

HOT MONEY

A Zoological Quest for Immortality in the Madagascar Vanilla Boom

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CHARACTERS

The Humans

SMASH – a zoologist and professor; aging into their 70s. They/them.

The MANGOMAN – a produce clerk; a former deforester; middle-aged. He/him.

DOC – a hot young neurosurgeon. Super butch. They/she. Doubled with rest of *The Humans*:

The Villager, The Baker, The Banker, The Farmer, and The Forester.

The Chameleons

CAMO CHAMELEON – doubled with SMASH; the Chameleon elder.

The ALCHAMELEONIST – doubled with MANGOMAN; an alchemist chameleon.

CHAMELEONS ELSE – all other chameleons, played by all actors.

A menagerie of animals, including...

ROC – doubled with DOC; an extinct Malagasy Crowned Eagle.

And...

EDMOND ALBIUS – doubled with MANGOMAN; 12-year-old horticulturist; a slave.

SETTING

A produce aisle.

A rainforest in Madagascar.

A surgical operating theater.

And some places in between.

The time is... fluctuating.

NOTES

The three performers are to be Trans and Gender Non-Conforming.

Madagascar is primarily inhabited by the Malagasy people, a mixed-race ethnic group with ancestry in Africa and Southeast Asia (there are also established populations of Indian, Arab, and Somali people on the island). Your casting of the actor playing Doc and Mangoman *must* reflect this.

Though there is a sizeable French/European population on the island, be conscious of all the auxiliary human characters Doc performs. Smash's race/ethnicity/nationality is open – however...

NOTES continued...

Please consider how differences in gender, race, and ability among the cast may impact individual characters, relationship dynamics, and the overall narrative. I'm interested in diverse and inclusive hiring practices in both casting and overall production.

The world of the play is unwieldy and at times temporally and spatially unstable, and you should latch onto whatever parts of the play give you solid footing in this fantastical place. I hope you'll think expansively about the entities, events, and environments in the play, and empower you to explore puppetry, masks, projections, shadow play, or other imaginative and innovative visual approaches to direction and design. I think Roc is manifest in costume, and that the chameleons *should* be puppets, but how they (and all the flora and fauna of the rainforest) manifest in material, scope, and scale – and their ultimate combinations and animation – is up to you. I'm fond of fruit.

Please deeply consider the dramaturgy of staging the humans as puppets or avatars, if you choose to do so, before you do so - especially Edmond Albius. What does it mean if humans aren't humans?

The *Thwacks* and *Cracks* which interrupt and punctuate the scenes which take place in The Produce Aisle should be primarily aural, perhaps supported by visual elements/effects with lighting.

Edmond's song toward the end of Act One is from the text of Rudyard Kipling's poem *The Bee-Boy's Song*, which is in the Public Domain (and you will have to make up your own tune for it).

Smash's Song in Act Two is adapted from Ovid's poem *Fasti* (The Book of Days). You'll have to score this as well.

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SYNOPSIS & SCENE LIST

With the help of Mangoman, a strange produce clerk whose wares only smell and taste of vanilla, Smash, a zoologist, searches the depths of the rainforest for the Malagasy Crowned Eagle. Supposedly extinct for over five hundred years, Smash believes one still lives and that this mythical and immortal bird may hold the secret to living forever. Elsewhere in the rainforest, the wild vanilla orchids--which an endangered species of chameleons relies upon for sustenance--have transformed into dollar bills. Doc, a neurosurgeon, examines the perspectives of the many people whose lives are impacted by the rise and fall of the price of vanilla across the globe, while Smash and the Mangoman embark on an epic romp through the life spans of various animals and find out what it means to truly live.

ACT 1

1. PROLOGUE
2. ENTER THE ANIMAL (PRODUCE AISLE)
3. ENTER THE DOCTOR
4. ENTER THE CHAMELEON
5. RETURN THE PRODUCE AISLE (KING MIDAS)
6. THE MONEY TREE
7. THE VILLAGER
8. NOTES FOR CAMOUFLAGE / ENTER THE ALCHAMELEONIST
9. RETURN THE DOCTOR
10. RETURN THE PRODUCE AISLE / CONSIDER THE TORTOISE
11. THE FARMER
12. THE PRODUCE AISLE / CONSIDER THE GOLDFISH
13. ENTER THE EAGLE
14. SMASH VIGNETTE (JANUS 1)
15. THE BANKER
16. SMASH VIGNETTE (JANUS 2) / ENTER EDMOND ALBIUS
17. ACT FINALE: CONSIDER THE DEER/BRAIN SURGERY

ACT 2

1. CONSIDER THE BLACK WIDOW SPIDER (TIME IS A TRAP)
2. I AM THE DOCTOR
3. THE ALCHAMELEONIST EXPERIMENTS (1)
4. CONSIDER THE BEDBUG / PRODUCE AISLE
5. THE BAKER
6. RAINFOREST PAST (JANUS 3)
7. ALCHAMELEONIST EXPERIMENTS (2)
8. THE FORESTER
9. CONSIDER THE MAYFLY / PRODUCE AISLE
10. THE IMMORTALITREE
11. (FINALE): CONSIDER THE JELLYFISH

PROLOGUE

*Nothing.
As much nothing as possible.*

*Except for:
A thwack of a thick blade against ancient wood.
And again.
 And again.
 And again and again and again.*

And then...

*Light.
A golden chair at a golden table.
On it, a golden bowl of golden fruit.*

SMASH V/O

The concept of an animal's lifespan is simple enough.

Enter the MANGOMAN.

He carries a golden axe in gloved hands.

SMASH V/O

But a "lifespan" is often confused
with other common concepts
in the aging
life,
and death
of living organisms.

*He approaches the table.
He is tired.
He drops the golden axe.*

SMASH V/O

Life span refers to
the maximum number of years
an animal *can* live.

Life expectancy
is the average amount of time
an animal can *hope* to live.

MANGOMAN pulls out the golden chair.

SMASH V/O

The current maximum accepted lifespan
of a human animal
is around 122 years.

MANGOMAN sits in the golden chair.

In America,
the average life expectancy
of a human animal
is 77.48 years.

*MANGOMAN considers the fruit.
He tosses piece after piece of golden fruit
onto the ground at the drop of each word.*

SMASH V/O

Life *expectancy*
Can be attributed to
Health,
history,
genetics,
lifestyle,
circumstance
and luck –

Whereas
A life *span*
is one and the same
for all animals of a species.

SMASH V/O

77.48?
Or 122.

*MANGOMAN picks up the last piece of fruit.
It is not gold.*

SMASH V/O

If you were
A human animal -
What would you do with 44.52 years
that you didn't expect to live?

*MANGOMAN puts down the fruit.
He takes off his gloves.*

SMASH V/O

That's more than another half of your life.

*MANGOMAN picks up the fruit.
It is not gold.*

SMASH V/O

What would you do with yourself?

MANGOMAN considers the fruit.

SMASH V/O

I mean, what would you *do* with yourself,
If you could live even longer than that?
If you could live forever?

*MANGOMAN takes a bite of the fruit.
He tastes it.
He weeps.*

SMASH V/O

What are you doing now?

CRACK.

Darkness, stillness.

And nothing.

Until...

SCENE: ENTER THE ANIMAL

*A compressor clicks on; a mechanical whirr.
Freon.
Neon.*

*A sign flickers.
Its backwards. It faces the world.
It says, "CLOSED."*

*Another click-whirr – and then mist.
It almost sounds like... a rainforest.
Dim lights flicker in the wet air.*

*Several small, refrigerated produce cases with the covers drawn.
And an island of fruit and vegetables
spilling out over the ground.
The mist stops.
The compressor clicks off.
Quiet.*

*It clicks on again.
The neon still flickers.
The MANGOMAN appears in the produce aisle.
He presses his face against the glass.
It's cold.
He closes his eyes.*

*MANGOMAN rubs his eyes –
But he quickly jerks his hands away.
He looks at them.
And back at his face in the glass.
The mist clicks on.*

*MANGOMAN puts on a pair of gloves.
Then he puts on an apron and opens a thermos.
He drinks.
The mist clicks on.*

*SMASH appears in the door as the neon sign flickers.
They see the MANGOMAN.
They knock on the door.*

*MANGOMAN doesn't notice,
Or, tries not to notice.
He is turning over blackberries one by one,*

checking for mold and imperfections.

SMASH knocks on the door again.

SMASH

Hello?

MANGOMAN

We're closed.

SMASH

Hello?

Sorry are you open?

MANGOMAN

We're closed

He points to the neon sign.

SMASH

Well, when do you open?

MANGOMAN

We don't open.

SMASH

What?

*The MANGOMAN doesn't look up from his work.
Smash knocks.*

Hello?

*And they knock.
Nothing.
Again and again –
Nothing.*

SMASH gives up and disappears into the night.

*MANGOMAN looks up from his blackberries –
he walks over to the door and presses his face against the glass.
He looks left,
he looks right –
he looks out into the night.
The loud sound again. A crack, or a thwack.
The MANGOMAN is thrown on his back.*

*He drops blackberries all over the ground.
The sign facing the world flickers – “OPEN”.
The doors open.
SMASH enters.*

SMASH

You *are* open.

MANGOMAN recovers himself.

SMASH

Look.

*MANGOMAN looks up at the sign.
He’s not quite sure what to do about it.
He starts picking up blackberries.*

MANGOMAN

I can’t help you.

SMASH

What makes you think I need help?

MANGOMAN points at their head.

MANGOMAN

You’re bleeding.

SMASH

What? Oh.

They try to wipe their forehead.

SMASH

I’m sorry.
Is there somewhere I can –

MANGOMAN stares at them blankly.

Is there anyone else here?

MANGOMAN hands them a rag.

SMASH

I thought you wouldn’t help me.

MANGOMAN

I don't want blood on the fruit.

SMASH

I'm sorry –

MANGOMAN

There's no one else here.

SMASH

Right now, you mean.

There's no one else here right now.

MANGOMAN

There's never been anyone else

Well, until you got here.

SMASH

Until –

MANGOMAN

Just now.

SMASH

...What do you do here?

MANGOMAN

I tend to the fruit.

What do you do?

SMASH

I teach. And research.

In the rainforest, and –

MANGOMAN offers SMASH a handful of blackberries.

MANGOMAN

Would you like to try some?

Fruit.

SMASH

Do you know the way back to the rainforest?

MANGOMAN

I'm just a produce clerk.

Try some.

SMASH hesitates.

A flicker.
A click
A whirr.
The mist pours out into the room.

SMASH

Okay.

They take a berry and slowly place it in their mouth.

MANGOMAN

Taste's good, right?

SMASH

What is it -
What is this supposed to taste like?

MANGOMAN

It tastes like –
It tastes like –
At first it feels cold on your tongue.
Like a dark deep ink from a frozen pool.
It's soft and succulent.
You can feel its juicy on the inside
from the way
the skin springs back
against your teeth.
It's sweet – slightly tart –
You can taste the earth.
You can taste the hollow of its core.
You can taste the bramble leaf,
the fast pulse of a sun ray –
You taste rain.
You can taste the rain.

SMASH

It's just a blackberry, right?

MANGOMAN

Just a blackberry –
...
Yes.
Just a blackberry.

SMASH

You can taste the rain?

MANGOMAN

Yes.

SMASH

Oh.

...Oh.

MANGOMAN

Why, what does it taste like to you?

SMASH

It doesn't
taste like anything.

MANGOMAN

Surely it tastes like something.

SMASH

It tastes like –
It tastes like...

Vanilla.

*MANGOMAN bristles at the mention of vanilla.
The neon sign flickers, between "OPEN" to "CLOSED"
The doors shut. The mist begins to fill the room.*

MANGOMAN

Vanilla?

*Smash finds a key on the ground.
They hold up the key.*

SMASH

...
There's no one else here?

SCENE: THE VILLAGER

*The Operating Theater.
DOC opens their surgical bag.
From the bag they pull a woven hat and a lamba.
DOC considers the objects.
They present them to us.*

DOC

The villager.

*DOC puts on the hat and wraps themselves in the lamba.
DOC becomes the villager.
The Operating Theater becomes the village.*

Our village is 10 miles from the main road –
Where there are banks, schools, police –
The village had none of these.
To get here it's an hour of dirt and dust on the back of a rusty motorbike.
Only the main roads are paved –
The road to our village is a dirt trail carved deeply into the red earth –
You ford rivers and teeter over buckling plank bridges.
And then you get here.

What do you find?

There is poverty.
There is hunger.
There is nothing to do.

There is nothing –
Before the boom.

And then –
Foreign Flavor starts to take an interest
in the vanilla villages.
Building schools and hospitals –
Not to support us, but to ensure a steady stream of good Vanilla by going straight to the source.

You got bananas?
No money.
Growing rice?
Not a cent.
These crops, they don't change lives.

But Vanilla –
 Vanilla makes you rich.
 Richer than you could ever imagine.
 Fresh yellow taxis line up at the gas station in town
 Waiting to rush you off anywhere you want to go
 The shops all have icebox hooked up to a solar panel –
 Now not only can you buy a beer – a cold beer!
 You can choose where to buy it from.

In the boom there is everything.
 You might even say there is too much.

My old neighbor has a slick new motorbike –
 He doesn't even know how to ride!
 A mean man in the market trips you with his fancy new shoes
 As he saunters the street with a suitcase full of cash.

You see, there's no bank in the bush for this money.
 There's no place to save.
 No place to invest.
 Only spend.
 Otherwise, the money is hidden in your home -
 stuffed into mattresses:
 Paper gold into straw.

DOC speaks to us.

Hot Money.
 Burning through your pocket.
 And the thieves come for it all.

And again they are the villager.

Abundance is asking for trouble.
 There is always a price to pay.
 Burglaries and break-ins happen everyday.
 Thieves will take whatever they can get their hands on –
 an entire crop,
 or a few vines,
 even a fistful of beans
 can make for a lifetime of riches.

Farmers sleep in their fields to protect what is theirs.
 Sometimes this works – sometimes not.
 And when someone's livelihood is stolen from them –
 They are liable to do anything.

**SCENE: NOTES FOR CAMOUFLAGE / ENTER THE
ALCHAMELEONIST**

One chameleon emerges from the group.

A chameleon elder –

The Camo Chameleon.

They slowly climb

They lift a tome woven from the old skins of vanilla beans –

A sermon.

Another chameleon breaks away and does not join in.

CAMO CHAMELEON

For all that can be seen and known -
I have no yearning to be among them.

For we who are unseen
Are not like those illusionists
who make themselves disappear
From what was once a clear field of vision

We who are unknown
vanish through different means.
And as we are safe
from the predations of the rainforest
We are seen and known to only one other

And that is enough.

CHAMELEONS ELSE

And that is enough!

CAMO CHAMELEON

The words of our elders
have a special place in my heart.
They have been with me day by day
for twenty years
These instructions for Vanishing –
These notes for Camouflage –
Are instinct.
Given without comment,
Save the comment of the very lives
of our elder chameleons
and those before them.
Our instincts are their legacy.

CHAMELEONS ELSE

Shadow!

CAMO CHAMELEON

We do not absorb the light –
When exposed we appear natural -
Perhaps only a silhouette.
Our skin pulses the entire spectrum of colors
Preventing our detection.

CHAMELEONS ELSE

Space!

CAMO CHAMELEON

We move cautiously through the rainforest in segments
Progressing in sequence with air between us
We loom among the landscape in perfect symmetry.
Stealthily we move in silence
We stalk with stillness
We shift swiftly with speed in our stride.

CHAMELEONS

Surface!

CAMO CHAMELEON

We obscure our shape and size
We conceal our distinct characteristics –

CHAMELEONS ELSE

Surroundings!

CAMO CHAMELEON

The seasons –
The scenery –
All things in our environs
either help or hinder
the Camouflage.

CHAMELEONS ELSE

Status Quo!

CAMO CHAMELEON

We must maintain with secrecy
certain conditions
so that everything appears
unaltered

Untouched
Indistinguishable
by and from everything else.
With the strength of the Camouflauge
we remain secure in all scenarios.

We change -

CHAMELEONS ELSE

We change -

CAMO CHAMELEON

So that we may remain
Unchanged.
Unseen.
Unknown.

We are seen and known to only each other

CHAMELEONS ELSE

And that is enough!

CAMO CHAMELEON

And that is enough.

THE ALCHAMELEONIST

Is it enough?

*Silence among the chameleons.
The chameleon who sat separately from the others during the
sermon comes forward.*

CAMO CHAMELEON

Is it enough for what, my friend.

THE ALCHAMELEONIST

Our way of life –
Is it enough to face change we cannot control?

CAMO CHAMELEON

There is no change we cannot control.
In the will of the Camouflage, we are safe.

THE ALCHAMELEONIST

The tree is changed.
Our siblings fall sick by the dozen.

CAMO CHAMELEON

No change in our world can confound us,
 if we follow the path of our elders.
 Before the vanilla we survived on insects.
 Before the insects we ate birds, lizards –
 We always adapt.
 Slowly, surely, adapt.
 This is just another change in the chain link of our kind.
 No obstacles can overwhelm us.
 No opposition can overcome.
 In the will of the Camouflage, we prevail.

THE ALCHAMELEONIST

Camo Chameleon –
 The instincts of the elders teach us to change –
 But the way we change is...
 Superficial.
 It doesn't ensure our survival
 if our sustenance has been altered on a –
 On a sub-material level.

CAMO CHAMELEON

If you ignore the instincts
 passed down from our elders –
 The Camouflage becomes weak
 And it compromises the integrity of the whole.

THE ALCHAMELEONIST

But Camo Chameleon –

CAMO CHAMELEON
(to the chameleons else)

Our kind will find a way to live
 in the eternal unknown.
 Use your sight.
 Use your smell.
 Use your spirit –
 And you will Vanish from the world.

Exit CHAMELEONS ELSE.

THE ALCHAMELEONIST

What you're talking about is superficial change.
 I'm talking about actual change –
 a change from the core, from the center, beyond the center –
 Real change.

CAMO CHAMELEON

This is *real change*.

This change is what has protected our kind for thousands of years –
It's allowed us to stay alive
It makes us who we are
We evolved to be this way –
We will adapt
We will overcome
We will continue to evolve
We must watch
And wait

THE ALCHAMELEONIST

What if there was another way.

CAMO CHAMELEON

There is no other way.
Through the Camouflage
Our kind will find a way to live
in the eternal unknown.

Imagine our body
can be maintained through the Camouflage.
Can be maintained through infinity.

THE ALCHAMELEONIST

Through infinity?

CAMO CHAMELEON

Not dying
By any natural causes
Or by any unnatural causes.

THE ALCHAMELEONIST

Is infinity the tool or the goal?

CAMO CHAMELEON

Disease.
Famine.
Predation.
Not dying by anything.
Only finding an end.
Only finding an end if you choose it.

THE ALCHAMELEONIST

So, theoretically –