

# THE CLEAN SWEEP AFFAIR

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

ARTHUR BOOKER, Greencreek resident  
LIBBY BOOKER, Greencreek resident  
JONATHAN CHARM, Greencreek Resident Manager  
SAUL SHOEHORN, Agent, Covert Operations Bureau  
ARNOLD BROOMLEY, President, Onceover Cleaning Company  
STEPHANIE FUGIT, Previous Greencreek Resident Manager  
With the assistance of-  
ALICIA, Robot Vacuum Cleaner

Time: The Present

Place: The Bookers' apartment

SETTING: Sofa, right center. Television cabinet at angle to sofa. Easy chair.

AT RISE: Libby Booker is watching television. Arthur Booker walks in from the bedroom.

MR. BOOKER. (Yawns.) I've been tired all day. I guess I stayed up too late. I'm going to take it easy. (Settles into his chair and picks up the newspaper.)

MRS. BOOKER. You take it easy every day, Arthur. (SOUND: Knock at the door.)

MRS. BOOKER. Darn. This spy movie has me hooked. They're just about to unmask the mole. Will you get it, dear?

MR. BOOKER. (Reluctantly.) All right. (SOUND: Another knock.) I'm coming, I'm coming. (Grumbling.) People are so impatient these days. (At STAGE RIGHT, opens the apartment door.) Oh, hello Jonathan. It's Jonathan Charm, the resident manager, dear.

CHARM. Hello, Mr. Booker. A package came for you. (Sets a blue box on the floor.)

MR. BOOKER. Dear, it looks like that robot vacuum cleaner we ordered. It'll clean the whole apartment at the push of a button.

MRS. BOOKER. (Looking away from the TV.) That's nice. Does it do windows?

MR. BOOKER. I'm afraid not, dear. This model is designed for floors only.

CHARM. These new devices can be tricky. Can I help you set it up, Mr. Booker?

MR. BOOKER. No thank you, Jonathan. I used to work as a software engineer. I'm sure I can figure it out.

CHARM. Well, I could at least read the model number if you want to register it.

MR. BOOKER. That won't be necessary, Jonathan. I'll take care of that later.

CHARM. As you wish. Good-bye, Mrs. Booker. (CHARM exits. MR. BOOKER takes the device out of the box.)

MR. BOOKER. I'm going to take this empty box into the next room. I'll be right back.

MRS. BOOKER. Okay dear. Ohhh, I think they're bringing in the mole.

MR. BOOKER (Returns). Hmm. This looks simple enough. Just touch the "On" button. Well, here goes . . . (SOUND: loud knock on the door.) Oh, I'll get that, dear. (Opens door.)

SHOEHORN. Arthur Booker?

MR. BOOKER. Yes.

SHOEHORN (showing I.D.) I am special agent Saul Shoehorn with the U.S. Covert Operations Bureau, COB for short. I understand that a package was just delivered to you.

MR. BOOKER. That's right. A robot vacuum cleaner. I was just about to turn it on.

SHOEHORN. Mr. Booker, do not touch that device. It could be a UHT.

MRS. BOOKER. (At the TV) A what?

SHOEHORN. (Chuckles) Of course a civilian wouldn't understand. In the covert operations world, UHT stands for Universal Hacking Tool.

MR. BOOKER. You've got to be kidding. That's just a vacuum cleaner.

SHOEHORN. It's made to look like one. But in reality that device may be a miniature supercomputer. If so, in the wrong hands, it could penetrate every encrypted communication in the U.S. government, as well as Amazon, Google, Seven-eleven, even your neighborhood dry cleaner. Any computer operating system would be vulnerable.

MR. BOOKER. That's terrible. My best suit is at the dry cleaner even as we speak. How did this happen?

SHOEHORN. This device was a tightly held secret at the Bureau. In the wrong hands our security, our economy—indeed our very way of life—would be at risk. That’s why we disguised it to look like a robot vacuum cleaner.

MRS. BOOKER (Looking away from the TV). That was clever. But why can’t it do windows?

SHOEHORN. Because, Mrs. Booker, it’s designed for a higher purpose. This is a state of the art decryption device.

MRS. BOOKER (sniffs.) In that case, programming it do windows should be easy.

MR. BOOKER. Why did you build such a device?

SHOEHORN. Obviously, so that we could break into the computer systems of other countries. It’s in our national security interest.

MR. BOOKER. And this vacuum cleaner could actually be the hacking tool. What makes you think so?

SHOEHORN. Despite our precautions, the UHT has been stolen by a foreign agent.

MRS. BOOKER. A foreign agent? How exciting. That’s what this movie is about. Did your foreign agent have a stringy mustache and wear dark glasses?

SHOEHORN. Of course not, Mrs. Booker. That kind of thing is just for old spy movies.

MR. BOOKER. So what does he look like?

SHOEHORN. He probably looks like an ordinary person on the street, purple hair, tattoos, nose rings, that sort of thing.

MRS. BOOKER. How did he get inside your agency?

SHOEHORN. Our offices are vacuumed by the Onceover Cleaning Company. It seems that he posed as a member of the evening cleaning crew.

MR. BOOKER. But since he worked at your Bureau, didn’t he have to go through a security check? Why don’t you know what he looks like?

SHOEHORN. Because of budget cuts, we’ve had to eliminate a number of personnel at the main security gate. There was a failure to properly vet this individual. Since he was dressed in the cleaning crew’s

uniform, the guard on duty waived him through. Needless to say the guard has been reassigned to another gate.

MR. BOOKER. So what do you know about him?

SHOEHORN. Well, the guard is a good family man who loves draft beer, racetracks and the Redskins. Unfortunately he's also very nearsighted and keeps misplacing his glasses. He means well and we didn't have the heart to fire him.

MR. BOOKER. I was talking about the foreign agent.

SHOEHORN. Oh. The guard recalled that he was between five-foot-six and six-foot-five, weighing between 150 and 250 pounds, with ash blond or black hair. His background could be either Norwegian or Nigerian. That's all we have to go on.

MRS. BOOKER. And did he do a good job? This apartment gets so dusty and we could use an outside cleaning service.

SHOEHORN. I'm afraid I can't help you there, Mrs. Booker.

MR. BOOKER. What does the cleaning company say about this individual?

SHOEHORN. The cleaning company denies knowledge of any such person. Unfortunately, the company uses the same kind of robot vacuum that that UHT was disguised as. The spy simply switched his vacuum cleaner for the UHT and escaped.

MR. BOOKER. That's terrible. Are you sure this is the device he stole?

SHOEHORN. I'll need to verify that. Do you have the box the vacuum came in?

MR. BOOKER. Of course. It's in the other room. I'll get it. (MR. BOOKER EXITS STAGE LEFT.)

MRS. BOOKER. Can I get you something to drink, agent Shoehorn? A vodka martini or scotch and soda?

SHOEHORN. Not while I'm on duty, Mrs. Booker. My mind has to be razor sharp and I need quick reflexes in case of danger. The six-pack I had for lunch will have to do. Speaking of which, may I use your bathroom? It's kind of urgent.

MRS. BOOKER. Sorry, the toilet is not working. I must remember to call general maintenance. There is a restroom off the main lobby downstairs.

SHOEHORN. I'll hurry up with what I'm doing here and go down there.

MR. BOOKER (returns with the box.) Here's what came earlier.

SHOEHORN. A blue box. That settles it. This is not the device we're looking for. The hacking tool was packed in a red box. This is merely a working vacuum cleaner.

MRS. BOOKER (looking over from the TV.) That's a relief. This apartment needs a good cleaning. There's dust everywhere.

SHOEHORN. It's not over. According to our sources, the actual device is definitely set to be delivered to this apartment in Greencreek sometime today.

MR. BOOKER. But why Greencreek? This is a quiet retirement community. And why our apartment? We are just an older retired couple.

SHOEHORN. Precisely because this is the last place anybody would think of.

MRS. BOOKER. My goodness, is there nowhere anymore that's safe?

SHOEHORN. Don't worry, Mrs. Booker. You and your husband are protected. Surveillance of the main entrance to your building is being provided 24/7 by our Bureau, the FBI, CIA, NSA and AARP.

MRS. BOOKER. That's such a comfort. I'd like to invite whoever is out there in for a drink. Just to show our appreciation.

SHOEHORN (indulgently). I'm afraid that won't be possible. Mr. and Mrs. Booker, if another vacuum cleaner like this one shows up, I want you to call me right away. Here is my card. Right now I'm heading downstairs for that restroom. (RUSHES OUT STAGE RIGHT.)

MR. BOOKER. Sweetheart, I'm going to put this vacuum cleaner back in its box. (EXITS STAGE LEFT.)

MRS. BOOKER (still intent on the movie). That's fine, dear. (Stares at the TV.) Oh, this is so exciting. The mole worked for a cleaning service that gave him entrée into top secret government installations. (SOUND: Knock on the door. MRS. BOOKER goes to answer it).

MRS. BOOKER. Jonathan, what brings you back so soon?

CHARM. Well, Mrs. Booker, it seems that another package has come for you. (ENTERS STAGE RIGHT, places a red box on the floor.) It looks like another robot vacuum cleaner. How many of these did you order?

MRS. BOOKER. I have no idea. Mr. Booker is always ordering new-fangled gadgets. I just wish he would find one that does windows. (IN A LOUD VOICE:) Dear, Jonathan is here again! (MR. BOOKER ENTERS STAGE LEFT.)

MR. BOOKER. Another vacuum cleaner! And this one is in a red box! This could be the UHT. I'm going to move it to the bedroom. Will you call agent Shoehorn?

MRS. BOOKER. Of course, Dear. (MR. BOOKER EXITS STAGE LEFT.)

MRS. BOOKER. (Pulls out her cellphone.) Agent Shoehorn, we've just received a second robot vacuum cleaner. And it's in a red box. (Pause.) Very good.

MR. BOOKER (Returns STAGE LEFT). What did he say?

MRS. BOOKER. He'll be here shortly. Meanwhile, no one is to leave until he gets here.

CHARM. I don't see why I should stay. I'm needed on the front desk. One of our residents is leaving on a trip and she refuses to fill out an Away from Greencreek form. Says it's all a lot of bureaucratic nonsense.

MRS. BOOKER. I agree with Jonathan. Rules are rules. The woman shouldn't be allowed off the property until she completes the required paperwork.

MR. BOOKER. Agent Shoehorn made it clear that we should all stay right here. (They argue, interrupted by a loud knock on the door. About to leave, STAGE RIGHT, CHARM answers the door. SHOEHORN enters.)

SHOEHORN. Who are you?

CHARM. My name is Charm, Jonathan Charm. I am the Greencreek resident manager. And I assume you are agent Shoehorn.

SHOEHORN. Correct.

CHARM. All guests at Greencreek are required to sign in. It appears that in your earlier visit you did not sign the guest register at the Front Desk.

SHOEHORN. Of course not. In a covert operation we never broadcast our whereabouts.

CHARM. Nevertheless, we have a strict policy that all visitors must sign the guest register.

SHOEHORN. There was no one at the front desk when I came in.

CHARM. That's because I was busy making a delivery. And this time you had demanded that no one leave this apartment. I need to get back down there.

SHOEHORN. All right, you can leave, Charm. But remain at the front desk. I may have some questions for you when we finish here.

CHARM. Before I answer any questions, you'll have to sign the guest register. (CHARM EXITS STAGE RIGHT.)

SHOEHORN. Something odd about that fellow. What do you know about him?

MR. BOOKER. Not much I'm afraid. He's only been here for a month. Our previous resident manager, Stephanie Fugit, had been here for five years. Then one day she didn't show up for work. Her disappearance is a mystery. Can you help locate her?

SHOEHORN. I'm sure your local police department is doing its best to find out what happened. We in the COB have bigger fish to fry. So after Miss Fugit disappeared, your Board of Directors hired Charm?

MR. BOOKER. Yes. Apparently he had worked as a lobbyist for a foreign government. For some reason he decided that he wanted to use his talents on behalf of retired people. The opening here at Greencreek was made to order.

SHOEHORN. Why was he the one who brought the robot vacuum cleaner to you? He must have staff people for those sorts of things.

MR. BOOKER. Jonathan, Mr. Charm, has made some changes around here. He checks all packages coming into the community and personally delivers them to the residents. That way he gets to know us better. He seemed quite interested in this vacuum cleaner, even wanted to read the model number.

SHOEHORN. Hmm. That makes your Mr. Charm a person of interest. It's a puzzle as to why you would receive two vacuum cleaners. We are dealing here with a cunning spy. Fortunately we are trained to handle this kind of deception.

MRS. BOOKER (returning to the TV). This is all getting too complicated for me. I'm going to watch the end of this movie. Ohh, they're taking the man with the stringy moustache and dark glasses away in handcuffs. (Loud knock at door.)

MR. BOOKER. I'll get it. (Opens door. Man with stringy moustache and wearing dark glasses enters.)

MR. BOOKER. Yes?

BROOMLEY. I'm Arnold Broomley, President of the Onceover Cleaning Company. One of our robot vacuum cleaners was stolen. We received a call that it could be found at this address.

SHOEHORN. Who called?

BROOMLEY. The caller wouldn't identify herself. And just who are you?

SHOEHORN. Saul Shoehorn. I am an undercover agent of the United States Covert Operations Bureau. So the caller was a woman. What else can you tell me about this phone call?

BROOMLEY. Well, our vacuum cleaner was taken from your agency. The caller knew that.

SHOEHORN. Has your company been involved in any shady dealings with foreign governments?

BROOMLEY. Of course not. We are a multinational corporation and we clean the offices of government agencies in a number of countries. Everything we do is on the up and up. Our premium service is available only in the United States at no extra cost. It's the least we can for our country.

SHOEHORN. Your premium service?

BROOMLEY. That's right. And, if I may say so, we do an outstanding job. In addition to vacuuming and dusting, we even clean off those messy desks with stacks of paper piled up on them. Messy desk, messy mind, we always say. We just drop all that paper into our company shredder.

SHOEHORN (To himself.) So that's what happened to those top secret reports that nobody can find. (To Broomley.) I have to say, Broomley, that I find your story hard to swallow. We've been expecting someone to come here looking for a vacuum cleaner, which in reality is a top secret codebreaking device. You show up claiming that an anonymous tipster led you here. I'm sorry but that won't wash.

MRS. BOOKER. I told you. A long stringy moustache and dark glasses. A dead giveaway.

SHOEHORN. Arnold Broomley, I am placing you under arrest. You are charged with attempting to steal a highly classified government device on behalf of an unknown enemy. You have the right to remain silent but, if you do don't come clean, you will be subject to forms of persuasion that our lawyers assure us do not amount to actual torture in a legal sense. (KNOCK ON DOOR. Mr. Booker answers. CHARM ENTERS STAGE RIGHT, carrying a red box.)

CHARM. Another package just came for you, Mr. and Mrs. Booker. Just like before, this is a robot vacuum cleaner. You're getting quite a collection of these. Well, I'd better get back downstairs.



SHOEHORN. Just a minute, Charm. You've got some explaining to do. Just who delivered this latest vacuum cleaner?

CHARM. I can't tell you. At the time the package was delivered. I was trying to persuade an elderly gentleman who walked in from the outside to sign the guest register. He refused and I had to insist. While this was going on, a person wearing a track suit with a hoodie rushed in, dropped the package on the desk and ran out. I didn't get a good look at him or her.

MRS. BOOKER. And did that elderly man sign the guest register?

CHARM. No. It turns out he was a resident and he had been outside looking for his wife. If he had been wearing his name tag, I would have known that.

SHOEHORN. Let's not get off the subject. Charm, your story makes no sense. You are trying to sweep this incident under the rug.

BROOMLEY. Agent Shoehorn, this is ridiculous. You can't accuse everyone who comes into this apartment of being a spy. I demand to speak to your superior.

SHOEHORN. That's not possible. My superior is currently out of the country on personal business. She left instructions saying that she will not have email or cell phone access. I am serving for the time being as the acting deputy assistant under-secretary for nefarious affairs.

BROOMLEY. In that case I will expose your wild accusations on my Twitter account. I'm sure it won't take long before they go viral.

SHOEHORN. Look Broomley, just because you've been arrested on charges of espionage and treason doesn't mean that you have to be unreasonable. I'm sure we can talk this through.

BROOMLEY. You can blame yourself, Shoehorn. The Onceover Cleaning Company has a lot of influence here in Washington. Half a dozen Senators owe their elections to the negative ads we funded against their opponents. I'm sure they'll want to look into your agency's use of taxpayer funds.

SHOEHORN. Now hold on Mr. Broomley. The COB can't handle another budget cut. Do you realize that the cost of miniature listening devices has gone up by twenty-five percent in just the past year? It's even worse for drones and hidden cameras. And you wouldn't believe our personnel costs. We have to bid on the world market for the best computer hackers. As a red-blooded American patriot, I'm sure you wouldn't want to undermine our top secret work. I'm prepared to work out a deal with you.

CHARM. The thief could be a rogue agent in your own Bureau, agent Shoehorn. According to sources on the Internet, that's been known to happen.

SHOEHORN. Just because a few people in the Bureau have been subject to internal investigation for sharing classified information in private email accounts is no big deal. It happens all the time.

MR. BOOKER. Were you one of those people?

SHOEHORN. What if I was? Nothing was ever proved. No harm, no foul, as they say. The Undercover Agents Association has filed a motion anonymously on my behalf. They demand that the Inspector General's report be removed from my personnel file.

CHARM. I notice that that car you drove in was the latest model Lamborghini. How could you afford that on a government salary?

SHOEHORN. As I explained to the investigators, a bachelor uncle of mine who recently died left a large sum of money for me in his estate. For convenience I have kept the money in a Caiman Islands bank account.

CHARM. I've heard enough. I'm calling the police. For all we know, you could be a double agent. Just in case, I am making a citizen's arrest.

SHOEHORN. That's absurd. You're the main suspect here, Charm. I'm arresting you on grounds of undermining the American way of life, including the golden years of our senior citizens.

BROOMLEY. While you two are busy arresting one another, I'm going to see what's in this red box. (Walks over to the red box, takes out the vacuum cleaner, reaches down and turns it on.)

*ALICIA. Hello, Mr. Broomley.*

BROOMLEY. Hello, Alicia. Are you ready?

*ALICIA. Sir, I was born ready. What can I do for you?*

BROOMLEY. Alicia, does this room need to be vacuumed?

*ALICIA. Sir, this room is a mess. Dust everywhere.*

MRS. BOOKER. I already told you that.

BROOMLEY. Alicia, I want you to give this room the Onceover special, a thorough vacuuming, wall to wall, corner to corner.

*ALICIA. Right away, sir.* (Broomley presses a button. The robot vacuum begins traversing the room.)

BROOMLEY. You see, this is a working robot vacuum cleaner. It's obviously the one stolen from my company.

CHARM. That settles it. Shoehorn, you have no right to hold either of us here. (All three men engage in an argument. Phone rings. Mrs. Booker answers.)

MRS. BOOKER. Yes, Mrs. Brimstone, I'm sorry for the noise. We have visitors and—yes, I understand, you are right below us and the noise is intolerable. You are going to call the police? Please hold off on that. I'll try to quiet the group down. If I don't then – what? Well, if that's your attitude, the same to you. (Hangs up.) That woman! I'm going to stop being part of her bridge group.

MR. BOOKER. (In a loud voice.) Gentlemen, enough! We can't have this kind of uproar in our apartment. Our neighbors are complaining. I must ask you all to leave immediately. (The group quiets down.)

BROOMLEY. Well, I've found what I came for. (He turns off the vacuum cleaner and puts it in the red box.)

MRS. BOOKER (to Shoehorn.) But he looks just the like the spy in the movie I was watching.

SHOEHORN. I'm a trained professional, Mrs. Booker. Appearances can be deceiving. I was perhaps a little hasty in accusing Broomley here of espionage. It's obvious that what's in this red box is a bona fide robot vacuum cleaner.

BROOMLEY. With a thirty day guarantee on parts and labor, I might add.

SHOEHORN. Mr. Booker, you have two vacuum cleaners in your bedroom, one in a blue box and one that is also in a red box. If the one in this red box is a vacuum cleaner, then the one in the red box in your bedroom must be the UHT. Bring that box here. (MR. BOOKER EXITS STAGE LEFT.)

CHARM. I've had enough. I'm going back down to the front desk. (EXITS STAGE LEFT.)

BROOMLEY. And I'm leaving with this red box. This is a busy week. We have to clean the offices of the CIA, FBI, NSA and DIA and we need every available robot cleaner. (EXITS STAGE RIGHT.)

MR. BOOKER (Returns STAGE LEFT with the second red box.) Here is your hacking device, agent Shoehorn. I assume that means we can keep the vacuum cleaner in the blue box.

SHOEHORN. Yes, it looks like everyone is getting what we were here for. Broomley has his stolen robot cleaner, I've got the UHT and you and Mrs. Booker have the vacuum cleaner you ordered. It looks like we've foiled the plot of an unscrupulous foreign power.

MRS. BOOKER. That's marvelous. This is even more exciting than Turner Classic Movies.

SHOEHORN. You know, this affair might be worth a promotion for me. If that looks like a possibility, Mr. and Mrs. Booker, would you be willing to write a letter of recommendation to the promotion board?

MR. BOOKER. We'd be glad to. It would put a spotlight on the intrepid but little known work of our nation's undercover agents.

SHOEHORN (picks up the red box). In that case, I'll be going.

MR. BOOKER. But, agent Shoehorn, you still don't know who was behind all this.

SHOEHORN. Oh, right. Well, we'll get on to that after I've delivered this box to the COB's hacking team. (SHOEHORN EXITS STAGE RIGHT.)

MR. BOOKER. All right, Stephanie, it's safe to come out of the bathroom now. (STEPHANIE FUGIT ENTERS STAGE CENTER, dressed in track suit and hoodie.)

FUGIT. That was close.

MR. BOOKER. Yes, you managed to deliver that second red box to the front desk at just the right moment.

FUGIT. It was climbing down the wall and back up to your bathroom that was the problem. I'm bushed. Your bathroom window is very small. I could barely squeeze through the window.

MR. BOOKER. Are you sure no one saw you rappelling up the side of the building?

FUGIT. Absolutely sure. It's three thirty in the afternoon. Everyone is taking a nap.

MR. BOOKER. Good thinking. And I'm lucky that guard at the COB didn't get a good description of me last night. I'm too old for this cloak-and-dagger stuff. Let me get the blue box.

FUGIT. When you suggested I call the COB and tell them they could find the UHT here, I thought the idea was crazy. But everything played out just as you said it would.

MRS. BOOKER. But, dear, you gave agent Shoehorn the first red box from the bedroom. Didn't that contain the UHT?

MR. BOOKER. It did until I switched it out for the one in the blue box. Agent Shoehorn is now in possession of a state of the art robot vacuum cleaner. (EXITS STAGE RIGHT AND RETURNS IMMEDIATELY WITH THE BLUE BOX.) And we have the UHT.

MRS. BOOKER. And it works on Windows?

MR. BOOKER. Yes, dear, as well as every other computer operating system.

FUGIT. Excellent. That means we can sell it to the highest bidder. When that's done, as agreed, I'll wire half the proceeds to your Swiss bank account.

MR. BOOKER. But first we need to get out of the country. And all the air terminals and seaports will be watched.

MRS. BOOKER. Plus we have to fill out an Away from Greencreek form. You know how Jonathan insists on that.

MR. BOOKER. We can email him that form later. Right now we have to figure out our means of transportation.

FUGIT (looks out the window at the rear of the room.) Not to worry. A few minutes ago I called a taxi. I've gotten a text saying that it just arrived at the back door of this building. I've promised the driver a big tip if he'll drive us all to Mexico. (FUGIT picks up the blue box.)

MR. BOOKER. That's great. Can we stop at the dry cleaners along the way? I've got to pick up my suit.

(ALL THREE EXIT STAGE LEFT.)

BLACKOUT

-END OF PLAY-

-OPTIONAL ENDING-

(FOR THOSE WHO PREFER SOMETHING TIDIER)

As the stage goes dark, an approaching police car's siren grows louder, the stops abruptly.