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*Dramatic Publishing*

# CRUSH



SCI-FI/COMEDY BY STEPHEN GREGG

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# CRUSH

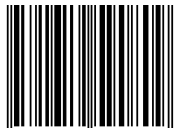
**SciFi/Comedy. By Stephen Gregg. Cast: 4 to 5m., 10 to 12w., 2 to 10 either gender.**

Welcome to Pin Cushion, California: population 791 and falling fast. Pin Cushion High School Drama has reached its final-ever production: *Our Town*. Despite never having once gotten a part, Bark Melon—16 and delightfully goofy despite some recent hard times—is convinced that he's going to get a lead. But Bark's audition goes awry when Aspen, the new student, enters and a chorus of malevolent voices enters with her. Only Bark can hear (and later see) that Aspen is not what she seems, that she's actually the lead body of a six-bodied alien creature. Soon, strange things start to happen. Giant hearts appear on the billboards leading into town. Mysterious, impossible-to-open envelopes flit through the air and hint at secret admirers. And, one by one, love-struck teenagers fall into inexplicable comas. Not a single person believes Bark when he says that Aspen is responsible for what's happening—not his father, not his classmates, not Aspen's head-over-heels boyfriend, not even Chloe, the ferociously competent girl who has declared Bark her boyfriend. Bark's attempt to stop the aliens himself ends disastrously. He'll need the help of the entire town because it's clear that these aliens are only the advance team for a giant ship already heading toward earth—and that their plan to take over the world has something to do with *Our Town*. *Crush* is hilarious, heartbreaking and full of unforgettable characters. It's a play about what it means to love someone and what it means to be human. In a breathtaking interactive climax, Bark saves the world, revitalizes the town, earns the love he deserves and gets a reward that no one could have anticipated.

**Area staging. Approximate running time: 105 minutes. Code: CR1.**

*Cover photo: Olathe South High School, Olathe, Kan., featuring (clockwise from top left) Hayley Dunitz, Olivia Harshbarger, Matthew Minelli, Megan Secrest and Ainsley Wilbur. Photo: Brandon Keeling. Front cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.*

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By

STEPHEN GREGG



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I had an enormous amount of help writing this play.

The bulk of the first draft was written while at a residency at the William Inge Center for the Arts in Independence, Kan. While there, Megan Monaghan Rivas practiced her brand of dramaturgy-through-encouragement to help get the play ready for its first public reading.

The actors and writers of Lab Twenty6 in Los Angeles provided clear-eyed critique and wonderfully tight deadlines.

Donovan Glover had his sophomores at CHAMPS Charter School in Van Nuys start the rehearsals of their black box production before the script was even finished.

And, finally, David Tate Hastings committed to producing the premiere of *Crush* before he'd read it. His thoughtful scrutiny of the play shows up on every page.

*Crush* is for  
my mom and my dad  
for Todd  
and for Joseph and Jessica and Laura and Lisa.



The sophomore class at CHAMPS Charter High School of the Arts (Van Nuys, Calif.) presented a terrific workshop production of *Crush* May 6-9, 2015. Directed by Donovan Glover.

BARK .....Andrew Gold  
CHLOE ..... Elizabeth Markovitch, Nachalah DuClerne  
JESSICA ..... Alana Pine, Madison Miranda  
COLE ..... Solomon Newbon  
ASPEN.....Hannah Miller, Francesa Guttler  
LINCOLN .....Jack Gaffney-Harvey, Dali Brljevic  
WINN.....Katherine O'Brien  
MS. PROKOPIAK.....Sarah Lucca  
CLAIR DE LUNE GIRL ..... Beatriz Pena  
BAILEY .....Evianna Garcia  
LISA FINCH-FOX..... Jailah Shannah  
MAYBELLINE..... Eter Matsiashvilli  
DEVON..... Olivia Dorsey  
CROOPER .....Dali Brljevic  
(EXHALATION) ..... Anahit Oksouzian

*Crush* was originally produced by Olathe South High School (Olathe, Kan.) Sept. 24-26, 2015, and subsequently at the International Thespian Festival in June 2016 with the following cast:

BARK .....Cole Taylor  
CHLOE ..... Veronica Wood  
JESSICA ..... Liz Hughes  
ASPEN ..... Andrea Strickler  
COLE ..... David Wernsman  
WINN ..... Emily Dykes  
LINCOLN ..... Liam Chewing  
FLX ..... Matthew Minelli  
CRICK ..... Kylee Wallentine  
ASPEN II ..... Olivia Harshbarger  
(EXHALATION) ..... Megan Secrest  
MS. PROKOPIAK ..... Susannah Kaufman  
LISA FINCH-FOX ..... Molly Neyens  
MAYBELLINE ..... Ainsley Wilbur  
CLAIR DE LUNE GIRL ..... Kyley Reinhart  
CROOPER ..... Kevin Velasco  
DEVON ..... Lexi Nelson  
ENSEMBLE ..... Ian Boy-Duncan, Shaun Carier,  
Ethan Christiansen, Abigail Cottingham,  
Cooper Dammrich, Spencer Foster,  
Ryan Hovey, Jacob Johnston, Aleks Kostic,  
Arian Moye, Alexis Roberts, Myah Sanborn,  
Chayston Simmons, Annabeth Swanson,  
Megan Weldon, Brandon Wright

Production Team:

Director .....	David Tate Hastings
Technical Director .....	Jeremy D. Riggs
Assistant Director.....	Alexis Roberts
Stage Manager .....	Curtis Leonard.
Assistant Technical Director .....	Trent Welch
Lighting Designer .....	Isaiah Reasby
Sound Designer.....	Heather Jackson
Costume Designer.....	Cooper Dammrich
Makeup Designer .....	Annabeth Swanson
Costume Manager .....	Logan Stelling
Properties Manager .....	Jaimeson Satterfield
Lighting Crew .....	Sarah Traylor
Sound Crew.....	Heather Kaufman
Costume & Makeup Crew .....	Akuec Yel
Stage Crew .....	Will Cecil & Alyxx Zinn

# Crush

## CHARACTERS

*(In order of appearance.)*

ENSEMBLE: Any age, either sex. Five seems about right, and that's what the script is marked for. The ensemble serves as narrators and as members of the community. They're students in the cast of *Our Town*.

BARCK: 16, m., energetic, strange and not bothered by it.

WINN: 40s, w., Bark's mother.

LINCOLN: 40s, m., Bark's father.

COLE: 17, m., an actor, smitten beyond words with Aspen.

ASPEN: 17, w., radiant, vulnerable, also the lead body of an otherwise invisible six-bodied alien creature.

CHLOE: 16, w., ferocious and secretly delightful.

CLAIR DE LUNE GIRL: 16, w., doesn't play piano, just the one piece.

JESSICA: 17, w., freakishly smart without being a freak.

MAYBELLINE: 16, w., a budding performance artist.

DEVON: 16, w., a tomboy, goofy in love.

THEODORA PROKOPIAK: w., the theatre teacher. That teacher.

CROOPER: 16, m., everyone's a little in love with him.

ASPEN 2 (the second body): w., the cultural anthropologist of the alien, like all the bodies, invisible to all but Bark.

CRICK (the third body): w., paranoid, able to levitate objects.

FLX (the fourth body): m., creates replicas of Pin Cushion residents in order to fool the townspeople.

(EXHALATION) (the fifth body, pronounced as a moan with no vocalization): w., terrifying, overwhelms her victims with darkness.

MAGDALENA SETH: the fire deputy.

FIRECRACKAMUNDO ANNOUNCER

LISA FINCH-FOX: Pin Cushion's leading light.

A "GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL"

AUDIENCE MEMBERS (at *Our Town*)

## SETTING

Pin Cushion, California.

A truckstop town, 230 miles east of Los Angeles.

Population 786 and dropping.

The present.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

Reading plays is difficult, at least it is for me. Once there are more than three characters onstage, it's easy to lose track of who wants what and how small interactions play into larger goals. With that in mind, here's a primer on the aliens who, together, form the hydra. With that in mind, here's a primer on the aliens who, together, form the hydra.

The hydra consists of six bodies. In order: Aspen, Aspen 2, Crick, Flx, (Exhalation) and the Sixth Body.

Aspen is wonderfully appealing to most of the people she meets. But without Aspen 2, Aspen is just a shell. Aspen 2 controls all aspects of Aspen, including movement, intelligence and personality. She's phenomenally good at making Aspen seem human. She's also the hydra's natural leader.

Crick is insect-like. Her movements are quick and sharp, like a praying mantis. She's also paranoid, constantly afraid that people have discovered the aliens' true nature. Crick has the ability to levitate objects, and her main responsibility will be to lower the approaching spaceship to the ground.

Flx is the only male. Males are vanishingly rare on the planet where the hydra is from. He suggests a snake in both appearance and movement. It's Flx who conjures up replicas of townspeople in order to trick the residents of Pin Cushion when necessary.

(Exhalation) is terrifying, even to the other bodies. The first image that I had in my head as I wrote was the salt monster from the first episode of Star Trek (look it up at your peril). The natural resting state of (Exhalation)'s face is mouth agape. Later, when (Exhalation) controls Aspen's mouth, it too will tend toward open. (Exhalation) is essentially the creature's battery. She drains the happiness from those in love, converts it into despair and uses the change in emotion to power all of the hydra's functions.

The Sixth Body is somehow obscured. When she rises at the end of the play, the audience probably fears that this is another, scarier monster.

A few staging suggestions: for the Bark and Chloe walking date, there's an understandable desire to have the two of them actually walk, to clamber over things, stroll behind the audience, etc. My experience in the development of the play is that it's best to keep the date simple. This scene is the heart of their relationship. It's more important to see the awkward, stumbling beginnings of their romance than to have them move much.

The ensemble can be their own entity as is written in the script, or the lines can be divided up among the other characters.

Experiment with the scenes in which Aspen's body is controlled by the other creatures. I've seen a version in which the hand had trouble gauging how far away the mouth was and kept whacking it. I've also seen it done with the hand scampering across Aspen's body like a crab.

—Stephen Gregg

# Crush

*(Lights up on the ENSEMBLE.)*

ENSEMBLE 1. The story of our town starts nineteen years ago at a city council meeting, jam-packed because of the enormity of the decision. Interstate 17, the Jack Rabbit highway, was approaching Pin Cushion, California, at a quarter of a mile a day. At issue was a choice: have the highway go straight through town:

ENSEMBLE 2 *(at the meeting)*. So they see all the businesses!

ENSEMBLE 1. Or route it around the outskirts, and make the traffic *choose* to enter the town:

ENSEMBLE 3. A business loop.

ENSEMBLE 1. The meeting was noisy because the town was insecure. Was there a reason to stop in Pin Cushion, California, other than for gas and a Caramello bar? If we built the business loop where you actually had to exit, would people go that extra three quarters of a mile?

ENSEMBLE 4 *(at the meeting)*. 'Cause if they don't, then this town is gonna dry up.

ENSEMBLE 5 *(at the meeting)*. The trucks *will* stop, and only the ones we want to stop. The rest'll go by and we won't have to hear 'em and breathe the fumes.

ENSEMBLE 2 *(at the meeting, agreeing)*. Those trucks are loud.

ENSEMBLE 4 *(at the meeting)*. Yeah, they're loud! That's the sound of money, and you can use that money to buy ear plugs and blackout curtains and you can sleep at night. You ever tried to fall asleep when you're unemployed?



ENSEMBLE 3 (*at the meeting*). What if we build the loop and the trucks don't stop?

ENSEMBLE 5 (*at the meeting*). They will stop! We have these bright-colored lamp shades that we're gonna put over all the street lamps. Like Hershey, Pennsylvania.

ENSEMBLE 3 (*at the meeting*). You really think that's gonna work?

ENSEMBLE 5 (*at the meeting*). I know it is. Raise your hands for the business loop.

*(The hands go up. A moment as the truth settles in.)*

ENSEMBLE 2. It was one of those decisions that you know right away is wrong but nobody wants to say it, like when you paint the walls the wrong color, or marry the wrong woman. Twenty-one thousand people held their breath, pretended it didn't matter when the Hallmark store closed, or when—

ENSEMBLE 3 (*to a neighbor*). That little market closed. You know the Korean one on Avenue L?

ENSEMBLE 1. Nineteen thousand people pretended everything was fine when Reggie's Diner shut down, and Abuelita's Fine Mexican Cuisine—

ENSEMBLE 5. Sixteen thousand—

ENSEMBLE 3. LensCrafters, The Home Depot—

ENSEMBLE 1. Thirteen thousand. There goes Udall's Automotive and Massage Envy.

ENSEMBLE 5. But we got two new bars!

ENSEMBLE 1. Goodbye to Fish Taco Taco—

ENSEMBLE 4. Eleven thousand—

ENSEMBLE 1. Beautiful You—

ENSEMBLE 4. Ten thousand—

ENSEMBLE 2. Walmart.

ENSEMBLE 3. Sixty-one hundred. The Denny's cut its hours—

ENSEMBLE 5. But we got three new liquor stores!

ENSEMBLE 1. At which point, the town council made the second great mistake.

ENSEMBLE 3. Those damn billboards.

ENSEMBLE 1. Welcome to Pin Cushion, California.  
Population seven hundred and eighty six.

*(And now, we hear a SPACESHIP LAND somewhere in the distance. Vaguely like sonar, a sonic boom, then a flash of pink light.)*

ENSEMBLE 1. Welcome to Pin Cushion, California.  
Population seven hundred and ninety one.

*(BARK's room, night. BARK, 16, talks to his mother, WINN. BARK is energetic and strange and not normally ashamed of either.)*

BARCK. She hates me!

WINN. Lisa Finch-Fox does not hate you.

BARCK. Yes she does.

WINN. Why would a guidance counselor just decide, for no reason, to hate one single student?

BARCK. I don't know!

WINN. *Were* you jumping on and off your desk?

BARCK. You had to be there.

WINN. Bark, just answer the question.

BARCK. But you weren't there! You didn't *see* it!

WINN. I am so pissed at you.

BARCK. Yeah? Would you be as pissed if you knew I'd gotten the lead in the school play?

WINN. You did not either.

BARCK. Yes I did!

WINN. The lead?

BARCK. Yup!

WINN. Oh, Bark!!

BARCK. I know!

WINN. That's fantastic! What's the play?

BARCK (*emphasizes the second word*). It's called *Our Town*.

WINN. That's so wonderful! When did you find out?

BARCK. Yesterday.

WINN. Why didn't you tell us?

BARCK. I saved it till I was in trouble.

WINN. Well it worked. I'm so proud of you.

*(LINCOLN, BARCK's father, enters. LINCOLN's a truck driver, a bit on the gruff side.)*

LINCOLN. Bark?

*(And now WINN is gone.)*

BARCK. Yeah?

LINCOLN. You doing OK?

BARCK. Yeah.

*(LINCOLN enters the room.)*

LINCOLN. Who you talking to?

BARCK. Nobody.

LINCOLN. Well, you were talking to nobody kind of loud.

BARCK. Sorry.

LINCOLN. Were you talking to your mom?

BARK. You were listening?

LINCOLN. Not on purpose. *(Beat.)* I just wanna check in about tomorrow. You sure you're ready to go back?

BARK. Yeah.

LINCOLN. Maybe you should wait and get used to being home through the weekend.

BARK. No, I gotta go tomorrow. There's a tryout.

LINCOLN. A tryout for what?

BARK. A play.

LINCOLN. No, it's too much, Bark. Let's ease you back in.

BARK. It'll keep my mind off stuff.

LINCOLN. No, those plays are late nights.

BARK. I'll come home right after rehearsal.

LINCOLN. Next time, bud.

BARK. There might not be a next time.

LINCOLN. They've been saying that for ten years.

BARK. But this is such a good play. It's called *Our Town*. It's about all the people in this town, and it's got a horror element to it.

LINCOLN. See, already this sounds like a repeat of the *Dracula* disaster.

BARK. It's not. I'm for sure gonna get a part.

LINCOLN. You don't know that.

BARK. I'm probably gonna get a lead. There's a character named George and there's one named The Stage Manager, and I just have a good feeling about this one.

LINCOLN. Next time. Stay home with me tomorrow.

BARK. No. I have to ask out a couple girls.

LINCOLN. A couple.

BARK. One's just practice.

LINCOLN. Well then, tomorrow it is. Get yourself ready for bed.

*(We hear a PING sound, like sonar. It happens again.)*

BARK. Did you hear that?

LINCOLN. What?

BARK. That sound. That, like, sonar sound.

LINCOLN. I didn't hear it.

*(We hear the sound again.)*

BARK. There.

LINCOLN. I don't hear anything.

*(The sound happens again. BARK looks to his father, but it's clear that LINCOLN hasn't heard it.)*

LINCOLN *(cont'd)*. Are you still hearing it?

*(The sound happens again.)*

BARK. No.

*(It happens again.)*

COLE. I know it's a long shot but I've got to at least try, you know?

*(And we've changed scenes. COLE and ASPEN, both sixteen, in the hills above Pin Cushion, listening to the night sounds.)*

COLE. I'm not even applying to colleges, I'm just gonna do the conservatory thing, 'cause in a way I think it's good not to have a back-up plan. And after that, move to Los Angeles, start auditioning. I've been saving up so I'll have some money when I get there. *(Beat.)* I have a request.

ASPEN. Go for it.

COLE (*but he's a little shy*). I've always liked the 17. It doesn't matter if it's two in the morning, that line of trucks is always coming up and down.

*(ASPEN moves out towards the view. The way she looks down, cautious, tells us it's a huge drop off.)*

COLE (*cont'd*). Careful.

ASPEN. You scared of heights?

COLE. I guess I am.

*(He joins her at the edge.)*

COLE (*cont'd*). We're at three and a half weeks.

ASPEN. I know!

COLE. My request is kind of about that.

ASPEN. What's the request?

COLE. I want to touch your heart.

*(This amuses her, which in turn amuses COLE. When COLE laughs or smiles broadly, he covers his mouth with his hand. It's quick, reflexive.)*

ASPEN (*gentle, she's seen it before*). What's that?

COLE. Habit I guess. Self-conscious about the teeth. My mom took this antibiotic when she was pregnant with me and these three got all shrivelled. (*Beat.*) The town didn't used to look so dingy. The craft store had these special covers they put on all the lamps to make 'em different colors.

ASPEN. Where'd they go?

COLE. Same place all the stores went.

ASPEN. Which was where?

COLE. You don't know? It's crazy famous.

ASPEN. So tell me. Tell it good enough and I'll let you touch my heart.

COLE. OK. Pin Cushion was dying, and the community board had to do something. They decided on this thing that had worked in other parts of the country. It's billboards. You put like a hundred billboards along the highway. "Eighty miles to Pin Cushion: Worth the stop." And the reason to stop was the famous fried chicken. Anyone who lives in a truck stop town knows we have the best fried chicken. 'Cause you don't actually want it all fresh and hot. The secret to great fried chicken is to let it sit in a warmer for hours. It gets all crusty and the meat pulls away from the skin and it's so good. How's the heart situation?

ASPEN. Keep going.

COLE. So Pin Cushion invests all its money in these billboards, both directions. "Holy chicken! Only sixty miles to go!" But then someone does a focus group. It turns out "sitting there for hours" doesn't test well. "Meat pulled away from the skin" is even worse. The thing is, though, the billboards were already up. The money'd been spent. There was just enough money left to buy some bushes and use 'em to hide a patrol car. Right past a billboard that said, "You're almost there!" We had a speed trap.

ASPEN (*disapproval*). Ohh.

COLE. But it *worked*. They couldn't write tickets fast enough. Until, three months in, the front page of *The Huffington Post*: The Meanest Town in the World. That was us. (*Beat.*) And it killed us. Some people left 'cause they were mad, and some people left 'cause they were embarrassed. You guys are the first people to move here in seven years.

ASPEN. All those empty houses.

COLE. Yeah. So, can I?

*(CHLOE, 16, enters, holding a camera. Like all the props, the camera is invisible. CHLOE's default setting is aggressive.)*

CHLOE. You guys gotta move.

ASPEN. No.

CHLOE. You're in the exact spot I need.

COLE. Find another spot.

CHLOE. No, you gotta move.

COLE. Why?

CHLOE. I'm taking a picture of Venus. It's for a projection for *Our Town*.

COLE. Take it from over there.

CHLOE. It's the *first speech in the play*. "The morning star always gets wonderful bright, the minute before it has to go—doesn't it?"

ASPEN. Have we met?

CHLOE. I know who you are.

ASPEN. Aspen. And you are?

*(CHLOE takes out a business card.)*

CHLOE *(grand)*. My card.

ASPEN. "S. Chloe Gander."

CHLOE. You're seriously not going to move?

COLE. Chloe, open your eyes. We're having a romantic moment.

CHLOE. Sh-sh-sh-she's not.

COLE. G-g-go away.

*(CHLOE is stung.)*

CHLOE. You're an ass.



*(She tromps off.)*

ASPEN. Did you just make fun of someone who stutters?

COLE. No!

ASPEN. Are you sure?

COLE. I've known her since sixth grade. Oh, I'm supposed to ask you. What's your favorite herb?

ASPEN. My favorite herb.

COLE. Yeah. The options are basil, dill, rosemary, sage or decline to state.

ASPEN. Why?

COLE. It's for Jessica. She's doing this whole taxonomy.

ASPEN. Sage.

COLE. Thanks. *(Beat.)* So? Can I touch your heart?

ASPEN. I need to go slow.

COLE. No problem.

ASPEN. Sorry.

COLE. No, I'm glad you said something.

ASPEN. But you can touch it.

*(We start to hear "Clair De Lune" played on an invisible piano. We'll call the girl who plays the piano CLAIR DE LUNE GIRL.)*

*ASPEN takes COLE's hand and guides it to the side of her stomach.)*

COLE. Oh wow.

ASPEN. Feel it beating?

COLE. Yeah.

ASPEN. Something went wrong in the womb. My organs are in the wrong place.

COLE. Amazing.

ASPEN. Not really. My ribs are still up here. So my heart's not well protected. Not what you were hoping for.

*(This amuses him, causes him to cover his teeth.)*

COLE. No.

ASPEN. You know something I like about you?

COLE. What?

ASPEN. Your teeth.