

Othello
and
Zombies
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ACT I

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Rodriguez leaned on the metal door. Bloody hands slipped through the cracks, clawing and grasping at him, hungry for his flesh. "Yo, man! Give me a clip!"

Iago, leaning against the other entrance to the dank sewer room, yelled, "You used your clip ration already. These bullets are mine!"

As if to accentuate his point, Iago blasted the head of a flesh-eating scullion that poked its dripping maw through the ever-widening crack in the door.

"Are you really going to bring up rations now?" Rodriguez yelled while he pulled a box cutter from his belt and nicked a rotted pinky finger.

"Use your machete!" Two more head shots. Two more bodies.

"It got stuck in the skull of a scullion trying to eat my brain!"

"You always do this! Every time we go on patrol, you miss half your targets and have to use my ammunition. It's no wonder Othello doesn't relegate you to domestics because of your sorry track record."

"You're just jealous because he picked Casey as his second."

"Fuck you, man! I earned that. My scullion count is way higher than anyone else's! There's a pile of bodies in my wake a mile high, and here I am, about to die in a goddamn hole with you because you have a hard-on for the boss's wife!"

"Oh sweet Desdemona, I'd make her mona, if you know what I mean."

The momentary distraction was all it took. The scullions burst through Rodriguez's doorway. He flew back and hit his head against a low-hanging pipe and went down for the count.

Iago stumbled back from his door. He pulled another gun from his belt. The horde of scullions flooded into the room through both doors. He stretched out his arms on either side. The muzzles flashed as round after round tore through the air. The corpses piled up, but the pack surged forward.

A scullion with a jawline that was more bone than flesh went for Iago's arm. Another with hollow sockets for eyes went for his thigh. In the end, it wasn't Rodriguez's fault. The jerk never had a handle on reality. The man told everyone he was a tax accountant before the apocalypse, when in reality, he dressed up as the Statue of Liberty and waved signs around every tax season.

The person that Iago really blamed for his death was Othello, the self-proclaimed president of the new world order. The asshole had the audacity to walk around like he was Obama or something when he was nothing more than a jobless bum before the scullions came.

Iago should have been the one to inherit the earth. He won Survivor three times. He was in talks about his own show. He was slated to become the next fucking Bear Grylls, and Othello wanted to put *Casey* as the second in command of what could be the only pocket of humanity left on the planet! Casey was a manager at an In-N-Out Burger before the end, not the next Mad Max.

Maybe humans deserved to die, except for maybe today. Iago kicked the scullion going for his thigh and landed another headshot in the one going for his arm. He sent two rounds after the two that were going after Rodriguez's unconscious form. Once his clips ran dry, he pulled two swords from his back. It was a daishō set he had liberated from this asshole producer he used to tolerate for the sake of television.

The producer called the swords a "Kitana" and "Wakisauy" and would brag about how a real ninja used "those very blades to get revenge." The asshole told the story during every party at his house, and they partied at his house almost every week. Iago would roll his eyes at the inaccuracies and would keep his mouth shut because he knew how to play the Hollywood "everybody is your friend" game. When laws and Hollywood parties ceased to have meaning anymore, Iago spray-painted, "READ ABOUT SAMURAI, FUCKFACE" above the empty case of the swords. However, the chances of the producer being scullion food and unable to read Iago's snide comment were high.

In the time since, Iago had used the weapons to get himself out of many situations like today's. He sliced a scullion in the skull with his Katana. Another went for his back, and he stabbed it in the eye socket with the Wakizashi. He stabbed another, whirled around, killed two more, and chopped his way through the horde.

When the last one knelt in front of him, as he had hacked off its legs at the knees, he yelled, "Thou villainous pottle-deep devil-mon!"

With one swoop, the head rolled from the scullion to the other side of the room. Its teeth chattered, as Iago had left the brain intact. He turned to the pile of bodies near Rodriguez. He kicked the corpses off of him and noticed one was still alive, and gnawing on his fallen partner's right hand. Iago cursed and poked his sword through the back of the scullion's skull.

He ripped off Rodriguez's sleeve and created a tourniquet using a pen he kept in his pocket. While he was tightening the wrap, Rodriguez began to stir and looked down at his arm.

"What are you doing?" Rodriguez yelled.

"You've been bitten," Iago said. He positioned his blade over his comrade's arm and gripped it.

"There must be some other way. I can..."

The blade came down, and Rodriguez screamed. Iago used a portable propane torch to cauterize the wound, and his ill-fated companion passed out long before the job was finished. Finally, after Rodriguez was as stable as he could be, Iago laid on the ground for a few moments. They had been scavenging for days. Food stores in the camp were dwindling. Iago had nothing substantial to eat in a while. The adrenaline high that had kept him going receded. Iago's vision went dim, and he passed out.

The scullion head that Iago had decapitated fluttered his jaws in anticipation of the meal. The jawline could be seen through the rotting flesh. It swayed back and forth until it toppled face first onto the floor. It landed in such a way that every time involuntary muscles attempted to bite at the ground, the teeth caught and inched the head forward. The head slowly made its way towards the sleeping form of Iago. Tasty flesh sprawled out for the plucking.

It was a mere nose length away from its target, if it had any nose rather than the tattered flesh that remained of its olfactory organ. Just as it was about to bite down on the tasty flesh of the sleeping man, a peg leg came down on the scullion's skull and pierced its brain. The abomination died.

The owner of the unusually sharp peg leg was accompanied by another set of boots that were worn and tattered, as they were designed for day trips into the woods. It had been two years since the television stations stopped broadcasting, and the once shiny gear that gleamed on the shelves of sporting goods stores throughout the country was now worn and battle hardened.

"Ask them the questions," the owner of the boots said.

"I'm not going to ask your stupid questions," the peg leg man responded.

"I'm telling you. The questions offer insight into their character. They will let us know if they are worthy of joining our clan!"

"It's a township, not a clan!"

"Haven't you read any post-apocalyptic fiction? People revert to tribal..."

"If those questions are so important to you, why don't *you* ask them the goddamn questions?" The peg leg punched his partner, and his partner hit back. The two were quickly locked in a tussle.

Iago had been feigning sleep. The moment he heard the two scuffle, he sprang into action. With a flick of his wrist, his two blades were up in the crotches of the two gentlemen who had saved him while he slumbered.

The men froze in their tracks. From the torn clothes, the grime under their fingernails, and the scruff of their beards, Iago could tell these men had seen a lot of action. That gave him some hope because he knew that only an idiot would try to test Iago now. Not that he had expected to see any idiots. Most of them got themselves killed in the first few months after the scullions arrived.

"What questions? And what town?" Iago demanded. He was pretty sure Othello's kingdom was the only one left in Southern California. Othello had united the gangs pretty early. They were used to being shit on by society, so the scullion apocalypse wasn't anything different. When the National Guard, the LAPD, and the Army fell, Othello welcomed the survivors into his conclave too. Othello only had two rules: If you were human, you were in. If you harmed a human, you were scullion bait.

Iago thought it was stupid to let people in, but it had somehow worked for a while. People kept coming, pooling supplies, and helping each other. It took the scullion apocalypse to get the residents of L.A. County to help each other out, but they did. Othello built a wall around parts of Watts, Lynwood, Willowbrook, and Compton to keep the scullion bastards from feasting on their flesh, and life continued inside the wall as close as it could be to life before.

However, paradise never lasted forever.

Farming in an urban area with polluted chemicals from the leftover wasteland of the city, not to mention a fucking desert, proved harder to work with than originally thought. Crops failed. Yields were low. The food from the world long ago began to dwindle. The

rationing started. The scouts had to go further and further to find less and less. Iago knew it was a mistake to trust people when resources were scarce.

"The questions are sort of a personality test..." the man with the boots said. Iago didn't know what to make of them. However, unlike Othello, who just seemed to trust anyone that wasn't a scullion, Iago was a little more cautious. When Iago didn't cut off the man's genitals right away, he elaborated. "They are harmless questions. Meant to define your character."

"Oh, give me a break," the peg leg man said.

"Hold on, I got this," the boot man said. "Since it all started, how many walkers have you killed?"

"Walkers?" Iago said.

"Undead, eat-your-brain types. See your head and say, *Nom, nom, nom!*" He made fake biting gestures. Iago was about to just kill the fools and get it over with when the man with the boots added, "You know, every post-apocalyptic group has a different name for them. This group from Gallup, New Mexico called 'em biters, whereas we call 'em walkers."

"You mean the rampallian, fustilarian scullions! I've killed too many to count," Iago said. He let the swords drop, and the men visibly relaxed. He was interested now. His sister, Emilia, had been in Albuquerque when the apocalypse struck. He hadn't heard what happened to her, or to anyone in New Mexico, for that matter, and there was a lot of desert to cross between L.A. and Albuquerque.

"So how many humans have you killed?"

"You don't ask a person you've just met that!" the peg leg man cried. "Hi, how are you? My name's Tony. How many people have you killed?"

"It's all part of the process. Trust the process," the boot man replied.

"Eleven," Iago cut them off.

"Why?" the boot man said with all seriousness.

"Why what?" Iago said.

"Why'd you kill them?"

"The scullions or the humans? You're being a little vague."

"I told you they were stupid questions!" the man with the peg leg yelled.

"No, they ain't!" the boot man argued. "I'm telling you there is no better way to find out if they can come back with us to New Mexico."

The swords were swift. Before they were able to blink, their crotches were in peril again. "What's in New Mexico?"

"We have a base! A military base in Albuquerque!" the boot man cried.

Iago pressed the swords harder against their jeans.

"Look, we can take you there, but the Brigadier, he don't take kindly to strangers, especially ones who threaten his own," the peg leg man offered. "You'll need to surrender your weapons."

"So you can rob me?" Iago said as he pressed, literally and figuratively.

"Do you think we would waste time trying to rob two capable men like yourself? We are on an important mission from the Brigadier." The peg leg man said.

Swords biting denim, Iago said, "Who's the Brigadier?"

"He runs the base!" the man with the boots cried out. "Please don't hurt us! We'll tell you anything you want."

The man with the peg leg slapped his partner. "That man is on a need-to-know basis, and he does not need to know."

"I'm also the one with the sword," Iago said. And with a swish of his blade, the man with the peg leg collapsed to the ground in fear, blood, and pain. He was now missing much more than a peg could fix. "Now, if you don't want to end up like your friend here, I suggest you tell me everything."

Sometime later in the day, Iago slung the wounded Rodriguez over his shoulder. He walked to the top of an overpass. There were a few abandoned vehicles here and there. A few even had rotted scullions inside twitching and gnawing at the windows as they passed. The day was hot, and the sun was blazing overhead. Iago wouldn't last long, but he had to see it for himself.

He crested the overpass and left Rodriguez leaning against a burned-out European sports car. He walked to the edge and gazed at the freeway below. The freeway was surprisingly clear for a very long stretch of road. Most of the roads were pock-marked and cluttered with vehicles. This freeway, in particular, was just clear enough to act as a runway for a plane.

The plane in question was a large military C-130 transport. It was big enough to hold an army, yet the only two people using it were peg leg and boots. They were given the mission to

find survivors and bring them back to Albuquerque. To Iago, it was freedom. He even knew how to fly a plane. Iago had never flown a C-130, though he figured that the principles were the same. He also knew of a library where he could dig around for some manuals on the way back. It couldn't hurt to do some prep work.

He pulled some bloody keys from his pocket. They were the keys to the plane. He inspected them and grinned to himself. He pocketed the keys and walked back towards Rodriguez.

"Don't worry, buddy," he said as he picked up his friend. "We are getting out of this urban hellhole, but first, we need to make a stop at home and get you patched up. Don't worry; we'll be back. There is no use in letting a perfectly good plane go to waste."

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Rodriguez dreamt of bacon, a large hot skillet of bacon, sizzling, nice and crispy, and ready to be eaten. His mouth watered and his stomach grumbled. He could almost smell the salty goodness. However, there was a pain in his arm. It burned. Flesh seared from his bones. He woke with a yowl.

A man with a blowtorch and welding mask bent over his arm. The sparks of the torch sprayed in every direction, burning his flesh, and singeing the hair on his arm. He tried to yank his arm away, but he was strapped down. A metal rod prevented him from biting his tongue.

Rodriguez looked in horror at his arm. Attached midway onto his forearm was a machete. The man in the welding mask was attaching a weapon to where a hand should have been. Rodriguez's memory came slowly back to him. They were on patrol. They were in a mall. The scullions broke inside. Half the crew died. The other half scattered. There were sewer entrances in the basement. Iago, Rodriguez, and a third person, a first officer, sailor, he couldn't be sure.

They hopped into the basement. The sailor was overrun. They barely made it into a room that would be their metal tomb. Scullions clawed at the doorways. He couldn't hold it any longer. The rabble swarmed through the entrance. Then... he couldn't remember... he was bitten. Iago cut off his right hand at the mid-forearm.

Iago's face appeared over Rodriguez, upside down from his point of view. A wide grin contrasted with Rodriguez's worried frown as his strapped-down body squirmed in pain and fear. Iago leaned closer. "You did it, my friend! You are the man of the hour."

Sweat poured from Rodriguez's face. His eyes contorted in agony and terror.

"If you hadn't so kindly gotten yourself bitten, we may have never met the cronies of one Brigadier General Brabantio of the United States Air Force, stationed in... care to guess?"

Rodriguez wanted it to stop. Muffled screams were all that would come out.

"That's right! Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico! Apparently, there is still some semblance of civilized society left. And what's even better is that, after some persuasion, and some missing body parts, I learned about their secret mission."

Tears streamed down Rodriguez's face. He wanted the man to stop. He didn't need a sword arm! If only Iago knew what he was thinking...

"Oh, don't cry. Don't cry. It's really good news. They are here to find the Brigadier's daughter, who just happened to be doing her tour as Miss California when the apocalypse struck."

Rodriguez wanted to die.

"What's that? Oh yes, quite right. Des happens to be Miss California! Desdemona doesn't just turn the heads of men like you. She's a sort of Helen of Troy. She's the kind of daughter one Brigadier would mobilize armies to get back. People fight wars for her.

"We just have to get to Albuquerque first. Tell the Brigadier about Othello's true character. Hell, you may even win her heart in the process. I heard she digs guys with big swords. Looks like you got a big one too. Though I suggest you use your left hand when you make love to her."

Rodriguez almost choked on his own tears. Iago's head lowered out of view, and when he poked back into Rodriguez's field of vision, the merciless man's grin was gone. "By the way," Iago added. "I say this as a friend. Don't ever use a sexual pun on a woman's name again. You'll never sleep with her that way."

The nameless welder continued to meld metal and flesh. The blade was glowing orange. Rodriguez would never forget his blade again.

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