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By **MICHAEL STARR**

April 21, 2004 -- Paula nails it

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"American Idol" judge **Paula Abdul** is nursing a sore paw after having the nail on her right thumb removed because of an infection. Abdul underwent surgery at Cedars Sinai Hospital Monday after a manicure went awry.

"I just got a manicure and they punctured me. I'm in a bit of pain," Abdul told "Entertainment Tonight." "It's throbbing. I had surgery to remove the entire nail - the infection was too close to the bone.

"I almost lost my thumb," she says. "I didn't think it would hurt this bad and I didn't realize how many limitations I would have - I can't button my pants and it'll be hard to turn and bark back at Simon [Cowell]. I guess I'll just talk to Randy [Jackson] all night."

Meanwhile, this week's guest "AI" judge, **Barry Manilow**, told "Extra's" **Dayna Devon** that he "never watched it actually" - meaning "AI" - but that he agreed to be a judge on one condition: That he get to rearrange the songs for each of the contestants.

"If you do Elton's songs just the way he did them, you've got a shot," he tells Devon. "If you do my songs in 2004 the way I did in the 1970s, it's going to sound like elevator music." Manilow is promoting his new CD, "2Nights Live."

And, just when you thought she might be going away . . . "Extra" producers have arranged for "Apprentice" troublemaker **Omarosa Manigault-Stallworth** to have a walk-on role on the NBC soap "Passions."

Last, but not least:

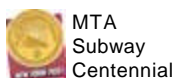
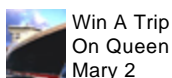
* Heavyweight contender **Vitali Klitschko** tells **Dan Rather** on tonight's "60 Minutes II" that he's banned his parents from watching him fight after KOing an opponent whose family was there watching (8 p.m./Ch. 2).

* A&E's "**Family Plots**," which debuted Monday (9 p.m.), was up 42 percent over the network's timeslot average (in adults 25-54).

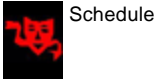
* AOL Music will announce four new "Breaker" artists today: **Cheri**, **Butterfly Boucher**, **Jin** and **Silvertide**. **Christina Milian's** "Dip it Low" was streamed 321,000

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times, so she's now an official "Breaker" success. The program gives up-and- comers exposure to AOL's audience.

* April 28: Post TV columnist **Adam Buckman** moderates an EPPS panel on entertainment PR campaigns. It's at The Bryant Park Hotel, West 40th (12:30-2 p.m.).

* **Robin Dorian** signing to host BBC America's "The Telly" (12:30 p.m. Saturdays).

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