AN EXCERPT FROM:
THE BALLAD OF OCTOPUS & SQUID

Written by

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Written for Live Reading During A Class of Comediocracy

PLAYERS:

QUINTIN - OCTOPI
JOSE - MAESTRO JOSHUA
RAFF - ACTION DESCRIPTION
AREN - SIMONE

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FADE IN:

EXT. SNIPING ROOFTOP - DAY

A post-modernist rooftop gleams with aluminum and steel, overlooking a positively soul-destroying CORPORATE BUILDING.

A SNIPER dressed in WHITE OCTOPUS ARMOR approaches the edge, with matching visor, on which an octopus emblem is emblazoned. He carries a translucent outrageously large BLUE RIFLE, that would pass as a cannon, attached to his arm. This is OCTOPI.

A SMALL CHILD of nine walks alongside him, carrying a kids' lunchbox decorated with fluffy animals. This is SIMONE.

SIMONE
Will we shoot it from 'ere?

OCTOPI
(voice muffled by his visor)
Yes, now it's important you remain silent. Have you got the Stream?

Simone produces a SMALL IPHONE. It is suitably futuristic, see-through with marble casing. It is set to a VIDEO LIVESTREAM, already buzzing with likes and comments and strange new emojis - the horrors of the modern age.

OCTOPI (CONT'D)
Good. You learn fast. We'll make a Personality of you yet.

Simone smiles, pleased.

Octopi gestures for him to crouch as he kneels to get his rifle in place on the cement railing. He focuses on the building across from them, lowering his visor to peer through a set of matching blue goggles.

Simone takes out a tripod from the lunchbox. He sets the phone on it and angles it at Octopi.

SIMONE
Aren't you going to use a weathervane?

OCTOPI
When you become a pro, kid, you never need one.

Octopi looks into the SCOPE.

OCTOPI POV: Through the hazy iris crosshair of his rifle, Octopi pinpoints his target: the back of a BUSINESSMAN CEO'S HEAD (50's), sitting at his desk in a spacious office. He appears to have headphones on, and looks to be DANCING IN HIS CHAIR.

He settles his gloved finger on the trigger...

Simone interrupts his perfect shot:

SIMONE
Why don't they have any bulletproof windows?

Octopi sighs and turns to him.

OCTOPI
They know of the current Trends and what Trained Snipers such as myself do for Views, but, you see, they have such an inflated opinion of themselves, that they never learn and refuse to take precautions like bulletproof windows. The nauseating confidence of these men-in-suits is stifling.

SIMONE
Are they always men?

OCTOPI
Mostly. A common Trend.

Octopi sets his eyes back to the scope.

INT. CORPORATE OFFICE - SAME TIME

The CEO sets at his desk moving his hands in tune with the ABBA-style music. He hums softly to himself, having the time of his life.

A massive BULLET RIPS THROUGH THE GLASS WINDOW behind him, hitting him right in the head and EXPLODING IT IN A CASCADE OF BRAIN MATTER, splattering everywhere in his office, including on a picture of his wife.

EXT. SNIPING ROOFTOP - SAME TIME

Octopi takes his finger off the trigger and lifts his rifle by his arm from the ground, as Simone looks on at the building, vaguely intrigued.

OCTOPI
That's how it's done.

SIMONE
Are we leaving already?

OCTOPI
Wait. Angle the camera at the window.

Simone does as he's bid, moving the tripod in place to focus on the office, full of shattered glass and gore.

The livestream is going nuts.

INT. CORPORATE OFFICE - SAME TIME

Back inside, a FEMALE SECRETARY (40's) enters, immediately greeted by the sight of her boss' headless corpse.

She SCREAMS in fright!

EXT. SNIPING ROOFTOP - SAME TIME

The livestream captures her reaction. Simone continues to watch, invested. Octopi ruffles his hair.

OCTOPI
C'mon kid, we got the money shot. It's always better with a reaction. Let's get outta here, time to run what we shot by Joshua.

INT. MAESTRO JOSHUA'S BUNKER, OFFICE

An underground shelter, reinforced and soundproofed. MAESTRO JOSHUA (40's), dressed in an orange striped conductor's outfit and possessing jaundiced skin, sits at a desk cluttered with empty bottles and half-full drinks.

Octopi and Simone sit across from him as he reviews the recorded livestream footage on a high-tech TABLET. He looks to be thrilled, and also completely WASTED.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
(slurring his words exuberantly)
Jusht stellar boysh, just shtella.

He downs a quadruple gin and slimline tonic with ice but no lemon.

OCTOPI
The kid's a chip off the old block.

Maestro Joshua sets the tablet down to point his finger at Simone.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
If you keep up like thish, you'll make it very far. We are a deluxe outfit 'ere. We give the people what they want.

Simone turns to Octopi like he's a father figure.

SIMONE
How did you meet this guy?

OCTOPI
Joshua and I go way back. Refresh my memory Joshua - how did you come to be bent over in a zoo giving your number to a pair of gerbils that one day?

Maestro Joshua raises his empty glass in answer. Octopi nudges Simone.

OCTOPI (CONT'D)
He has always been one for the drink. It is a rare thing finding an alcoholic in 2057. Booze fell out of fashion, you see. Anyway, after finding him like that, I knew it would be the start of a beautiful friendship.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
And enduring partnership.

OCTOPI
And divine relationship!

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
And divine relationship!

They both share a resounding laugh. Once they've collected themselves, Joshua narrows his bloodshot eyes:

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Now, don't let thish good-natured soiree fool you. We must talk business. A Personality going by the name of Miss Wilde is making wavesh online. She's trying to discredit us.

OCTOPI
But our Morals are iron-clad --

MAESTRO JOSHUA
-- So we believe. And so do many othersh. But Miss Wilde hash shtarted shpreading the word...

He trails off. Octopi and Simone wait for the rest eagerly, but Maestro Joshua seems to be slumping in his chair, beginning to drool into a coma.

OCTOPI
We're waiting, Joshua.

He awakens.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
As I was shaying, she is sphreading the word that...

Starts to pass out again. Octopi SLAMS his fist on the table. Maestro Joshua is startled back to life.

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
T-that CEO's sh are GOOD PEOPLE!

Octopi reaches across the table and SLAPS Joshua in response, so dreadfully offended by the very idea of that statement. He then sits back down, satisfied.

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
She said it, not me. She holdsh that our actions are repugnant and that we should be drowned in squidsh.

OCTOPI
Why squids?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
She caught onto our octopush motif.

OCTOPI
That impinges on our IP, our entire brand. Blatant theft, and she must herself be in a Cosmic Bandwagon Echoing Chamber.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
She has a signed slip from a doctor that looked at her.
(MORE)

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
It saysh that she left her Cosmic Bandwagon Echoing Chamber and has reached Equilibrium.

OCTOPI
Equilibrium. What a farce. Our kills are justified in the eyes of Article 1,789 of the Independent Murder Group Clause for Social Media.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
It seems that the Old Moral Order is shlowly returning. Soon, all Independent Murder Groups will be frowned upon once again.

Octopi nudges Simone.

OCTOPI
Won't that be a dark day?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
In the meantime, all we can do ish prepare for what ish to come, and how to deal with this Miss Wilde.

INT. MAESTRO JOSHUA'S BUNKER, HALLWAY

Later. Maestro Joshua and Octopi stand in the hallway outside the office. Through a window in on the room, they can watch Simone, who plays with an old flip-phone.

Maestro Joshua drinks from a FUTURISTIC FLASK that has a digital screen for measuring the number of sips it holds.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
Have you told him?

OCTOPI
Why should I? That would spoil our Trend as a duo.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
The reports show that the Consumers are also tending to value the Universal Abstraction Trend known as 'Unconditional Honesty'.

OCTOPI
Which reports would those be?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
Come with me. I'll show you.

At his urging, Octopi follows him down the hallway into another room.

INT. MAESTRO JOSHUA'S BUNKER, CRUCIBLE OF ALGORITHMS

Maestro Joshua leads Octopi into a large circular room where HUGE MACHINES scrawl out codes and data at a rapid pace.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
Welcome! To the Crucible of Algorithms!

OCTOPI
So, this is where you get it all from.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
You bet your tentacles. These machines analyze the current Patterns apparent in social media and spit it out for me. If a particular Catchphrase, Hashtag, or Meme is looming large in the Zeitgeist or Lexicon, that goes straight into our posts.

INSERT: An example of a SOCIAL MEDIA POST done by Maestro Joshua. It shows a REEL of one of Octopi's livestreams, where ANOTHER CEO is getting shot in the head. The caption reads: "OMG FEELING FREAKY TODAY. #HIGHRISELIFE #ROOFTOPSNIPER."

BACK TO THE SCENE.

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
By including #HighRiseLife along with our handle of #RooftopSniper, I catapulted our Viewers to a record of 10 mill.

OCTOPI
And what does this have to do with telling Simone?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
My friend, the people know that after you killed Simone's father for their enjoyment, you selflessly adopted him as your own son, and took great pains to bring him on every future killing, teaching him the ropes, and prohibiting him from having his own phone and finding out on his own, to maintain that splendid relationship. But, when I post the video of you admitting to his father's killing, that is when they will truly go nuts, and hunger for more.

OCTOPI
Hunger for more?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
They will be so hungry for more, they will start eating one another. Or at least, let us hope so. They will admire you for being Honest to the boy, and the boy will love you for it too.

OCTOPI
How can you be sure?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
I took an online course in psychology. They had the most remarkable folk pretending to be insane for us students to offer diagnosis.

OCTOPI
Oh? I did not know that.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
Maestro Joshua is full of surprises. Now, on the topic of Miss Wilde...

He gives him a forward gesture and takes him towards a machine with a SUCTION HOLE.

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
This is a can for garbage.

He pulls out a sticky wad of paper from his pocket and moves it within 10 inches of the hole. It is immediately sucked into the machine with a resounding WHOOOOSH.

OCTOPI
What was that paper?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
The results of my latest liver exam. Nothing to worry about. The point I was trying to make is that the paper doesn't represent Miss Wilde, only her ideas. We must take them, and --

He takes out another slip of paper. Into the suction hole it goes.

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Discredit them.

OCTOPI
What was that one?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
The results of my latest heart exam. Nothing to worry about. How do we discredit her ideas alone? Well, take our Trends, for example. We kill people. She tries to preach an outdated concept of Harmony. We take Harmony, and we --

He withdraws an entire file folder from his outfit and sacrifices it to the machine.

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Turn Harmony to Frenzy.

OCTOPI
What was in the folder?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
A list of things doctors heard me referring to while hallucinating. Don't even get me started on the Leopard-Giraffe.

OCTOPI
How do we turn Harmony to Frenzy, Maestro?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
We wage war on Wilde's Squids.

OCTOPI
War?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
War! Brutal fucking war.

Maestro Joshua SLAPS Octopi, paying him back for earlier. Octopi takes it with a grain of salt.

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Are you ready, my disciple?

OCTOPI
I object to that phrase.

MAESTRO JOSHUA
Are you ready, my associate?

OCTOPI
That's better. Fine, sure. What are we going to do first?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
The Smear Campaign starts now. We will hit them where it hurts. There is a Gathering of Squidmen at the E. Frederick Supermall on the 28th. Are you ready for a Freaky Frenzy?

Octopi nods. Maestro Joshua takes an ELECTRIC TIMER out and shoves it into his hands.

OCTOPI
What's this?

MAESTRO JOSHUA
A timed explosive. Attach that to the Supermall wall at 0: 900 when the Squidmen will be at their densest.

Octopi strides away with purpose, holding the bomb. Maestro Joshua calls:

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Oh, and Octopi!

He turns back to face him.

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Don't forget to take the boy with you. We'll tell him the truth after the war, kapeesh?

OCTOPI
Hail Honesty.

MAESTRO JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Hail Honesty.