

e-\$cape

a cybermusical
music by Clifford J. Tasner
book & lyrics by Scott Guy

e-\$cape

CAST

Matthew Helber, 19

Lynn Helber, Matthew's mother

Anna, Matthew's student, 18

Andrew Cuvolo, owner of *Sect Wars*

Brian Zakowski, accountant

Exothoptera, programmed by Matthew

Kikyono, programmed by Anna

Ensemble plays avatars and Skaeloks

Musical Numbers

Act One

	script	script/score
1. Sect War..... Skaeloks, Exothoptera, Matthew	1	1
2. The Code of My Life Matthew	9	17
3. Just Not Enough/The Code of My Life.....Lynn, Matthew	15	29
4. It's All Buzz..... Anna	19	41
5. Hakai Shinai SakuseiJanKenPon, Anna, Ensemble	27	57
6. The Car..... Matthew	32	77
7. Avatar Building..... Instrumental	36	91
8. The Value of Things Lynn	46	103
9. Gotta Launch..... Instrumental	51	125
10. Gotta Fly/Jan-Ken-Pon/Synchro.....Ensemble	118	131

Act Two

11. Be My Light.....Ensemble	6	167
12. Gonna Make a Move on You.....Ensemble	1	149
13. Sudden Good..... Matthew	6	167
14. Be With Me When You're With Me..... Anna	9	175
15. My Kroger Days Lynn	19	193
16. Wrayth's Transformation..... Instrumental	21	199
17. The Vig Riot Ensemble	24	209
18. The Value of Things - Reprise..... Matthew	30	219
19. Sudden Good - RepriseMatthew, Anna, Brian	41	235
20. The Vig Riot - Reprise..... Ensemble	44	245
21. Finale.....Matthew, Ensemble	49	255

ACT ONE

Scene One

A jungle. Dim light. A small platoon of identically-camouflaged warrior/creatures (THE SKAELOKS) stalk then surround a round rusted sheet-metal Quonset hut. The Skaeloks are made of dark, foreign material, dully-shining like black beetles. **1. Sect War.**

SKAELOKS

(whispery; a dangerous hush)

VERMIN. HUMAN.
NOT OF OUR BLOOD.
CUT THE HEART.
TAKE THE HEAD.
EXTERMINATE.
ERADICATE.
TILL THE SECT IS DEAD.

(The skaelok CAPTAIN lights a small object and tosses it through the hut's window. Smoke starts to emanate from inside the hut.)

SKAELOKS

VERMIN. HUMAN.
NOT OF OUR KIND;
FALLEN RACE,
PLEAD OR CRY.
A DIFFERENT SECT,
YOU'RE NOT ONE OF US
THEREFORE, YOU MUST DIE.

A FEMALE VOICE; IN THE DARK

(hushed, frightened)

Okay, what'm I supposed to do?!

A CALMER MALE VOICE

They can't assassinate you if you surrender with your hands in the air.

FEMALE VOICE

(panicking)

I don't know how to do that!

MALE VOICE

Yes, you do. First things first. Open the door. Then make sure they see you have your hands up.

(The Quonset hut door opens slowly. The Skaeloks cock their guns. A human tentatively emerges. Female. Japanese. Unarmed except for a small dagger and a throatful of adrenaline, she wears a tattered jinbei. Her hands are by her side. This is KIKYONO.)

FEMALE VOICE (still unseen)

Like this?

MALE VOICE (still unseen)

Okay, good job with the door. But get your hands above your...!

(KIKYONO makes a spastic move with her elbows; easily misinterpreted as an act of aggression...and the CAPTAIN shoots. KIKYONO reels.)

KIKYONO

(roars; wounded)

FEMALE VOICE

No, I meant -- !

MALE VOICE

Uh-boy.

(The platoon attacks KIKYONO. A lop-sided fight; she doesn't stand a chance. SHE randomly strikes out at the Skaeloks with a small dagger, but it's just a matter of time before she will be killed. However, emerging from the jungle with a great bound is a half-breed Skaelok/Human, male; human torso in a flak jacket, leaping with great, hinged hind insect legs. He has fierce, shining pincers which he wields efficiently and lethally. This is EXOTHOPTERA. Skaeloks attempt to attack him, but each time he is able to leap with his hinged legs, spin, and launch a new offensive.

Simultaneous with this action, the lights rise on a separate world: a classroom in Logan, Ohio.

MATTHEW HELBER, 19, tutors a student, ANNA, a rough-around-the-edges high school-aged student.

SHE's a little fashion-statement confused; opting mainly for Japanese/manga influence, unsuccessfully touched with Gaga/geek/Goth experiments. HE's a little high-strung. They both have laptops, and are typing rapidly.

MATTHEW (THE MALE VOICE)

I gotcha.

ANNA (THE FEMALE VOICE)

I'm so sorry, Matthew.

MATTHEW

(as the battle rages)

Are you kidding? I live for this!

(MATTHEW types; EXOTHOPTERA moves in response. MATTHEW and EXOTHOPTERA both speak together.)

MATTHEW/EXOTHOPTERA

DIE, INSECTS!
GIVE UP, GIVE IN!
SECT WARS, SKAELOKS,
MAY THE BETTER SPECIES WIN!
DIE, INSECTS, DIE.

SKAELOKS

VERMIN. HUMAN.
NOT OF OUR BLOOD.
CUT THE HEART
TAKE THE HEAD.
EXTERMINATE.
ERADICATE.
TILL THE SECT IS DEAD.

(EXOTHOPTERA takes on KIKYONO's attackers, as SHE slips back into the hut. EXOTHOPTERA slaughters the Skaeloks. Slaughters; it isn't pleasant to look at.)

MATTHEW/EXOTHOPTERA

SECT WARS.
SKAELOKS.
DIE!

(EXOTHOPTERA licks his mandibles. MATTHEW wipes his mouth, heaving a little. ANNA stares at MATTHEW.)

ANNA

Oh, God, Matthew, you in battle, it's like art. The way you move, the way you leap around like that. It's beautiful. Look at me, I'm like short of breath.

MATTHEW

(a nervous laugh; not entirely funny)

ANNA

Kay, I don't know what's creepier, your laugh, or your insect avatar. Listen, Matthew, I'm running out of time. I need to pass my computer programming this summer or they're not going to let me into Japanese Computer Art. You gotta help me, cuz Kikyono's moves are pathetic.

(ANNA types on her laptop; KIKYONO flails around, deliberately spastic and jerky)

KIKYONO

(Neanderthal)

Me a spaz cuz me have dumb programmer.

MATTHEW

Don't say that.

KIKYONO

It's true.

MATTHEW

No, it's not, and don't have your character say that. Characters don't have programmers...they have, y'know, families and real lives. This isn't Matthew; it's Exothoptera.

EXOTHOPTERA

(to Kikyono; point at the dead Skaeloks)
Pick up one of their chitter-knives.

KIKYONO

(fascinated; tempted)

It's bloody.

EXOTHOPTERA

(rubbing his legs; a lecherous sound)
Yeah. I want to see you hold it. Krrrrrrrrr....

(EXOTHOPTERA picks up the knife and starts stalking KIKYONO.)

MATTHEW

Okay, I'm coming at you now. So what do you do?

ANNA

Is there a function key marked *run*? No, so how about I...flirt?

KIKYONO

Hey, insect-boy, I'm your bad romance.

MATTHEW

He's almost on you. Try a flip-kick.

ANNA

Uh, uh, uh, no, something Japanese. Mikazuki!

(EXOTHOPTERA makes a move; ANNA types: KIKYONO leaps.)

KIKYONO

Mikazuki!

(But ANNA has miscalculated, and KIKYONO *sbings* off, sideways, then begins stutter-walking, unable to turn around.)

ANNA

Dammit.

(SHE sighs; takes her hands off the keyboard. KIKYONO stops.)

ANNA

I just wanna design. Why do I gotta pass computer programming!?

MATTHEW

Cuz you need it for computer art design. Did you read Chapter Seven?

ANNA

I don't understand it.

MATTHEW

Did you read it? Did you even try?

ANNA

Let's go get some coffee together instead, how about that?

MATTHEW

(stands; slams some books suddenly)
No, we're done here.

(HE packs up.)

ANNA

Woah, kinda over-reacting, I'll read the....

MATTHEW

You're wasting my time.

ANNA

How can I be wasting your time if I'm paying for it?

MATTHEW

Do the homework, and then we'll talk. Not before then.

(MATTHEW leaves.)

ANNA

I'm only paying for half a lesson! So, I'm only half-wasting your time.

(Lights fade on ANNA, who looks confused and disoriented.)

ANNA

(shouting after him)

Anata wa konch•desu!

(We follow MATTHEW, raging. **2. The Code of My Life.**)

MATTHEW

WHAT A WASTE OF MY TIME.
WHAT A WASTE OF MY LIFE.
I GOT SO MUCH TO GIVE.
INSTEAD, I'M STUCK AT TEN BUCKS AN HOUR....
WHAT A WASTE!
WASTING MY TALENT.
PAYING SOME BILLS, DOING SOME JOB,
JUST WAITING.
WAITING BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD,
TRYING TO CRACK THE CODE.
CAN'T FIND THE PROGRAM.
CAN'T FIND THE MANUAL.
TRYING TO WRITE THE CODE OF MY LIFE.

NOBODY.
NOBODY LISTENING.
PROGRAMMING BUT...MAKING NO SOUND.
JUST TYPING.
FEELING LIKE I'M GONNA EXPLODE
TRYING TO CRACK THE CODE
CAN'T FIND THE ANSWERS.
CAN'T FIND THE SEQUENCE.
TRYING TO WRITE THE CODE OF MY LIFE.

THE ONES AND ZEROS
ADD TO ZERO.
THE ZEROS AND ONES
MAKE NONE.
NEVER GOIN' TO COLLEGE.
NOT GOING ANYWHERE.
NEVER GONNA SAY I'VE BEGUN.

NOBODY.
NOBODY SPECIAL.
PAYING SOME BILLS, DOING SOME JOB
JUST WAITING.
WAITING BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD,
TRYING TO CRACK THE CODE.
CAN'T FIND THE PROGRAM.
CAN'T FIND THE MANUAL.
TRYING TO WRITE THE CODE OF MY LIFE!

(Blackout.)

ACT ONE

Scene Two

A sad kitchen in a small, ill-kempt house in Logan, Ohio; early evening. LYNN HELBER, 43, frantically finishes putting a single plate of food onto the table, throwing down silverware, a paper napkin, and a white envelope, just as MATTHEW slams the back door and flings his backpack across the room.

MATTHEW

Okay, remember Anna I'm tutoring in computer programming? Didn't read the chapter, didn't do the assignment, how'm I supposed to help people like that?

LYNN

Save it for the Marines. I got about four minutes before my night shift at Kroger's which I'm more pissed off than you are. What's this?

(SHE thrusts the white envelope in his face.)

MATTHEW

I dunno.

LYNN

Something from MIT, which I told you not to apply.

MATTHEW

Is it from Student Loans?

LYNN

Like I open mail addressed to you.

MATTHEW

Cuz there are some forms for the parent to sign --

LYNN

You ain't going. I can't afford it.

MATTHEW

There's a government loan program which --

LYNN

We been through this --

MATTHEW

Mom, listen. Programming a computer's the only thing I'm good at. The only thing, Mom. You should see how I suck at tutoring --

LYNN

Thirty-five thousand dollars a year plus housing and books and whatever, for four years; that's, I don't know how much that is, but unless you go to work for Tony Soprano, I don't see how --

MATTHEW

With a computer programming degree, I could make sixty a year and help create all kinds of --

LYNN

Ain't gun happen, Matthew. Single mom working at Kroger's where you know that damn company "seniority" has got me stuck behind idiot assistant manager Doris...

MATTHEW

I thought you only had four minutes.

LYNN

And I'm giving you everything I can: food, allowance, ten bucks a month for that online role-playing game you obsess over.

MATTHEW

Sect Wars.

LYNN

I got nothing else to give you, Matthew. Which I'm sorry it's not good enough for you!

(SHE throws his dinner onto the floor. MATTHEW diminishes before our eyes; his bones grow soft, his muscles weak. HE kneels on the floor and cleans it up.)

LYNN

Don't pick that up.

MATTHEW

(continuing to clean)
It's okay, Mom, it's okay to be mad.

LYNN

(disappointed in herself)

No, it's not okay to be mad. It's been nine years since your dad died. Throwing your food on the floor. What kinda role model...? So, open the student loan letter from MIT.

MATTHEW

What's the point?

(LYNN tears open the envelope, violently; too violently; not quite in control. MATTHEW turns away. SHE reads.)

LYNN

(accusatory)

They already accepted you. This is for housing.

(softening)

Maybe if I can get a second job at --

(doesn't have an idea)

(Pause.)

MATTHEW

Let it go, Mom. Community college'll be fine. I don't need to be a computer programmer.

LYNN

Maybe if idiot Doris is hit by a bus, I can get assistant manager. Hey, think you could get a summer job as a bus driver near where Doris lives?

MATTHEW

Nice.

LYNN

Damn company seniority. Doris started six days before me eighteen years ago and now she's making like eight thousand a year more. Damn your father! Damn him.

(trying to retract it)

I didn't mean that. Matthew, I should never --

MATTHEW

It's okay. Loser Dad would've been proud of his nobody son, tutoring other nobodies. Yay.

(LYNN goes to hug MATTHEW, but he squirts away and bounds upstairs. Lights follow MATTHEW to:)

ACT ONEScene Three

Matthew's bedroom; rather claustrophobic and dark, brimming with stacks of projects and folders. There is a clear area right in front of the computer, as though it repels paper. MATTHEW runs in and shuts the door, booting his computer.

The cyber junglescape of *Sect Wars* becomes visible again; a few humans are engaged in hand-to-pincer combat with Skaeloks. **3. Just Not Enough/The Code of My Life.**

MATTHEW

THE ONES AND ZEROS
ADD TO ZERO.
THE ZEROS AND ONES
MAKE NONE.
NEVER GOIN' TO COLLEGE.
NOT GOING ANYWHERE.
NEVER GONNA SAY I'VE BEGUN.

(In the diminishing light of the kitchen, we see LYNN, weeping.)

LYNN

DONE ALL I CAN
GAVE ALL I GOT
JUST TRIED TO HELP YOU.
IT'S CLEAR THAT I HAVE NOT.
SORRY I FAILED.
TIMES, AIN'T THEY TOUGH?
GIVE WHAT YOU GOT, BUT
JUST NOT ENOUGH.

(In cyberspace, EXOTHOPTERA joins the battle, with a ferocious rage; a terrifying rage. During the following, EXOTHOPTERA has hold of a single surviving Skaelok, and treats it as though it were scrap metal; ripping its limbs and tearing its armor with irrational, sub-human rage. Simultaneously, MATTHEW transforms. HE tears

open his shirt, and pounds at the keyboard, his silent rage becomes more and more overt, until he and EXOTHOPTERA are fairly indistinguishable. Scary. LYNN, too, fights Rage Demons. SHE stubs out her cigarette, then crushes the whole pack as though it were a human heart.)

<p>MATTHEW</p> <p>NOBODY. NOBODY SPECIAL. PAYING SOME BILLS, DOING SOME JOB JUST WAITING. WAITING BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, TRYING TO CRACK THE CODE. CAN'T FIND THE PROGRAM. CAN'T FIND THE MANUAL. TRYING TO WRITE THE CODE OF MY LIFE. THE ONES AND ZEROS ADD TO ZERO. THE ZEROS AND ONES MAKE NONE. NEVER GOING TO COLLEGE, NOT GOING ANYWHERE. NEVER GONNA SAY I'VE BEGUN. CAN'T FIND THE PROGRAM, CAN'T FIND THE MANUAL. TRYING TO FIND THE CODE OF MY LIFE.</p>	<p>LYNN</p> <p>DONE ALL I CAN GAVE ALL I GOT JUST TRIED TO HELP YOU. S'CLEAR THAT I HAVE NOT. SORRY I FAILED. TIMES, AIN'T THEY TOUGH. GIVE WHAT YOU GOT, BUT JUST NOT ENOUGH.</p> <p>TRIED TO HELP. CLEAR I'VE NOT. DONE WHAT I CAN. GAVE WHAT I GOT. FAILED AS A MOTHER. FAILED AS A WIFE. TRYING TO HELP YOU BEGIN YOUR LIFE.</p>
---	--

(LYNN exits.)

MATTHEW

(scary; losing it)

TRYING TO FIND THE CODE
TRYING TO FIND THE CODE
TRYING TO FIND THE CODE!
FIND. THE. CODE.
FIND. THE. CODE.
FIND. THE.
(incoherent; no longer language)

(EXOTHOPTERA spins, making heaving sounds. MATTHEW grins; feels better. The SKAELOK CAPTAIN rises up from behind EXOTHOPTERA. MATTHEW leaps back to his laptop; EXOTHOPTERA leaps to attack mode. But the CAPTAIN raises his hands above his head.)

CAPTAIN

No, no, truce, brother. What's that name, Exo, Exo what is it?

EXOTHOPTERA

Exothoptera.

CAPTAIN

Those moves of yours. Where'd you get 'em?

EXOTHOPTERA

I, uh, my father was a Skaelok and my mother human, so when I went to Jhandaban Military Academy, I --

CAPTAIN

Whatever, I'm not into role-playing, I'm just trying to make a buck here. Sell me that flip-duck thing and that pop-kick; I'll give you, how's 300 V-points for those fight moves?

EXOTHOPTERA

I don't know what you're talking about.

CAPTAIN

I want to pay you money for your programming code.

EXOTHOPTERA

Skaeloks believe in transformational exchange of ideas and commodities --

CAPTAIN

Okay, loser, whatever. But think about it. Here's my email. 300 V-points.

(MATTHEW's laptop dings. The SKAELOK walks away. An eerie ghoul avatar named WRAYTH approaches Exothoptera, and touches him on the shoulder with a bony translucent hand.)

WRAYTH

I'll buy all your V-points.

EXOTHOPTERA

(creeped out a little)

What?

WRAYTH

Ten dollars, real dollars, for every 100 V-points. Hundred dollars for a thousand. I'll buy however many points you got. Here's my T-access code. Email me.

(WRAYTH fades away; evaporates. MATTHEW is lost; confused. KIKYONO now appears from the shadows.)

KIKYONO

Look, I know you're mad at me....

(Lights up on a new area: ANNA's bedroom. SHE sits on the floor, at the foot of her bed, typing on her laptop.)

KIKYONO

You haven't answered like four of my emails; I'm totally stuck on that chapter you wanted me to....Whoa, how many Skaeloks did you kill just now?

EXOTHOPTERA

Looks like seven.

(Another SKAELOK falls from a tree and lands on the others, dead.)

EXOTHOPTERA

Eight.

KIKYONO

God, this game, it's just like killing and killing more....

EXOTHOPTERA

(grinning; likes it)

Yeah.

KIKYONO

Wouldn't you rather *make* something? Okay, whatever. Can you phone me?

EXOTHOPTERA

I don't know what you mean by phone.

KIKYONO

On my cell.

EXOTHOPTERA

The cell structure of a half-breed Skaelok and human....

ANNA

Omigod, forget it.

(ANNA clicks off on her laptop; KIKYONO fades. EXOTHOPTERA primal-screams like King Kong. MATTHEW, however, is stony-faced once again, passive. Lights blackout on EXOTHOPTERA and MATTHEW, leaving ANNA alone. **4. It's All Buzz.**)

ANNA

FALLING IN LOVE WITH AN INSECT.
 NOT THE SMARTEST THING TO DO.
 COMPLETELY DIFFERENT SPECIES.
 NOT THE GUY FOR YOU.
 I MEAN, HE BUZZES, NOT TALKS,
 HIS EYES NEVER BLINK.
 IN HIS PRIVATE COCOON,
 DOESN'T CARE WHAT YOU THINK.
 ONLY LOOKING FOR SOMETHING OR SOMEONE
 TO MUNCH ON AND CHEW.
 FALLING IN LOVE WITH AN INSECT.
 NOT THE SMARTEST THING TO DO.

Okay, let's face it, girl...

HE'S GOT THESE
 SHARP RAZOR PINCERS
 WHICH CAN SNIP OFF YOUR HEAD.
 HE'S GOT THESE
 HEXAGON EYES
 THAT'RE BUMPY, OH, AND RED.
 HE'S GOT THESE
 THICK HAIRY DEALIES
 THAT ARE SORTA LIKE ANTENNAE
 BUT THEY DANGLE FROM HIS LIPS,
 GOD, I WISH HE HADN'T ANY.

HE'S AN INSECT.
 I'M A HUMAN.
 AND ALL THE REST HE DOES
 IS JUST BUZZ.

HE'S GOT THIS
 BLACK WAXY BUILD-UP
 COVERING ALL OF HIS CHEST.
 HE'S GOT THIS
 GODAWFUL SPIT
 HE'LL EXCRETE (EW!) IN THE NEST.
 HE'S GOT THIS
 LOUD FLIRTY CHIRPING
 THAT HE DOES WITH HIS LEGS.
 BUT I'M DAMNED I'M GONNA LAY HIM
 SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND EGGS!

HE'S AN INSECT.
 I'M A HUMAN.
 AND ALL THE REST HE DOES...?
 ...IS ALL BUZZ.

Okay, pull yourself together, Anna. Do the homework and don't think of the teacher....Yeah, that lasted about a second.

(SHE types.)

ANNA

Matthew, I'm still up. Call me? Email me?

(sighs)

FALLING IN LOVE WITH AN INSECT.

NOT THE SMARTEST THING TO DO.

GOTTA PASS THE CLASS.

AND NOT THINK ABOUT YOU.

(Lights change to:)

ACT ONE

Scene Four

The kitchen. LYNN staggers in through the back door, weary to the point of dropping. MATTHEW paces.

LYNN

You're still up! It's four in the morning.

MATTHEW

Couldn't sleep.

LYNN

Listen, sorry I blew up again about your Dad. I'm just so stressed. There's talks about company layoffs, and it's me gets fired before idiot Doris and --

MATTHEW

Mom, I got a favor to ask. Can I deposit some money into your checking account?

LYNN

Deposit some money? Sure. Why, what money?

MATTHEW

You know that ten bucks a month you're paying for my subscription to *Sect Wars*, or as you call it, my role-playing game I obsess over?

LYNN

Yeah.

MATTHEW

Well, tonight a player offered me a pile of V-points, virtual dollars, and I can sell 'em for real money, but money gets transferred into a checking account.

LYNN

Why can't you use your own checking account?

MATTHEW

It's a direct access link to the account you used a couple years ago to set the game up for me. I'll transfer the money into your account and you can write me a check, okay?

LYNN

How much you talking about?

MATTHEW

A couple hundred from the first guy. Second guy might buy some other stuff. I spent a thousand V-dollars on Exothoptera's flak jacket.

LYNN

I don't want you spending a thousand dollars on a flak jacket!

MATTHEW

No, Mom, listen, I don't want to buy a flak jacket. I'm thinking I might buy a new computer and a host domain. See, tonight it occurred to me, here's all these folks paying ten bucks a month to play *Sect Wars*, right? What if I could get like a thousand players to pay me five bucks a month to play in a new world which I design. It's cheaper. I could make it be about creating, not killing, and I'd offer open source coding, but maybe charge for grid space.

LYNN

I don't know what the hell you're talking about.

MATTHEW

A thousand players at five bucks a month, that's five thousand a month, which is sixty thousand a year. Mom, maybe I can go to MIT! But I need your okay to link the transactions to your checking account. It won't cost you a cent.

LYNN

It won't cost me a cent.

MATTHEW

Promise.

LYNN

(a la *Godfather*)

You know, you're making me an offer I can't refuse. Go ahead and link.

MATTHEW

Really?

LYNN

Yeah. Go buy your flak jacket.

MATTHEW

No, not a -- never mind. Cool! Love you, Mom!

(HE pecks her on the cheek and bounds upstairs.)

LYNN

(calling after him)

"Love you, Mom"? That can't be good.

(Lights change to:)