

Generic Radio Workshop Script Library (BACK)**Series: X Minus One****Show: Skulking Permit****Date: Feb 15 1956**CAST:

ANNOUNCER

INSPECTOR, from Imperial Earth; pompous, excitable

TOM FISHER, affable, like all the villagers

BILLY PAINTER

MAYOR, of the New Delaware colony

ED BEER, tavern keeper

MARY CARPENTER

MARV CARPENTER

GRENT, political adviser; shrewd, smooth

and assorted VILLAGERS

SOUND:

HIGH-PITCHED ELECTRONIC HUM ... JOINED BY ELECTRONIC BEEPING IN
AGREEMENT WITH COUNTDOWN

ANNOUNCER:

Countdown for blast-off. X minus five, four, three, two. X minus one.
Fire.

SOUND:

A MOMENT'S SILENCE ... THEN ROCKET SHIP BLASTS OFF

MUSIC:

BUILDS VERTIGINOUSLY TO A CLIMAX ... THEN IN BG

ANNOUNCER:

From the far horizons of the unknown come transcribed tales of new
dimensions in time and space. These are stories of the future,
adventures in which you'll live in a million could-be years on a
thousand maybe worlds. The National Broadcasting Company, in cooperation
with Galaxy Science Fiction Magazine, presents -- (HEAVY ECHO) X Minus
One!

MUSIC:

TO A CLIMAX ... THEN OUT

ANNOUNCER:

Tonight's story, "Skulking Permit" by Robert Sheckley.

MUSIC:

FOR AN INTRODUCTION ... THEN IN BG, OUT AT [X]

INSPECTOR:

(DICTATES A MEMO) August sixteenth, Year Twenty-Two Oh-Four. To --
Central Colonial Administrative Authority, Alpha Centauri sector. From --
Colonial Contact Inspector Thirty-Seven. Subject -- Planet New
Delaware. Following the procedure outlined in manual for contact with
lost colonies, open communication by interstellar radio with New
Delaware. This is the first contact established in two hundred years. Am
proceeding on Overdrive for personal investigation. Situation on New
Delaware appears unconventional. (LOW, ASIDE, UNHAPPY) To say the least.
[X]

SOUND: BANG OF HAMMER POUNDING NAILS IN WOOD ... OUT BEHIND--

TOM: Hi! Hi, there! Hi, Billy!

BILLY: Hi, Tom! Got no time for talkin' this morning. Gotta get this sign up.

TOM: It's a real pretty sign. (READS) "No Aliens Allowed Within City Limits."
(TO BILLY) What's an alien?

BILLY: Beats me. The mayor told me to put it up. He says to me, "Billy Painter, you're Chief of Police, so I want you to paint me a big sign and set it right in front of the town hall.

TOM: Aliens? A-lee-uns. Oh, it's a real pretty word.

MAYOR: (UPSET, CALLS) Billy! Billy Painter! I thought I told you--

BILLY: Take it easy, Mayor. I put the sign up.

MAYOR: It's not that. It's the church.

BILLY: I painted it -- just like you told me.

MAYOR: I know, I know! But you painted it wrong!

BILLY: I painted that church with a nice bright red. What's wrong with that?

MAYOR: I looked it up. It's the Little Red School House, not Church House. Churches are supposed to be white!

BILLY: Can't keep track of 'em all -- school house, church house, jail, post office. Got along fine enough in New Delaware for two hundred years without 'em.

MAYOR: I know, I know, but we need them now and we haven't got much time. Where are the Carpenter boys?

TOM: I saw Sam and Marv over at Ed Beer's Tavern.

MAYOR: Well, Billy, you go down there and tell them that they've got to build us a little school house -- and you paint it red, it's very important.

BILLY: Uh, Mayor, when do I get a police chief badge? I read that a police chief always gets a badge.

MAYOR: Make yourself one! Now, go on!

BILLY: (MOVING OFF) All right then.

MAYOR: Ohhh, it sure is hot here. I don't know why the inspector couldn't have come in winter. Oh, Tom. Tom Fisher.

TOM: Yeah?

MAYOR: Tom, I've got a job for you. A very important job.

TOM: Well, now, look, Mayor, I'm on vacation. Fish won't be back in these waters till--

MAYOR: No vacation! Not now. He's due any day. Uh, Tom, how would you like to be - a criminal?

TOM: I don't know. What's a criminal?

MAYOR: Well, come over to my house and I'll explain. I've got to appoint a criminal and it looks to me like you're it.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

MAYOR: You don't mind sitting right next to the interstellar radio, do you? I'm waiting for a call.

TOM: Thought that thing was broken.

MAYOR: No, no, it wasn't broken. My father told me always to leave the monitor on "Recording," in case. Just didn't seem to be anybody calling -- not for two hundred years. Not since that war back on Earth.

SOUND: BEEP! OF RADIO

MAYOR: Oh-oh, it's time now. You just listen, Tom.

SOUND: CLICK! OF SWITCH ... RADIO WARMS UP

MAYOR: They said that they would call just at this time.

SOUND: RADIO STATIC UNDER INSPECTOR'S DIALOGUE

INSPECTOR: (FILTER) New Delaware? New Delaware, do you hear me? New Delaware, come in -- immediately!

MAYOR: Yes, yes, yes, we hear you. (LOW, TO TOM) He's very touchy.

INSPECTOR: (FILTER) This is Colonial Inspector Thirty-Seven. As I told you in my broadcast yesterday, there's been no contact with the Outer Colonies for some centuries, due to unsettled, uh -- (CLEARS THROAT) -- conditions here. But that's over, except for a little mopping up. Now, you of New Delaware are still a colony of Earth and subject to her laws. Do you acknowledge that status?

MAYOR: Oh, yes. We called a town meeting last night and talked it all over. We're still loyal to Earth.

INSPECTOR: (FILTER) Excellent. That saves us the trouble of sending an expeditionary force to reconquer you. However, as Colonial Contact Inspector, I will be obliged to make a personal investigation to make sure that you conform fully to the customs, institutions and traditions of Imperial Earth.

TOM: (TO MAYOR) Imperial? That's funny. All the books talk about Earth as a United Democracy.

MAYOR: (TO TOM) Well, a lot can change in two hundred years. And, of course, there's been a war.

INSPECTOR: (FILTER) Do you hear me, New Delaware?!

MAYOR: Oh, yes! Yes, sir, we hear ya.

INSPECTOR: (FILTER) You realize, of course, there is room for only one intelligent species in the universe -- man! All others must be suppressed, wiped out! We can tolerate no aliens! I'm sure you understand, General.

MAYOR: I'm not a general, I'm a mayor.

INSPECTOR: (FILTER) You're in charge, aren't you?

MAYOR: Yes, yes--

INSPECTOR: (FILTER) Then you're a general! Now, be sure you're running an Earth colony, General -- with no radical departures from the norm, such as free will, free speech, free elections, or anything else on the proscribed list. It is impossible to administer an empire where everyone does as he pleases. Get your colony in order, General. I will call to inspect you in exactly one week. That is all!

SOUND: CLICK! OF SWITCH ... RADIO STATIC ABRUPTLY OUT

MAYOR: Well, you see how it is, Tom. Now, Tom, about your job. I'm appointing you Town Criminal.

TOM: I don't see why there has to be a criminal.

MAYOR: That's a very important part of Earth society. All the books say so, Tom. The criminal is as important as the postman or the police chief. He works against society. If you don't have people working against society, how can you have people working for it? How can there be any more important job?

TOM: I don't want to do it.

MAYOR: Now, be reasonable, Tom. Put yourself in my position. This inspector comes and he meets Billy Painter, our police chief. He asks to see the jail. Then he says, "No prisoners?!" How can I hold my head up and tell him that we don't have any crime? "No crime?!" he'll say. "But Earth colonies always have crime!" Don't you see that, Tom? Right there, the whole thing falls through. He'll see that we're not truly Earthlike. We're faking it. We're aliens! And you heard what he said about being rough on aliens.

TOM: Well, yeah. But - why me?

MAYOR: Can't spare anyone else. And you've got narrow eyes. Criminals always have narrow eyes.

TOM: Well, they aren't that narrow.

MAYOR: Tom, please. We're all doing our part. You want to help, now don't you?

TOM: Aw, I suppose so.

MAYOR: Fine! You're our criminal! Here, I've got this paper all made out for ya, just to make it legal.

TOM: (READS) "Skulking Permit--"

MAYOR: (READS) "Know all Men by these Presents that Tom Fisher is a Duly Authorized Thief and Murderer. He is hereby required to Skulk in Dismal Alleys, Haunt Places of Low Repute and to Break the Law."

TOM: What's the Law?

MAYOR: I'll let you know as fast as I make them up. All Earth colonies have laws.

TOM: Well, what do I do?

MAYOR: You steal! And kill! Look, I'll give you a couple of books on it. Steal as much as you like. Er, one murder should be enough -- don't overdo it.

TOM: It don't sound sensible somehow.

MAYOR: Oh, you can work up to it, Tom. Why don't you start off easy-like by - haunting a place of low repute?

MUSIC: BRIDGE ... RAUNCHY JAZZ ... FOR A PLACE OF LOW REPUTE

SOUND: TAVERN BACKGROUND

ED: Hello, Tom. I hear you're our official criminal now.

TOM: That's right. I'll have a beer.

ED: How's it goin'?

TOM: Well, I been studyin'. But I can't put my finger on it yet.

ED: Hey, did you get the weapons Mary Carpenter sent over?

TOM: Yeah, a hatchet, a spear, two knives, and a blackjack.

ED: Uh huh.

TOM: I stuck myself with the spear, Ed. The whole thing ain't sensible to me. I can't figure out what's the purpose of crime? What did people get out of it?

ED: Here's the beer. I tried a new root this time. Tell me how you like it.

TOM: (DRINKS) Hmm. Very dry. Less filling.

ED: How come you ain't out thievin' now, Tom?

TOM: Oh, I'm plannin'. My permit says I have to haunt places of low repute and that's why I'm here.

ED: Well, this ain't no place of low repute.

TOM: You serve the worst meals in town.

ED: (A LITTLE SAD) I know. My wife can't cook. (BRIGHTLY) But there's a real friendly atmosphere here; the folks like it, Tom.

TOM: It's all changed, Ed. I'm makin' this tavern my headquarters. It's now a criminal lair.

ED: (TO HIMSELF) Mmm, try to keep a nice place and a lot of thanks you get.

MARY: (APPROACHES) Hi, Tom. You steal anything yet?

TOM: Oh, well, not yet, Mary, no.

MARY: I'll have a perricola, Ed. Don't worry, Tom, you'll catch on. If anyone in this village can learn, you can.

ED: Sure. We got confidence in you, Tom.

MARY: Why don't you steal somethin' right now, Tom? Go ahead.

TOM: Well -- s'pose I could.

MARY: I brought some geefers in my basket. They're real ripe. You could steal those.

TOM: Well, they are nice-lookin' geefers, Mary. Real tasty.

ED: (LOW) Go ahead, Tom. Steal it.

TOM: Well, I-- (CLEARS THROAT, TO MARY, ACTING THE PART OF A CRIMINAL) These are nice-lookin' geefers. Mind if I take one out in the light and look at it?

MARY: (GIGGLES) No, Tom -- you go right ahead.

BILLY: (APPROACHES, ACTING THE PART OF POLICE) Now just a minute there!

ED: Hi, Billy. What'll you have?

BILLY: (TO ED) I'm on official police business. (TO TOM) What were you doing with that geefer, Tom?

TOM: Just lookin' at it.

BILLY: I don't think you were just looking at it, Tom. I think you were planning on stealing it! You're a suspicious character. I think I'd better lock you up for further questioning.

MAYOR: (APPROACHES) No, no, no! Billy, what are you doing?!

BILLY: I'm doing my duty, Mayor. Tom here is looking mighty suspicious. The book says--

MAYOR: I know what the book says! I gave you the book! You can't go arresting Tom. Not yet.

BILLY: But there's no other criminal in the village.

MAYOR: Oh, Billy, don't you understand? This village needs a criminal record. Acting suspiciously isn't a crime.

BILLY: All right -- but I was just tryin' to do my job. (POMPOUS, TO TOM) I'll still get you, Tom! Remember -- crime does not pay!

ED: (IMPRESSED) Hey, that's a real slick way of putting it, isn't it?

BILLY: (CASUALLY) I thought it was kind of catchy. I read it in a book.

MAYOR: Well, Tom? Go ahead now. Steal something.

TOM: (UNENTHUSIASTIC) Oh, I'm not in the mood any more.

MAYOR: You better get to it soon -- and don't forget the murder.

TOM: Is it really necessary?

MAYOR:

Oh, I wish it weren't, but this colony has been here for over two hundred years and we haven't had a single murder. Not one.

TOM: Well, I suppose we should have one. (REASSURING) I'll take care of it.

MAYOR: Good boy, Tom. We're counting on you. Billy? I want you to paint up a couple hundred signs saying "Private Property - No Trespassing - Violators Will Be Prosecuted." And a dozen saying "Speed Limit - Thirty-Five Miles an Hour."

BILLY: Why? All we got is those kwog horses and they won't go faster'n a walk.

MAYOR: Never mind. You gotta have a speed limit. It's civilized.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

SOUND: NOCTURNAL BACKGROUND ... CRICKETS CHIRP, ET CETERA ... BANG OF HAMMER POUNDING NAILS IN WOOD ... OUT BEHIND--

MAYOR: Well, that's the last of the signs, Billy. You might as well get some sleep.

BILLY: Aren't you going home, Mayor?

MAYOR: No, I've got to get out to Fred Farmer's. I appointed him postmaster. Since nobody ever sends letters around here, I promised to help him write all those letters.

BILLY: Well, good night, Mayor. I guess I'd better be making my rounds.

MAYOR: (MOVING OFF) Yeah. Good night, Billy.

SOUND: PAUSE ... THEN CRASH! OF METAL, OFF

BILLY: (CALLS) Who's that?! Tom?! Tom Fisher?! You out thieving?! Who's there?! Don't move -- or I'll shoot!

SOUND: BANG! BANG! OF CAP PISTOL

BILLY: Hey, Tom! Come back!

SOUND: NEARBY WINDOW OPENS

ED: (OFF) Hey, what's goin' on out there?! What's all the racket?!

BILLY: It's the Town Criminal, Ed! I think I heard him robbin' your house!

ED: (OFF, YAWNS) Yeah?

BILLY: He's made his getaway now! But don't you worry! I'll get him yet!

ED: (OFF) Oh, all right. But get him in the morning, will ya?! Some of us are tryin' to sleep!

MUSIC: BRIDGE

SOUND: BANG OF HAMMER POUNDING NAILS IN WOOD ... OUT BEHIND--

TOM: Mornin', Marv. How's the school house comin'?

MARV: Fair. Woulda come along better if I had my saw.

TOM: Your saw?

MARV: Yeah. I left it leanin' against my door last night. (POINTEDLY) Wasn't there this mornin', Tom.

TOM: Oh, yeah. Your saw. Well, you know how it is, Marv. I had to practice some skulkin' last night.

MARV: Yeah, sure. Say, do you suppose I could use the saw for a while? Just for an hour or two?

TOM: Well, I don't know. It's legally stolen, you know.

MARV: Well, I'd give it back. I wouldn't keep anything that was legally stolen.

TOM: Well, it's in the house with the rest of the loot.

MARV: (MOVING OFF) Okay, I'll go borrow it then.

MAYOR: (APPROACHES, SEEMINGLY ANNOYED) Tom, I've been lookin' for you.

TOM: Mornin', mayor.

MAYOR: Did you steal my bronze plaque?

TOM: (BELLIGERENT) I certainly did!

MAYOR: (APOLOGETIC) Oh. Well, I was just wondering. You did it just in time. You see up there?

TOM: What?

MAYOR: Up there -- the black dot near the rim of the sun.

TOM: Oh, what is it?

MAYOR: Well, I'll bet it's the inspector's ship. You got your murder planned? Time is running short, Tom. The inspector may land any hour now. That darn radio's been yapping at me -- something about a revolt at Deng IV and all Earth colonies are to prepare for, er, conscription, whatever that is. So let's get that killing over with.

TOM: I don't know, though. Murder--

MAYOR: Now, look, Tom, criminals on Earth commit dozens of murders a day and think nothing of it. All this village wants of you is one little killing. Is that too much to ask? Now, who'll it be, Tom?

TOM: Oh, I guess I'll kill George Waterman.

MAYOR: Why?

TOM: Why? Why not?

MAYOR: What's your motive?

TOM: I thought you just wanted a murder. Who said anything about a motive?

MAYOR: We can't have a fake murder. On Earth, every murderer has a motive.

TOM: Well, I don't like the way George walks. Never did. And he's noisy sometimes.

MAYOR: No, no, no. That might be good enough for a crime of passion. But you're a legal criminal. Tom, you're ruthless, cold-blooded and cunning. You can't kill someone just because you don't like the way he walks. That's silly!

TOM: I'd better think the whole thing over.

MAYOR: Well, don't take too long. Oh, and Tom! Don't forget to leave clues. They're very important.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

SOUND: TAVERN BACKGROUND

ED: Have another beer, Tom?

TOM: Oh, I don't mind if I do.

ED: Hey, how do you like the way I fixed the tavern over? I hung up dirty curtains, you know?

TOM: Mmm.

ED: That makes it a Dismal Retreat. 'Cause I figured if this was gonna be your headquarters, it ought to be a real criminal's lair. How do you like the blood stains on the floor?

TOM: That's only Billy Painter's rootberry red paint.

ED: Oh, I know, but it looks like blood stains. Hey, how's the murder coming?

TOM: Oh, not so good. No, I've been thinkin' about it, Ed. You realize I'm supposed to kill somebody? I'm supposed to make somebody cease to exist. I mean, like take Marv Carpenter. Here he is today, workin' on his school house; big fella. Now if I kill him-- Well, he wouldn't work any more. I been tryin' to imagine it. Marv Carpenter lyin' on the ground, with his eyes glarin' open and his mouth twisted, and never gonna hold a piece of wood in his hands again, or never gonna sing a song or have a beer or anything. Well, it just made me kinda sick. I mean, I could go on with the thievin' -- but murder?

ED: Yeah, yeah, I know but-- Tom, it's your job. It's for the good of the village.

TOM: Murder. I better have another beer.

SOUND: OF SPACESHIP LANDING ... THEN IN BG

TOM: Hey, what's that?

ED: That must be the Inspector's ship landing. Come on! Let's go see!

MUSIC: BRIDGE

INSPECTOR: (SHOUTS ORDERS) Perimeter guard, advance! Set up portable generators and rocket launchers! All personnel restricted to immediate area of the ship! Sidearms to be worn at all times! And guards at battle stations!

MAYOR: (CLEARS THROAT) Welcome to New Delaware.

INSPECTOR: Thank you, General. I'm the Inspector. This is Mr. Grent, my political adviser.

GRENT: (WITH DISDAIN) Is this the capital of the colony?

MAYOR: Well, I'm afraid there's only this village on the whole of New Delaware.

INSPECTOR: Only one?! Now, Grent, I told you when we surveyed the planet we were wasting our time.

GRENT: Patience, patience, there's always an advantage in every situation.

MAYOR: If you gentlemen are ready--?

INSPECTOR: Ready?

MAYOR: You're going to inspect our village, aren't you?

INSPECTOR: Inspect?! I can see it all from right--

GRENT: (SMOOTH) Why, of course, General. We're ready. Let's inspect your village.

MUSIC: BRIDGE ... FOR A DIGNIFIED INSPECTION TOUR

SOUND: DOOR CLOSES

MAYOR: (PROUD) You see? We've got it all -- jail, post office, church, little red school house. Oh, we're very normal! Very Earthy!

INSPECTOR: Huh! Grent, I have my Efficiency Rating to think of. This place is worthless. No smelting, no heavy industry, no atomics, no taxation, no -- no-- They don't have anything!

GRENT: Oh, I wouldn't say that, Inspector. If you'll excuse us, General.

MAYOR: (MOVING OFF) Of course, of course.

INSPECTOR: I'll be downgraded at the next Colonial Board. Why - why, this place is a - a utopia! It's subversive! We ought to blow it right out of the sky!

GRENT: Now, now, don't be despondent, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: But this whole trip is a total waste of time.

GRENT: Not entirely. New Delaware has a very important commodity for us.

INSPECTOR: What? You saw them -- hulking peasants. (WITH DISTASTE) Nothing but farmers!

GRENT: Yes. Strong, healthy farmers. Good cannon fodder.

INSPECTOR: But-- But-- Oh-- (PAUSE, REALIZES) Ohhhh.

GRENT: Let me take over. (TO MAYOR, SWEETLY) General?

MAYOR: Yes, sir?

GRENT: How many able young men are there in the village between the ages of fifteen and sixty?

MAYOR: Why?

GRENT: You see, General, Imperial Earth is engaged in a war. The colonies in Deng IV are revolting against the authority of Mother Earth.

MAYOR: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

INSPECTOR: We need good healthy fighting men. Our reserves are, uh, depleted.

GRENT: We wish to give all loyal colonists a chance to fight for Mother Earth. We're sure you won't refuse.

INSPECTOR: (AGREES) Mmmm.

GRENT: Most colonies welcome a little conscription. It cleanses the blood, reduces crime--

MAYOR: Crime! Oh, I thought that would come up. We've taken care of that. I appointed--

INSPECTOR: Now, you see, Grent? Sixty, seventy -- perhaps a hundred recruits. Not such a waste of time coming here at all.

GRENT: (DRY) Perhaps not.

INSPECTOR: (CLEARS THROAT, THEN CALLS) Sergeant? Detail a squad of fifty men armed with portable heat generators to post a guard in the village!
(CONVERSATIONAL) All right, Mr. Mayor, suppose we go talk this problem over.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

ED: Tom? Tom, you out there?

TOM: Yeah. I been skulkin' out here all day. I'm hungry.

ED: Well, I brought you supper. The mayor sent you a message, Tom. He said to hurry up with the murder. He's been stalling the inspector and that nasty little Grent man. But they're gonna ask him. They're sure to.

TOM: All right, all right. I'll get around to it. Tonight.

MUSIC: BRIDGE ... FOR SKULKING

SOUND: NOCTURNAL BACKGROUND ... CRICKETS, ET CETERA

TOM: Hey! Hey, wait a minute!

MAYOR: Oh, hello, Tom. (WARY) What are you doing?

TOM: You said there had to be a murder, so--

MAYOR: Now, wait! I didn't mean me! It can't be me!

TOM: Why not?

MAYOR: Well, for one thing, somebody has to talk to the inspector. He's waiting for me. Someone has to show him how to--

TOM: Billy Painter can do that. You think a knife'll be more fatal in the heart or in the throat? Nothing personal, of course.

MAYOR: Wait! If there's nothing personal, then you have no motive.

TOM: Oh. Well, I guess I could think of one. I've been pretty sore about you appointing me Town Criminal.

MAYOR: It was the mayor who appointed you, wasn't it?

TOM: Well, sure.

MAYOR: Then, look! I'm not a mayor any more. I'm a general. Look -- stars, gold braid--

TOM: Well, what's that got to do with it?

MAYOR: Well, you missed the ceremony this afternoon, Tom. Inspector said I had to wear a general's uniform. It was a very friendly ceremony. All the Earthmen were grinning. They were winking at me and at each other.

TOM: Aw, congratulations. But you were the mayor when you appointed me criminal, so my motive still holds.

MAYOR: Yes, but killing a general isn't murder -- it's mutiny!

TOM: (REALIZES, RELENTS) Oh! Oh. Oh, I'm sorry.

MAYOR: That's all right. It's just that I've read up on it and you haven't. Well, I better get back. The inspector wants a list of the men that he can draft.

TOM: Are you sure this murder is necessary?

MAYOR: Oh, yes, yes, absolutely. Just not me!

MUSIC: BRIDGE

SOUND: TAVERN BACKGROUND

ED: No luck, huh, Tom?

TOM: Aw, I just can't do it. Ed, I can't kill anybody in the village. I grew up with them. I've worked with them, I've drunk root beer with them. I don't have any motive for killin' any of 'em.

ED: I know. But you do have to commit a murder, Tom. You don't want to let the village down.

TOM: But I can't kill the people I've known all my life.

ED: No, I suppose not.

TOM: Wait! Wait a minute, I got an idea. Ed, suppose I kill the inspector!

ED: Well, what's your motive?

TOM: (ENTHUSIASTIC) Ohhhh, it would be a very terrible crime! I'd be killin' for glory, for fame, for notoriety! And it'll show Earth how, er, earthy New Delaware really is! Why, they'll say crime is so bad here that a criminal actually killed their inspector on the very first day!

ED: Tom, that's just the sort of thing a master criminal would do!

TOM: Oh, ya think it's a good idea, huh?

ED: I think it's great, Tom. But how you gonna do it?

TOM: Well, one of those soldiers got drunk on a bottle of your keebler juice and dropped his gun. I picked it up.

ED: Oh, is that a gun?

TOM: Yeah, you push this button here.

SOUND: GUNSHOT! ... TAVERN CROWD REACTS

ED: Hey! Look out!

TOM: Oh, I'm sorry, Ed. I--

ED: Now, I'll have to get the Carpenter boys to fix that hole in the roof.

TOM: Oh, well, I'll be careful.

ED: Did you kill the soldier?

TOM: Of course not. No point in killin' the wrong man. Well, I better git goin'. I'll wait for him on the path between the mayor's house and the ship.

ED: Good luck, Tom!

TOM: Thanks!

MUSIC: BRIDGE ... INCONGRUOUSLY CHEERY MARCH

SOUND: VILLAGERS MARCH DOWN STREET ... ALL OUT OF STEP ... THEN IN BG

INSPECTOR: (TO VILLAGERS) Hup! Two! Three! Four! Keep in line there! (ASIDE, TO GRENT) Bah, what a sloppy crew. All left feet.

GRENT: Still, it's a nice night's work. With those landing parties dying like flies, we can use every new man we can get.

INSPECTOR: Sssst. Don't say that.

GRENT: What? Are you afraid the mayor will hear me? Don't be ridiculous. It's a completely passive population. Sheeplike, obedient--

INSPECTOR: Look at them. No two of them in step.

GRENT: Well, what do you expect from backward agrarians? Wait till those sergeants get hold of them at the base. They'll whip them into first class fighting men in no time.

TOM: Halt! Stand and deliver!

SOUND: VILLAGERS COME TO AN AWKWARD HALT

MAYOR: What the--? Why, it's Tom!

TOM: Hands up, Inspector!

INSPECTOR: Huh?

TOM: I got you covered! Now, the rest of you drop your guns and move out of the way!

INSPECTOR: What?! Now, see here--!

TOM: Go on now -- drop those guns!

SOUND: VILLAGERS DROP GUNS DURING FOLLOWING

INSPECTOR: Now, what's the meaning of this?

GRENT: And who are you?

TOM: Tom Fisher! I'm the Town Criminal! I'm going to kill the inspector. Now, please move out of the way.

INSPECTOR: Criminal? So that's what the mayor was prattling about.

TOM: Now, I know we haven't had any murders in two hundred years, but I'm changing that now. Now, move out of the way!

GRENT: (DRY) Well, I suppose I'd better get out of the line of fire.

INSPECTOR: Here now, wait a minute! Wait!

TOM: Now, don't move! I know just how to do it! I've been thinkin' about it! Now, I'll push this button -- and you'll die! You'll fall down on the path and your eyes'll open, and your mouth twisted, and no air goin' in and out of your lungs, and no beat to your heart, and I-- (STAMMERS) I-- (BEAT) I can't do it. Here, here's your gun. Take it. I don't want it!

SOUND: TOM THROWS DOWN GUN AND RUNS OFF

INSPECTOR: Quick! Quick! After him! Sergeant! Take a squad and search the forest!

GRENT: Take it easy, Inspector. This whole planet is forest. Ten thousand men couldn't find him, if he doesn't want to be found.

INSPECTOR: Well, I'll have him hanged on the spot! I'll--

MAYOR: Oh, I'm terribly sorry--

INSPECTOR: Sergeant, have the entire ship's company turned out! General, I want all your people out looking for him! Shoot on sight! Kill him instantly!

MAYOR: Oh, we couldn't do that. Although we appreciate the compliment.

INSPECTOR: What? What? That man--

MAYOR: He's a criminal. That's what I'm trying to explain. I appointed him. We - we had to have one.

INSPECTOR: You what?!

GRENT: You mean -- you had no criminals?

MAYOR: (RELUCTANT) I-- Well, I'm afraid not. Oh, I - I'm terribly ashamed. You see, we knew how uncivilized we were. That's why we did it. I'm dreadfully embarrassed that Tom couldn't handle the job.

GRENT: Well, why did you give the assignment to that particular man?

MAYOR: Well, I figured if anyone could kill, Tom could. He's a fisherman, you know. Pretty gory work. (SIGHS)

GRENT: (REALIZES) And he wasn't able to kill the inspector.

MAYOR: Well, we just haven't had to kill anything for two hundred years, except fish. The only animals on New Delaware are small grass eaters and they're not good to eat so we - never kill any of them.

GRENT: Then the rest of you would be equally unable to kill?

MAYOR: (SADLY) We wouldn't even get as far as Tom did.

INSPECTOR: (SHOUTS) I want that man found--!

GRENT: Forget about it, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: What? What?

GRENT: (LOW) We'd better get away from here. You want men in our army who can't kill?

INSPECTOR: (LOW) Huh?

GRENT: Think of it. The morale problem.

INSPECTOR: Oh.

GRENT: The possibility of infection. One man in a key position endangering a key ship or maybe a whole fleet -- because he can't kill. It isn't worth the risk, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: Yes, sir. I-- Mmm. I see what you mean.

GRENT: Order your troops back to the ship. We'll take off at once.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

SOUND: SPACESHIP FLIES AWAY

MAYOR: (CALLS) Tom! Tom, you can come out now! Tom, they're gone!

BILLY: He's hiding around here somewhere, mayor.

MAYOR: Yeah. (CALLS) Tom! Tom!

SOUND: RUSTLE OF UNDERBRUSH

TOM: (SHEEPISH) Here I am. I'm sorry. I bungled it.

BILLY: Well, don't feel bad about it. It was an impossible job.

MAYOR: I'm afraid it was. I thought that just possibly you could swing it. But you can't be blamed, Tom. There's not another man in the village who could have done the job even as well.

BILLY: Hmm. What are we gonna do with all those buildings, Mayor -- the jail, the post office, the little red school house, the church?

MAYOR: Well, I think we'll build a playground for the kids with swings and slides and sandboxes for them.

TOM: Oh, another playground?

MAYOR: Surely. Why not?

TOM: Well, I guess I won't be needin' my skulking permit any more.

MAYOR: No, no, I guess not.

SOUND: RIP! PERMIT TORN UP

MAYOR: Oh, well, we did our best.

TOM: I had the chance, then I let you all down.

BILLY: It's not your fault, Tom. Look how long it took Earth to get civilized. Thousands of years. And we were tryin' to do it in two weeks.

MAYOR: Well, we'll just have to go back to being uncivilized.

TOM: Yup, yup.

BILLY: Well, we better get back to the village. Looks like rain.

TOM: Well, soon I'll start fishin' again. Say!

MAYOR: What is it, Tom?

TOM: Well, it's too late now but it's too bad I didn't think of it before. I might have been able to go through with it.

MAYOR: Think of what, Tom?

TOM: I think I coulda done it ---- if I'd only had the sense to think of the inspector as a fish. Well, it's too late now. Guess he's just a big one - that got away.

MUSIC: FOR A GRAND FINISH

ANNOUNCER: You've just heard "X Minus One," presented by the National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with Galaxy Science Fiction Magazine which this month features an unusual story by James E. Gunn, "Tsylana," a story of what happened when crime suddenly invaded a crimeless society -- and where the only way to catch a thief was to manufacture a thief. Galaxy Magazine, on your newsstand today.

MUSIC: CLOSING THEME SNEAKS IN BEHIND--

ANNOUNCER: Tonight, by transcription, "X Minus One" has brought you "Skulking Permit," a story from the pages of Galaxy written by Robert Sheckley and adapted for radio by Ernest Kinoy. Featured in the cast were Dick Hamilton, Wendell Holmes, Joe DeSantis, Joseph Boland, Alan Hewitt, Bill Quinn, Mandel Kramer and Ruby Dee. Your announcer, Jack Costello. "X Minus One" was directed by Daniel Sutter and is an NBC Radio Network production.

MUSIC: TO A FINISH