see. Good thing we never tied the  
knot.

LAURA

Yeah, would have killed each other  
by now. Seriously, how are you?

TOMMY

Oh, you know, fighting the good  
fight in this god-forsaken media  
jungle.

LAURA

Saw your piece on the councilman.  
It was great.

TOMMY

Wow, that makes two people who saw  
it - can prime time be far away?

LAURA

Do good work and let the chips  
fall.

TOMMY

I hate it when people quote me to  
myself.

LAURA

You always did. Well, gotta go.

TOMMY

Sure. Oh, hey, listen, I was going  
to call you on this.

Tommy holds out a card, flips it over.

INSERT - CARD

"Zack Hunter" in Tommy's scrawl.

LAURA

Do I know him?

TOMMY

Gonzo web journalist, old buddy of mine. Allegedly vanished from the face of the Earth. Thought you might run his name by some of your insider wonks.

LAURA

Normally, I'd say no, but for you, no way.

Tommy looks at her askance. Laura takes the card.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I'll call you.

EXT. STREET -- DAY

Tommy walks up the front steps of his two story flat, puts his key in the front door - it's ajar.

TOMMY

What the...?

INT. TOMMY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Tommy pushes open the door - the place has been tossed.

TOMMY

Well bless me.

He checks around. A cat CRIES.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Max? Where are you, Max?

Again the cry. Tommy looks under the bed.

ANGLE

Max is there, freaked out.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Come on boy, it's okay.

He reaches under the bed, pulls Max out, holds him close.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Doesn't look like they took anything.

(to Max)

Can you give me a description?



Max meows.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE BUILDING -- DAY

A taxi pulls up in front of a sleek office tower with sign: Media News Network. Tommy debarks the cab, hustles in.

INT. EXECUTIVE OFFICE -- DAY

Tommy meeting with MNN senior editor, JARED COBB. They watch the end of the UFO video on Tommy's laptop. Tommy shuts it.

JARED

Okay, so we have some web guy spinning conspiracy theories about UFOs in the desert. What else is new?

TOMMY

Let me run a story, Jared.

JARED

You don't have anything.

TOMMY

What do you mean - footage of saucers coming out of a mesa?

JARED

Of questionable authenticity.

TOMMY

If it's the real deal, or even close, then it's the story of the millennium.

Jared considers.

JARED

Look, we're not a tabloid.

TOMMY

But...?

JARED

I'll run it up the flagpole.

TOMMY

That's the gutsy Senior Editor I know and love.

JARED

No promises. You're a friend,  
Tommy. I'd like to see you back on  
top.

TOMMY

You and me both, amigo.

Tommy gets up, takes his leave.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Call me.

INT. TOMMY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tommy puts photos back on a bookshelf - shots of him with prominent politicians and celebrities. Then a newspaper photo of him and Laura, in younger, happier days. He looks at it wistfully.

CLOSE ON PHOTO

The headline under the photo reads: "Reporters Stone and Ryan win Pulitzer for Investigative Reporting".

TOMMY

(to self)

Do good work and let the chips  
fall...

INT. TOMMY'S STUDY - NIGHT

The place is back in a semblance of order. Tommy works in front of a large desktop screen.

On the screen, Zack doing one of his reports - this one at Ground Zero in NYC.

ZACK

So how is it that no steel framed buildings have ever been brought down by fire, ever, and on 9/11, it happens twice, no, three times if you count building 7, which wasn't even hit by a plane? If you believe the 9/11 commission report, then I've got some swamp land in Florida I'd love to sell you...

Tommy smiles, shakes his head.

TOMMY  
(to self)  
Oh Zachary - ever the shit  
disturber.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK CAFE -- DAY

Tommy sits at an outdoor table - nice place in the city center. He is joined by Laura, who looks a bit frazzled.

TOMMY  
Hey now. We don't see each other  
for years, now it's twice in one  
week.

LAURA  
Like old times.

TOMMY  
The tostada salad here is to die  
for. You still doing the salad  
thing?

LAURA  
I'm not hungry.

TOMMY  
Starvation diet - even better.

Tommy senses something, looks at Laura. She looks around, then back at Tommy.

LAURA  
I got something for you.

TOMMY  
Let 'er rip.

LAURA  
My guys did a search on Zack  
Hunter. He's a hot item.

TOMMY  
Meaning?

LAURA  
Certain agencies are interested,  
very interested - all files are  
blocked.

TOMMY  
That can't be good.

LAURA  
My guess is that Zack was into something. The kind of thing you don't mess around with.

TOMMY  
Spare me the cloak and dagger.

LAURA  
Tommy, I know he was a friend-

TOMMY  
Is. A friend.

LAURA  
I can't do anything.

TOMMY  
Can't or won't? Okay, okay, listen, thanks for trying.

Tommy gets up abruptly, pulling out his wallet.

LAURA  
Still friends?

TOMMY  
Sure, why not?

Tommy drops some cash on the table, turns to leave - a MAN and WOMAN in dark suits are in his way.

WOMAN  
Mr. Stone, we'd appreciate it if you came along with us.

TOMMY  
For what, a tour of the kitchen?

The Man flashes an ID.

MAN  
Just a few routine questions.

TOMMY  
Right... Come on, Laura.

He grabs her by the arm, ushers her off in the opposite direction.

WOMAN

Please don't make a scene, Mr. Stone.

TOMMY

With all due respect, fuck off.

He breaks into a run, dashing into the street with Laura - a car nearly hits them.

LAURA

What are you doing!

Thick traffic blocks the pursuing agents.

Tommy flags a taxi going the other way, gets in with Laura. They take off just as the Agents rush up to the window. Tommy waves bye-bye.

INT. TAXI -- DAY

Laura and Tommy.

LAURA

Are you insane?

TOMMY

Call me old-fashioned, but I don't go into anyone's custody without talking to my lawyer first.

LAURA

Fine, but did you have to drag me into this?

TOMMY

(to driver)  
Stop the car!

The taxi pulls over. Tommy leans over, opens the passenger side door.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

You're right. Go back to your future president. You don't want to be associated with scum like me.

LAURA

I didn't mean it that way.

TOMMY

It's cool. Really.

Laura gets out of the car, looks back in.

LAURA

Looks like you're into a story you shouldn't be.

TOMMY

The best kind. Ciao, kiddo. Keep your eyes on the headlines.

Laura reaches into her coat pocket, hands Tommy a card.

LAURA

One of the guys said you should use this contact if you get into a tight spot. He knows about this, er, stuff.

INSERT -- CARD

"Carlos Van Tassel, UFOlogist and Exopolitics,  
CVT@paradigmshift.org"

TOMMY

Thanks.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TENNIS CLUB -- DAY

The taxi pulls up outside. Tommy debarks.

EXT. TENNIS COURTS -- DAY

Jared Cobb, just walking off a court with a partner. Tommy confronts him.

TOMMY

We need to talk.

JARED

Come inside. We'll have a drink.

INT. TENNIS CLUB BAR -- LATER

Jared and Tommy at a table. Tommy's drink is untouched.

TOMMY

This actually could be something, Jared. Why else would they sick goons on me?

JARED  
I'm not convinced.

TOMMY  
We have UFO footage, men and women  
in black, and a missing journalist,  
right here in the land of the free.

JARED  
Maybe your pal's ducking someone -  
creditors, an ex-girlfriend,  
girlfriend's old man...

TOMMY  
Come on, Jared, you know that  
people, and their records, don't  
get blocked unless...

JARED  
Unless what?

TOMMY  
You tell me.

JARED  
I wouldn't know.

TOMMY  
So are you going to run a story or  
not?

JARED  
Goddammit, Tommy, I would if I  
could.

TOMMY  
You're a Senior Editor at MNN, a  
decision maker. Make a decision.

Jared looks around, leans over, speaks in a hushed tone.

JARED  
They threatened my family.

TOMMY  
They, who are they?

JARED  
You're in over your head, Tommy.

TOMMY  
So where do we go from here?

JARED  
You want my advice? Take a  
vacation.

TOMMY  
Where?

JARED  
Anywhere. Just get the hell out of  
Dodge. I gotta go.

Jared claps Tommy on the shoulder, gets up to greet his  
approaching tennis partner.

EXT. TOMMY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Tommy, at the door of his downstairs neighbor, holding Max in  
a carrier. He hurriedly hands Max to an older woman, MRS.  
DUNN.

TOMMY  
Thanks, Mrs. Dunn. You're a  
lifesaver.

MRS. DUNN  
When did you say you'll be back?

TOMMY  
I didn't - breaking story - could  
be a few days, maybe longer.

MRS. DUNN  
Well-

TOMMY  
Thanks again. Remember, just a  
spoonful of dry, and the rest wet,  
no matter what he says.

Tommy takes off.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY LIBRARY -- DAY

Tommy pulls up in his Highlander.

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY

Tommy at a public computer. He logs into an email account,  
username "Dick Hertz", clicks.



CLOSE

"Carlos Van Tassel" is typed onto a search window. A video comes up, begins to play. Tommy dons a pair of headphones.

ON THE SCREEN

CARLOS VAN TASSEL appears. Middle-aged, bearded, he lectures with passion and intensity.

VAN TASSEL

To believe in UFOs is tantamount to cultural heresy. Well, it was once heresy to think the earth was round. The fact is, UFOs and alien species exist, and our government has long known it. Their persistent and ludicrous denials are telling.

A question from the lecture audience.

QUESTIONER

If what you say is true, where are they from, and why are they here?

VAN TASSEL

Well, those are the trillion dollar questions. There's a lot of theories, some official disinformation. But I'll tell you this - there's some hellacious things happening. If we're not vigilant, it could well mean - some really bad shit...

LADY (O.S.)

I don't believe it!

Tommy yanks off his headphones. An elderly LADY, in the carrel next to his, is aghast.

TOMMY

What is it? Did you hear-

LADY

That's simply incredible!

TOMMY

Yes, er, what?

LADY

The library charged me twelve dollars for an overdue book!

(MORE)

LADY (CONT'D)

I could buy the old rag for less than that!

TOMMY

You don't say? Well, what is this world coming to?

The Lady clucks in agreement as Tommy picks up to leave.

EXT. LIBRARY - DAY

Tommy exits the library - flashes a look of concern - a black sedan has blocked his car. The two black suited agents emerge from the sedan.

TOMMY

Long time no see. You don't call, you don't write.

WOMAN

No drama this time.

Tommy turns - another pair of agents approach from behind.

Just then, a BMW sedan rockets through the parking lot, brakes between Tommy and the agents. The passenger door flies open - it's Laura.

LAURA

Get in!

Tommy does - the door slams, Laura accelerates wildly past the scattering agents.

INT. LAURA'S CAR

Tommy, thrown back, buckles up, looks behind.

TOMMY

I've got two things to say - damn glad to see you and, what in the hell are you doing?

LAURA

We've got to get out of here.

TOMMY

Ya think?

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The Beamer charges up a freeway onramp. No pursuit in sight.

INT. LAURA'S CAR - DAY

Tommy, looking back.

TOMMY  
We're clear.

LAURA  
Good.

Tommy looks to her for an explanation.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
We're going to see Van Tassel.

TOMMY  
We're? Van Tassel? Did I miss something, like the part where you call me and we plan this out?

LAURA  
There wasn't time for that.

TOMMY  
Evidently.

LAURA  
I'm sorry, Tommy. Janet asked what was going on - she found out about the check I ran.

TOMMY  
And?

LAURA  
She's concerned.

TOMMY  
Is she?

LAURA  
I told you, she's not like the others. She knows there are shady ops going on. She thinks there should be oversight.

TOMMY  
That's nice. But I don't see what-

LAURA

She wants me to help find out what's going on and break the story.

TOMMY

I don't get it. Won't she need you to introduce her at press conferences?

LAURA

Tommy, with her on your side, you might actually get the story out.

TOMMY

Okay. An intriguing turn of events. I'll roll with it. So where does Mr. Van Tassel live, and what can he do pour nous?

LAURA

Tucson. And we'll find out when we get there.

Tommy glances at Laura skeptically, flashes an "okay-what-the-hell" smile.

TOMMY

Whatever.

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - DAY

The Beamer makes its way on a tiny asphalt ribbon that traverses the vast landscape. A highway sign reads "Tucson 286 miles".

INT. BEAMER -- DAY

Tommy and Laura survey the scenery.

TOMMY

I forgot how immense this desert is.

LAURA

It's been awhile.

TOMMY

Yeah. When did we go on that trip to the Grand Canyon?

LAURA  
It's been eleven years.

TOMMY  
No... God, that was fun.

Laura looks at him a moment.

LAURA  
So what did Zack find?

TOMMY  
You saw what I saw.

LAURA  
You really think he's onto something?

TOMMY  
Hell if I know. To be honest, which, by the way, I usually am, I don't believe in UFO's.

LAURA  
What's to believe? Either they exist or they don't. It's a matter of evidence.

TOMMY  
Maybe, but even assuming the craft Zack shot are real, who says they're from outer space?

LAURA  
Secret prototype?

TOMMY  
Possibly. What I can't figure is - what's your angle?

LAURA  
Excuse me?

TOMMY  
Why is your boss interested?

LAURA  
I told you -

TOMMY  
I know, she wants to get the truth out. But what's her real reason?

LAURA  
That is her real reason.

She looks at Tommy.

TOMMY  
Okay.

LAURA  
Some things just don't change.

TOMMY  
Guess not.

CUT TO:

EXT. ECONOMY HOTEL - NIGHT

Tommy and Laura pull some things out of the back of the car, head for their rooms. Tommy holds out a pair of keys.

TOMMY  
One for you, one for moi.

LAURA  
Thanks.

TOMMY  
Seems a waste. I mean, I was thinking...

LAURA  
No way, Jose. What kind of woman do you take me for?

TOMMY  
That kind. Okay, okay, didn't mean to offend.

LAURA  
Tommy, I stopped being offended by you a long time ago.

TOMMY  
Oh, uh, good, I guess.

Tommy looks up at the sky.

TOMMY (CONT'D)  
Wow, look at that.

The night sky sparkles with a massive display of stars.

LAURA

Amazing.

TOMMY

Who knows, maybe E.T. is out there  
somewhere?

LAURA

Maybe.

TOMMY

Laura?

LAURA

Yes.

TOMMY

Ever wonder what happened to us?

LAURA

I don't think we need to rehash  
ancient history.

TOMMY

Contrary to what you might think,  
people do change - sometimes.

LAURA

So I've heard. Listen, I don't mean  
to offend, but I think it best we  
keep this professional.

TOMMY

Professional, what a concept. Of  
course, no problem.

LAURA

Well, good night then.

She enters her room, shuts the door.

TOMMY

Good night Laura.

He gives one last look at the sky, wondering.

EXT. DESERT -- DAY

Somewhere outside Tucson, the Beamer makes its way along a  
dirt road, stops at a barbed wire fence. Behind it is a  
bizarre compound of Quonset buildings and odd metal  
contraptions.

TOMMY  
You sure this is it?

Laura checks a map.

LAURA  
Yeah.

Tommy and Laura get out of their car, try the gate - it unlatches. They walk in.

As they make their way, the wind WHISTLES eerily through the cacti. Just then, BARKING is heard. Two fierce German Shepherds suddenly appear and charge.

TOMMY  
Look out!

Tommy and Laura race back out the gate, slam it shut just as the dogs hurl themselves in a snarling fury. A COCKING sound is heard off screen. Tommy and Laura look.

ANGLE

Carlos Van Tassel, grayer hair and beard, points a shotgun at Laura and Tommy.

VAN TASSEL  
Who the hell are you?

LAURA  
Mr. Van Tassel, I'm Laura Ryan. I work with Senator Janet Carlsen. And this is Thomas Stone. He's a freelance television journalist.

VAN TASSEL  
Get the hell off my land.

TOMMY  
Please, Mr. Van Tassel, we've come a long way. We need to speak with you.

VAN TASSEL  
Well I don't need to speak to you.

He FIRES a shotgun shell over their heads.

VAN TASSEL (CONT'D)  
The next time my aim won't be so bad.



TOMMY

Okay, okay, we're going. Come on  
Laura.

LAURA

But-

TOMMY

Just come on.

(to Van Tassel)

Oh, by the way, here's something  
I've been working on. It may be of  
interest. If not, maybe the dogs  
would like it.

Tommy tosses a CD jewel case onto the ground. The dogs snarl  
and bark.

INT. DINER - LATER

Tommy and Laura at a remote diner, having coffee.

LAURA

That went well.

TOMMY

All this way for nothing.

LAURA

Can you believe that guy had a  
level 43 security clearance?

TOMMY

What happened?

LAURA

Officially, chronic mental fatigue.

TOMMY

Think that's what I've got.

Just then, Tommy's phone rings.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Yeah?... That's right... Okay, be  
there in ten minutes.

Tommy hangs up. Laura looks to him for an explanation.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Mr. Van Tassel has invited us to  
tea.

CUT TO:

EXT. VAN TASSEL'S COMPOUND - DAY

Van Tassel guides Tommy as he drives the Beamer into a  
Quonset hut covered with camouflage paint and organic debris.  
Van Tassel points to the sky.

VAN TASSEL

Eyes everywhere.

Inside the Beamer, Tommy and Laura exchange a look - how  
wacko is this guy?

INT. VAN TASSEL COMPOUND - DAY

Van Tassel's living space - equal parts high tech, mad  
scientist, and male slob.

LAURA

You won't see this in Architectural  
Digest.

Van Tassel glares at Laura and Tommy

VAN TASSEL

You're either government stooges or  
naive idiots, but in either case, I  
don't have time to waste.

TOMMY

Then why are you talking to us?

VAN TASSEL

Because, people have to know.

LAURA

Know what?

VAN TASSEL

You sure you're not with the  
government?

TOMMY

Yes, but we may still qualify as  
idiots.