

TENTACLES: A LIMITED SERIES

Ecocritical screenwriting as entertainment education.

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A minor dissertation submitted in *partial fulfillment* of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master in Film and Television Studies: Screenwriting

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
Project Overview	3
Screenplay Overview	5
Screenplay: Tentacles - Episode 1	6
Screenplay: Tentacles - Episode 2	59
CFM Plagiarism Declaration	112
Essay: Ecocritical Screenwriting as Entertainment Education	113
Bibliography	135
Filmography	140
Appendix A: Tentacles Series Synopsis	144

NOTE:

Page numbers for navigation of this dissertation are recorded on the bottom right of each page.

Additional page numbers on the screenplays are included at the top right of the applicable pages as per standard screenwriting conventions.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Considering the unanimous scientific consensus regarding the detrimental impact of human activities on ecosystems, biodiversity, and atmospheric composition it is notable that helpful pro-environmental narratives, the framing of environmental action as anything other than sacrifice, and positive/aspirational representations of environmental activists in fiction are virtually absent from mainstream entertainment television and film.

In response, I wrote *Tentacles*, a multi-modal limited series screen story set in Cape Town, South Africa, that merges environmental realism with imaginative science fiction, action, and comedy into a blended genre that transcends current cli-fi (climate fiction) offerings. *Tentacles* tells the story of Aiden, a teenage environmentalist and son of a Kalk Bay fishermen, whose body is hijacked by a pre-historic sentient cephalopod named Bob. Fused into one being, the pair must negotiate their differences to survive South African poachers, Chinese Triads fuelling the fisheries black market, and... high school.

This limited series screen story aims to demonstrate that popular entertainment television narratives can be designed to transfer factual and educational information pertaining to the environment. Furthermore, entertainment can be an effective vehicle to paint the socio-economic landscape affecting the environment and present positive actions and behaviours that may improve our relationship with the environment. The goal of such a narrative in the mass media space is to spread awareness and to provide a mediated node for open public discussion.

To construct the narrative, I inverted the conceptualisation process by approaching the story not from the point of character and plot, but from the core thematic element: the environment. Based on the intended educational, entertainment, and environmental outcomes, construction of the narrative thus required an ecocritical approach. While ecocriticism is a useful analytical tool in academia, it also proved to be a valuable guiding instrument to identify poignant current and historical materials to inform my creative process, identify rich settings, and shape the perspectives of the characters. By framing the educational and environmental outcomes in the conventions of pure entertainment, the message may reach a mass audience that has thus far been underexposed to responsible environmental messaging in primetime entertainment.

I found that research into persuasive strategies to overcome resistance to educational messages in entertainment helped to create characters and plot events that may facilitate identification and empathy

among the audience. While academics rightly question the power of ecocinema, as a field of study, to have any measurable positive impact on the environment, I found that the holistic perspectives demanded by ecocriticism led to deeper research and richer possibilities for my story.

The implications are that productions informed by both approaches—ecocritical and entertainment education—may be effective tools to shape public opinion, as has been seen in political primetime television series. The entertainment value and talk-ability of such a production may help to stimulate discourse. By providing a rich canvas for ecocritical exploration, the audience may better understand, process, and address the numerous interconnected issues affecting the environment and their communities.

SCREENPLAY OVERVIEW:

Working Title:

Tentacles

Episode 1: Phone Home

Episode 2: Entangled

Genre:

Blended: Science Fiction, Comedy, Action, Adventure, Superhero Fiction, Multi-modal Animation

Format:

Limited Series / Television Series

52 minutes per episode, 8 to 10 episodes per season

Target Audience

Teenagers and Young Adults, 16+

Written by:

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Logline:

The son of an alcoholic Kalk Bay fisherman battles teen angst, poachers, and murderous Chinese Triads when a prehistoric sentient cephalopod turns him into a crime-fighting calamari.

TENTACLES

EPISODE 1 - PHONE HOME

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EXT. OUTER SPACE - DAY

Distant galaxies collide in a dance of destruction and creation. From somewhere out there the electric hiss and hum of an alien radio signal shoots towards Earth. Like a 90's dial-up modem on crack we follow the signal through psychedelic nebula, past black holes, careening through the spiral arms of the Milky Way, into our solar system, past Neptune, Jupiter, Mars, the Moon...

Until it hits the

TITLE: Big Ear Radio Telescope, Ohio State University, 1977

INT. OBSERVATORY - DAY

We follow the signal from the dish, through thick cables, into a massive mainframe--high-tech for the 70's. The signal spools onto reels of magnetic tape before more cables carry it to the whirring screech of a dot-matrix printer.

As the page sputters out, a red pen circles a series of numbers and letters on the printout. A SETI researcher scribbles "WOW!", tears the page from the printer, and runs down the hall.

EXT. SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN - DAY

The bow of an aircraft carrier cuts through the water.

TITLE: South Pacific

On deck a SOLDIER yells at his shipmates about something in the depths.

A submarine? No. It's too big. A colossal dark shadow overtakes the carrier with ease before breaking the surface.

The carrier lurches as dumbstruck SOLDIERS with gaping jaws gaze up-up-up.

A gigantic LIQUID UFO rises into the air, like an aquarium trapped in a forcefield. It sounds eerily like the perpetual roll of waves you hear when you put a shell to your ear.

Visible through the translucent hull are entire coral reefs, manta rays, whales, sharks, schools of fish, all manner of ocean life swimming free.

Faint gurgles and pops that smack of desperation draw our attention to the nose of the craft.

A bioluminescent cephalopod, BOB, clings to the surface for dear life. From his vacillating hues, we can see he is in some distress.

Pressing a DULL 20CM PEARL against the translucent liquid surface, he begs not to be left behind. A series of gurgles and pops translates to English.

BOB

...But I got one back. Have some hearts!

Inside the craft two more of his kind, with a PAIR OF IRIDESCENT PEARLS, stare blankly at the desperate pleas.

On the horizon a NUCLEAR MUSHROOM CLOUD balloons from the ocean. The shockwave ripples through water and air. It hits BOB with a gust. Tentacles blow in the wind. Moments later dead fish float to the surface.

CEPHALOPOD 1 looks at Bob with the most disapproving countenance an octopus can muster. Its colours and textures change suddenly to something dark and spikey. Bob emits a nervous giggle. Beat.

CEPHALOPOD 1

Eat a dick, Bob.

The speaker strokes one shimmering ball and the UFO shoots up. Bob flaps in the wind like a slimy, wet rag caught in the boot of a souped up VW. His SUCKERS POP LOOSE one by one.

CEPHALOPOD 2

You break it, you bought it, asshole.

POP. The last sucker on Bob's last tentacle pops loose. He plunges back towards the clouds like a slippery Hans Gruber.

BOB

Don't leave meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee...

A tiny dot that is Bob drops away from the craft. Earth curves against the dark expanse of space. Many more arks leave the atmosphere. In orbit they are merging into a vast interstellar ship--an ocean in the sky.

Bob, however, plummets to the Pacific far below, abandoned, alone.

BOB (CONT'D)

...eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

Moments before Bob hits the water, we see thousands of dead fish floating on the surface...

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. KALK BAY HARBOUR - DUSK

A limp human body is plunged into the water. Suddenly, it awakes as a drunk, swearing fisherman, FELIX. He gasps for air.

AIDEN (O.S.)
Mom says dinner's ready.

AIDEN, a grinning 17-year-old leans on the gunwale of a colourful fishing boat in the Kalk Bay harbour.

FELIX
(slurring)
My fok, man. As ek my hande op jou kry!--

AIDEN
Ja, whatever. Kom ons kyk of jy my kan vang voor jou lewer by jou gat uitval.

Aiden kicks at empty bottles rolling around on the deck.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
How about I tell mom there were only two of these, I return them for the deposit, and we call it quits.

Felix spits out water, grabs a plastic bottle floating in the polluted harbour and tosses it at Aiden.

FELIX
Here's another one, you little shit.

Aiden ducks with a laugh. An ALARM for "DO HOMEWORK" goes off on his phone. He checks the time. The screen is badly cracked. He sighs and slips the phone into his back pocket.

AIDEN
Come on.

Hanging over the gunwale, Aiden grabs his father with both hands and expertly drags him onto the fisher's boat.

EXT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS - DUSK

Arm over Aiden's shoulder, Felix stumbles back home. The fishermen's flats near the Kalk Bay harbour aren't exactly ruins, but they need maintenance.

FELIX

We were never suppose to end up
back here. Remember when we still
had the fish factory?

KARLA, a coloured woman in her late sixties, smokes on the low stone wall by the steps to one of the blocks. She glares daggers at Felix as they pass. Speaks only to Aiden.

KARLA

Well, I see you caught at least one
rotten snoek, today, huh? Our
fortunes must be turning.

FELIX

Fokof, Karla.

KARLA

(to Aiden)

What did you use as bait? 'n
Brannewyn drol?

AIDEN

Night, Auntie Karla.

KARLA

You know what they say. You are
what you eat.

They leave Karla to her cigarette. The coal glows red hot.

INT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

FELIX snores in an armchair, mouth open and head lolling. He wears a well-worn pink bathrobe. A plate of food on his lap.

Aiden is hunched at a small linoleum kitchen table eating while doing homework.

His eternally optimistic mom, LETTIE, is in her safe place: food, couch, TV. It's Carte Blanche.

ON TV: we see images of brutal shark-finning, drowned whales and dolphins caught in trawler nets.

ANCHOR (V.O.)

It is estimated that there are currently over 500 illegal Chinese fishing vessels stripping South Africa's waters. With organised crime links in Hong Kong, mainland China and Cape Town, these poachers are part of a parallel black market economy that far eclipses the commercial fishing industry in South Africa.

Aiden's cracked phone rocks on a disconcerting bulge where the battery is supposed to be. Tap, tap, tap. He searches "Are Pufferfish die-offs in False Bay linked to sewage spills?". He manoeuvres the text into the most readable part between the cracks. Sighs. Aiden heads to his room.

INT. AIDEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

The room is meticulous. Everything has its place. Colourful posters on the wall for Xtinction Rebellion and environmental campaigns are neatly lined up. If not obsessive, this is the room of a perfectionist with a cause. A large coral aquarium dominates a sturdy, alphabetised bookrack.

Looking through the tank, we see Aiden enter. He removes a biology textbook from the bookrack and stares into the tank for a moment.

ANCHOR (O.S.)

In the case of abalone, 2000 tonnes are looted from the South African coast annually, while government quotas amount to only 300 tonnes, making the illegal abalone industry 7 times larger.

He wipes a fingerprint off the glass.

INT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

At the kitchen table, Aiden is already paging through the book when he drops back onto the chair. Frustrated. Some pages are missing, and others show the tell-tale torn angles of joint roaches.

POACHER 1 (O.S.)

What are we supposed to do? I have a family to feed. My children need to go to school.

ON TV: a heavily tattooed, sun-wrinkled man prepares a scuba tank in front of a run-down caravan.

POACHER 1 (CONT'D)

They are going to keep taking abalone until it's all gone. So either I get in or I miss the boat.

INTERVIEWER

And the law?

Felix chokes on spittle. Snores himself awake and sneers at the abalone story on TV.

POACHER 1 (O.S.)

I have been to prison. Twice, now. But it's good money. Very good. And I am not hurting any people, right?

FELIX

Fok jou, Johnny.

Passes out again. Lettie looks from Felix to Aiden to see him shake his head, disgusted.

LETTIE

It will be better when the fishing permits are finally allocated.

AIDEN

And what is that permit going to say, Mom? 300kg, six months, and good luck feeding the family?

(beat)

Besides, there's hardly anything left out there.

An ALARM beeps on Aiden's phone. "GO TO WORK"

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Okay. I'm off to earn the aggressively mediocre bucks.

He gets up.

LETTIE

Aiden... It will be okay. The ocean will provide.

AIDEN

(sigh)

Tell that to uncle Johnny. IF he's ever out of Pollsmoor long enough to visit.

Aiden kisses his mom lovingly on the head and leaves.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

At a large double sink by the backdoor of a bustling restaurant kitchen, Aiden scrubs dishes. ANTHONY, the cocaine-cocky manager, yells across the kitchen.

ANTHONY
Aiden! Glasses. Now!

Aiden drains the dirty water from one sink. Opens the tap in the other and fills it with soap and a layer of pint glasses. A head pops through the back door. It's KLIPPIES, a smooth operator with too many faded tattoos.

KLIPPIES
Anthony around?

AIDEN
Yup.

KLIPPIES
Fred?

AIDEN
Nope.

KLIPPIES
Tell him I have his usual.

AIDEN
Do your own favours, Klippies.

KLIPPIES
Oh, you know, they don't want our types on that side. Where can I put it?

Aiden sighs, looks around the kitchen.

AIDEN
Alive?

KLIPPIES
Ja. On ice since this morning. Promise.

AIDEN
They need to go into the tank. Wait outside.

KLIPPIES

I hear your dad's boat is just banging a hole in the harbour wall these days. I wouldn't mind helping you get it back to work.

AIDEN

Yeah. I am sure my uncle will be more than happy to captain it, you asshole.

KLIPPIES

Hey, man. Johnny Klein Skippie did what he did. I'm just sayin', abalone is good money. And all you have to do is pick a couple of wetsuits out of the water. Think about it.

Klippies slips away. Aiden stares into the foamy water. As he SLAPS the tap shut...

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE LAB - DAY

Black screen. Muffled speech fades to clarity.

MRS MILLS (V.O.)

...making this the 5th year in a row that thousands of *Blaasoppies* have washed up on the beaches of False bay. And...

BANG! A palm slaps Aiden's desk. He startles awake. Wipes a tendril of drool from his cheek.

MRS MILLS

WHAT! Mister Florez, is the problem with a beach full of dead pufferfish?

LISA, Aiden's secret crush, smiles endearingly from a nearby desk. He sheepishly shuffles upright.

AIDEN

It's, uh, rotting fish?

MRS MILLS

Well, yes, and...?

RRRRRRING. Saved by the school bell.

MRS MILLS (CONT'D)
 HOMEWORK! What ecological issues in
 the bay could be responsible for a
 mass die-off of the pufferfish?

STUDENT 1
 Want dit is 'n drolsop.

Students laugh and pack up.

MRS MILLS
 Well, yes, AAAAAAND? Get me five
 more culprits. Research credible
 journals and newspapers only.
 Handwritten onto an actual piece of
 paper. Bonus points if your name is
 spelled correctly. NO WHATSAPPS at
 three in the morning will be
 accepted. And remember... Humans
 are the vampiric, demon-scourge
 sucking the planet dry, BUT...

STUDENT CHORUS
 (lacklustre)
 ...Don't get depressed, get
 motivated, instead. We are the
 change.

MRS MILLS
 (exaggerated melodrama)
 Oh! With an energy like that, my
 expectations for the future of our
 species have been validated!

Lisa, friendly as always, turns to Aiden.

LISA
 It's poisonous, by the way.
 Blaasoppies. They produce one of
 the deadliest naturally occurring
 neurotoxins. Tetrodotoxin.

AIDEN
 Ugh, ja, thanks. I actually know
 that. Ironically.

Despondent, Aiden picks up a failing grade biology paper from
 his desk.

LISA
 Have you been getting enough sleep?
 You look--

AIDEN

It's nothing... I have a night job,
but it's temporary, until I can
afford a new one of these.

(picks up phone)

Just two more--

A quick hand snatches the phone. Bombastic wannabee gangster SHANE guffaws at the relic. His cronies, JAROD and ERIC, hover like flies around a donkey's arse.

SHANE

Hey daar, armgat. I see your pappa
still can't afford an upgrade.

AIDEN

Give it--

SHANE

You better get rid of this thing
before it blows up. Oh, wait, I can
help you with that!

Shane pretends to throw it against the wall. Aiden flinches to Shane's delight, drawing a mocking laugh from the CRONIES.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Not like it's going to make much of
a difference. It's already a broken
piece of shit.

Shane flicks the phone at Aiden who FUMBLES the catch. The phone hits the floor. Shane laughs derisively.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Look at you go, Willie Le Roux!
Jirre. No wonder we never see you
on the field.

AIDEN

Shane! I need that to do my
homework, you fff--

SHANE

What?

Aiden considers his options, and just sits there. Shane smirks and bumps past, his arse flies in pursuit. Jarod feints a punch, but is met with an unflinching scowl.

XOLANI picks up Aiden's phone. He is a Xhosa Manga nerd with a flamboyant streak. He is also Aiden's only friend.

XOLANI

That guy needs a real good,
 (gestures a slap)
 you know, psychiatrist to work
 through his issues.

AIDEN

Not worth it, Xolani. Besides, by
 the end of next week, that thing
 gets recycled.

XOLANI

(checks phone)
 Ouch. Sorry, my man. I don't think
 you have until next week.
 (puts on NYC accent)
 It going black. And, you know what
 they say; once you go black...

Xolani hands the phone to Aiden. Indeed, the new cracks have the tell-tale leaking fringes of a screen that will soon die [TICKING CLOCK]. Aiden's sucks air through his teeth. His shoulders drop.

He turns back to Lisa... Her desk is empty. At the door? No. Wait. There she is. Aiden stares longingly at her retreating figure through the classroom window.

XOLANI takes him by the shoulders. He also glances after Lisa.

XOLANI (CONT'D)

It's never going to happen, buddy.
 Because you, my friend, are a broke
 ass bitch.

MRS MILLS

Aiden, since you are still eagerly
 hanging about.

Xolani glances at the failing grade paper on Aiden's desk. Oof, ouch. With a sympathetic raised eyebrow he pats Aiden on the shoulder and heads to the door.

Aiden joins Mrs Mills at her desk.

MRS MILLS (CONT'D)

Xolani, the posters?

XOLANI

It'll be a masterpiece, Mrs Mills.

MRS MILLS

That wasn't the brief, Xolani. The brief was "legible" and "finished on time".

XOLANI

I felt that it was more open to interpretation.

Xolani ducks out before Mrs Mills can reply. She shakes her head with a smile. Ugh, the kids today. Attention to Aiden.

MRS MILLS

The environmental committee missed you last night.

AIDEN

I was hoping to talk to you about that, actually. Uhhh. I have picked up a few extra shifts.

MRS MILLS

The clean-up and recycling drive is your initiative, Aiden.

AIDEN

I... Sorry, Mrs Mills. Everyone is confirmed though. The activists from Extinction Rebellion are doing protest art. Greenpeace, 350, ACRP, the Recycling Plant--they are all ready to tell the students why we must end the pollution. There's not much left for me to--

MRS MILLS

That's not the point of learning leadership, Aiden.

AIDEN

It's... I just need the extra cash, right now. My ability to organize my life, and finish my homework, and... everything... If I don't get a new phone, I risk failing at high school.

MRS MILLS

Speaking of failing...
(upbeat)

(MORE)

MRS MILLS (CONT'D)

If you are trying to spare me the trouble of writing a letter for that marine sciences scholarship: Don't worry, it's mostly a template. But you still have to pass for the signature.

AIDEN

The only thing that will occupy my attention until that test, is studying. I promise.

Scout's honour face as...

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

XOLANI

Girls. Girls. Girls. Everywhere.

Aiden and Xolani cross a train bridge on Campground Road heading into Claremont.

XOLANI (CONT'D)

Just shift your focus. Lisa is picky A.F. Three years, and she hasn't hooked up with anyone from our school.

The eastern flank of Table Mountain rises in the distance.

AIDEN

That's a good sign. Half the guys in school are, objectively,
(looks around, shy)
...you know, twats.

XOLANI

Ooooh! Did Aiden say a bad word? Firstly, mister goody two-shoes, that's sexist. Use asshole. It's a gender-agnostic twat...

AIDEN

AND, and, and, she joined the environmental committee for my beach clean-up.
(snaps up sidewalk trash)
That's something.

XOLANI

SECONDLY, what's the goal here?
True love? Bullshit. You have a
crush you can barely speak to. It's
cute and all, but get you head
straight. None of our relationships
now are "forever". Unless you are
dumb enough to get it on without a
condom. So, grab a handful and...
(jerk-off gesture)
get over it. In fact, let's find
some wi-fi and I will solve all
your problems.

AIDEN

I don't want your weird porn,
Xolani. Besides, Lisa is...
different. It feels like we can be
best friends if she'll just give me
a chance.

XOLANI

Oooh. That cuts deep.

AIDEN

Sorry.

XOLANI

I'll get over it.

Xolani pulls a funny face with a jerk-off gesture and gets a
disapproving shake of the head from an ELDERLY GOGO at the
traffic light. He mouths "Sorry" with an apologetic smile.

Aiden absentmindedly bins the rubbish he picked up.

INT. SHOPPING MALL: CELL SHOP - DAY

Xolani stares through the window of a CELL C/MTN/VODACOM Shop
at the latest flagship Samsung Ultra. The price tag is
ridiculous.

XOLANI

Man! You can buy a pretty decent
new laptop for that price.

Aiden is elsewhere looking at a more modest model.

AIDEN

I am not even looking at that. It's
depressing.
(beat)
THIS I can do.
(MORE)

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I'm just a 1000 bucks away from a brand new phone WITH a working camera.

Xolani and Aiden with hands on knees lean in to look at the phone. The PHONE LOOKS BACK. We see them through the window, from the phone's camera--shots switch between lenses.

XOLANI

And the ladies are just lining up to get your unsolicited dick pix.

AIDEN

It's for photos of the nudibranchs in the tidal pool--to build a portfolio. Is sex the only thing you ever think of?

XOLANI

Ooooh, nudeys.

AIDEN

It's sea slugs, you idiot.

XOLANI

Oh-yeah, your sea slug.

Aiden breaks. He can't help but smile. Xolani changes tone. Still seen from the phone camera perspective.

XOLANI (CONT'D)

(with compassion)

I know, like, shit fell apart for your family with your dad and loosing the factory, and everyth--

AIDEN

Do you think they have it on LAY by?

XOLANI

Don't deflect. It's not something you just shake off. I get that. But you can't just hide until some magic moment where you get your status back and everything is normal again.

AIDEN

A phone isn't some status symbol, Xolani.

XOLANI

Weeeeeeeell?

AIDEN

That's not what I... mean. Of course, it's a status symbol. But it's also access. You know, with your drawing. There's an entire universe of knowledge available, right out here, in the airwaves.

Aiden taps the glass. Points straight to the camera.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

And all you need to see it is a little WINDOW of opportunity. Then you can learn anything.

XOLANI

(snapping his fingers)

I'm going to "whatever" you, bitch. A phone is not what has been keeping you from coming out of your room. You haven't been to an Eco Day meeting in weeks. Where you could actually speak to Lisa--just a thought.

(beat)

And who the hell do you know who's learnt anything but TikTok dances and how to waste an incredible amount of time? It sounds more like you're planning on getting a bigger screen so you can hide out in your room "Learning Things."

(squints at the camera)

I heard these guys spy on people.

Xolani stretches and wanders off.

XOLANI (CONT'D)

Come-on. If you are done WINDOW shopping, Wi-Fi awaits. And you're your about to "learn" a whole lot.

Xolani takes a sharp left at familiar hangout, the Comic Book Store.

INT. READER'S DEN IN CLAREMONT - CONTINUOUS

Wall-to-wall comic books. Tapping his phone, Xolani marches past the register and straight to new Manga arrivals.

XOLANI

Hi, Bill.

BILL, the comic shop owner, reads at the counter. He grunts with familiarity.

Aiden's phone beeps. Xolani grins at him with an eager nod.

XOLANI (CONT'D)
Download satisfaction. But I
wouldn't open that in a public
place, Mmmm-kay?

As Aiden checks his phone, Xolani carefully pages through the new manga. Something *fascinates* him, and he slips a notebook and pencils from his backpack.

He outlines the art on a blank page. Quick, practiced strokes hint at a deeper talent.

XOLANI (CONT'D)
Look at that. It's a thing of
beauty.

It's a particularly gory double-page spread in a Mort Kunstler Pulp-Art style. A smoke billows as fire-breathing Chinese Dragon feasts on the half-charred, still-screaming leftovers of a US soldier.

Tentacles flailing from the corners of the dragon's gaping mouth grip most, or rather some, of two other torn-apart soldiers.

Villagers take refuge from both soldiers and their monstrous devourer. To the discerning viewer the dragon has FIVE CLAWS on each foot, representing the Chinese Emperor/Government. One foot holds a flaming orb--his dragon ball--a pearl of wisdom.

Aiden shakes his head as he glances up from his phone.

AIDEN
Strange tastes.

XOLANI
(at Aiden's phone)
No, you are just completely out of
touch with reality.

AIDEN
I think it's getting worse.

XOLANI
Your phone screen? Or your social
skills?

AIDEN

Your porn.

XOLANI

The world, Aiden, is like this gorgeously, delicious wall of premium Japanese manga. Premium people, *LIKE LISA*, who are not hiding from reality, they want premium stories they can touch and smell.

Envious, Xolani looks over at a glass case with a hand written sign that reads "Never Lick Unless You Buy - Licking = Banned."

XOLANI (CONT'D)

Or they want the ones that are worth a lot of money. Continue on the path you're on, and...

Xolani gestures to the BARGAIN BIN and a HAIRY PLUMBERS-CRACK stooping over unsold comics. A greasy, 40-year-old--probably a hipster, possibly homeless--hovers over the table. He holds a SANDWICH on the verge of dripping.

XOLANI (CONT'D)

...you may have to settle for lower standards and way more body hair.

(At patron)

Oi! No eating over the art! Have some respect.

AIDEN

I'm not hiding--

Xolani scans the graphic novels, snaps one up.

XOLANI

See this guy... you're him.

Xolani holds up a double page spread on a MANGA FAIRY TALE - It's young URASHIMA TARO RESCUING A TURTLE on one page, juxtaposed with an aging gradient version of himself on the next.

His face, half young, half old, stares in terror at his own skeletal hand.

MOMENTARILY ANIMATED on the page--his flesh turns to dust and blows away on the wind.

XOLANI (CONT'D)

Urashima lived in oblivion in a magic palace under the ocean, and when he came back to the real world, 300 years had passed, and everyone he knew was dead, and no-one cared who he was, and then he turned to dust.

(takes a last look)

Don't be like Urashima. Be relevant instead.

They leave. Bill, without looking up from his book:

BILL

Finally buying one?

XOLANI

Oh, Bill. Your optimism is ceaseless. Besides, one day you will be buying from me.

BILL

Uh-huh. Plenty of optimism in the air, it would seem.

XOLANI

It's all in the mindset.

Xolani taps the side of his head with double click of the tongue. He swaggers into the mall.

Aiden hangs back, self-conscious.

AIDEN

Hey, Bill? You don't have something I can do around here for a thousand Rand?

(check phone screen)

Before the weekend, maybe?

Bill looks through the empty store.

BILL

Sure, kid. As soon as business picks up.

Aiden hesitates.

AIDEN

Thanks, Bill.

BILL

I have new stock coming at the end of the month? Best I can do.

AIDEN

Uh... I'll take it. Thank you. If you hear of something sooner--

BILL

Why aren't you a waiter?

AIDEN

There was...

FLASHBACK: Aiden makes obsessive, precise shifts to cutlery and condiments on a table. Measures the line of desert spoons with one eye. When he steps back we see three confused patrons protecting their drinks from Aiden's perfectionist onslaught.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

...an incident. I'm not great with disorder when I am under stress. And waitering was both stressful and disorderly.

BILL

Tips are good though?

AIDEN

Not so much, all things considered.

Xolani pops back. Aiden nods good bye. Joins Xolani.

XOLANI

What the hell? I've been chatting to you for, like, 7 store fronts. And then you weren't there. Pretty selfish, just disappearing like that.

They wander off. Bill rolls his eyes and returns to his book.

EXT. TRAIN TO KALK BAY - AFTERNOON

The eastern flank of table mountain reflects in the train window. Aiden stares out.

- A couple holding hands walk down the street.
- Two people running together.
- Two students laughing under a tree.

- Two dog-owners are arguing next to a pair of shagging dogs. The top dog stares into Aiden's soul, and winks.

Aiden looks away.

INT. TRAIN TO KALK BAY - CONTINUOUS

Inside the carriage there is another loving young couple looking at a video on a phone together and giggling.

He takes out his own phone.

"Lisa is pinned to favourites", along with "Xolani", and "Mom".

Aiden TYPES TO LISA -- [Letters hidden behind cracks]:

SCREEN WRITE: H , Lisa, ca we meet aybe? DELETE

HEADS-UP DISPLAY WRITE: Can you catch me up on... DELETE

HUD WRITE: Hey, how about that Eco Day?

AIDEN
What? No. Delete.

HUD WRITE: If you're free on the weekend, could we maybe chat about the Eco Day? I feel I have a bit of catching up to do.

Aiden's finger hovers on send.

Alarm goes off. He flinches. "DO HO WORK" on screen.

He looks at it for a moment before silencing the alarm and putting the phone away.

INT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A pot of mussels BUBBLES on the stove. Aiden, at the kitchen table, does homework. Lettie and Felix watch TV--a camp sci-fi horror.

Aiden searches for articles on evolutionary biology and the tree of life. The struggle is real.

He can read some of the article between the cracks and the dark blotches, but only if he manoeuvres the text to the least damaged pixels.

ON TV: B-Grade Horror Film: A damsel in the foyer of a boarded-up house flops melodramatically against the front door to OMINOUS TONES and lightning bolts.

TV WOMAN

You never let me do what I want to do!

Aiden's frustration mounts. He considers his options before taking a deep breath.

TV MAN (O.S.)

But, honey! If I let you leave they'll eat your brain!

Aiden checks the living room for bottles. Three. That's not too bad. He looks at Felix. He seems sober enough.

TV WOMAN (O.S.)

And if I stay here, you'll eat my soul.

(A door slams)

AIDEN

Dad?

ON TV: B-Grade Horror Film: Unseen monsters close in on the damsel in the woods. She runs in a manner befitting the title "damsel".

Aiden shuffles nervously.

FELIX

Mhhhh?

ON TV: B-Grade Horror Film: The damsel rounds a tree and trips. When she looks up, it's a closeup on her face--eyes widen in terror.

Aiden closes his eyes and blurts it out.

AIDEN

Can I borrow some cash until--
[SCREAM ON TV]?

Felix suddenly looks nervous.

FELIX

Uhm...

ON TV: Commercial break. Toothpaste.

AD MAN

Are you grinding your teeth in your sleep?

Felix wiggles his clenched jaw and turns the VOLUME DOWN on the TV.

AIDEN
I'll pay it back. Next week. It's
just my phone--

FELIX
But I thought you were getting
yourself a new one, soon.

AIDEN
I am. The thing is--

FELIX
You remember the deal right? Who
dropped that one?

AIDEN
(reluctantly)
I did.
(beat)
There's a super important test
coming--

FELIX
And... we decided, YOU, you decided
that you'll buy your own phone. And
you're so close.

(beat)
It's better if you earn the money
for your phone yourself. Then you
will have respect for it. And take
better care of it, right? That's
what you said.

(beat)
It shows you have real character,
Aiden. I support that.

(beat)
You can't give up now, right? Don't
let yourself down.

Felix turns the VOLUME UP and avoids Aiden by watching his
show harder. It's really awkward because it gets steamy....

ON TV: B-Grade Horror Film: The damsel and a hunky "Wild Man"
with flowing hair kiss fervently.

TV WOMAN
But how can this be. You're alive!

Felix shifts uncomfortably, but he is committed to his
avoidance strategy. He nods slightly, like an attentive
student. Inversely, Aiden shakes his head slightly in
disbelief.

ON TV: B-Grade Horror Film: The damsel rips the man's shirt open revealing glistening scars and a glistening six-pack.

TV MAN 2

Of course, darling. I don't die easy. You thought I was the monster? But you were locked up with the real monster all along.

ON TV: B-Grade Horror Film: The damsel's clinging, wet negligée is virtually transparent.

Light from the TV screen colours the discomfort on Felix and Aiden's faces. Squishes, panting, and sexy elevator music set the awkward-o-meter to 9.5.

Lettie, on the other hand, is enraptured. She escapes into a cream éclair that squirts just a little as she bites.

Aiden Adam's apple bobs up down. On the stove the pot bubbles over.

Aiden turns back to his studies. He scrolls aimlessly. He looks at his notes. Ugh. His heart isn't in it any more.

Aiden eyes his phone, checks over his shoulder, and opens Xolani's Whatsapp message.

An EROTIC GROAN is cut short as Aiden presses the phone speaker against his body and manically squeezes the volume down. Did his parents hear? They don't react. Coast clear.

He peeks at the video, considers his options, and casually sneaks off to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Aiden takes some me-time. His PHONE with low-res porn video is perched on the toilet cistern. Frowning, looking ever more frustrated, Aiden, masturbates with rapidly declining vigour.

Inadvertently Censored! All the good porno bits are covered by cracks on the phone screen... except for a hairy man-ass.

AIDEN

Nee, Jissis, dis net poephol.

Zooming the screen with one hand, the phone slides off the cistern and plops into the bowl. The screen flickers and dies.

Aiden snatches it from the water! Too late. The phone hisses as the bulging battery shorts out and CATCHES FIRE. He drops it back in the juice and flushes instinctively. Beat.

The drain pipe explodes in a spray of toilet water, cracking the bowl.

Trousers around the ankles, Aiden trips backwards like an errant domino in factory manufacturing nothing but fans and faeces.

Flailing, he rips the door off the medicine cabinet.

He falls back shattering the shower door.

As a CHURCH CHOIR SINGS a solemn Ave Maria, the medicine cabinet knocks a small plastic cup of TOOTHBRUSHES. They fly in a slow-motion ballet, end-over-end.

With the synchronised precision of an Olympic diver, the three toothbrushes disappear into the toilet bowl... which promptly splits in two.

Aiden is dumbstruck.

The door bursts open. Felix looks bewildered at the toilet, at Aiden. Their eyes meet. $1 + 1 = ?$.

Felix spins around and stops Lettie who is hot on his heels, leaving Aiden with the illusion of a shred of dignity.

INT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS - NIGHT

Rumpled cash stacks up on the linoleum kitchen table. Aiden counts out the last of his hard-earned savings.

His dad can't look him in the eye. Thank God.

Aiden tops off the pile with assorted coins.

FELIX
Urges, are--

AIDEN
Nope!

Through the open front door.

LETTIE (O.S.)
Thank you, Karla. It's only
tonight. Maybe tomorrow.

KARLA (O.S.)
 You tell the drunk, if he knocks
 after 9, I'll *klap* him with a
 cricket bat.

Lettie, manic smile, enters.

LETTIE
 Karla says--

FELIX
 I'll piss in the sink.

LETTIE
 (cracking)
 You will piss in the shower like a
 civilised fucking human.

Lettie straightens her shawl in the awkward silence.

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

OCEAN FLOOR. A bottom-dwelling fish strikes at a small
 shrimp. We follow the fish. Beat. The sound of grinding metal
 and rock rumbles to a cacophony. A cloud of murk billows in
 the clear water.

Suddenly a drag net emerges; It scrapes the ocean floor
 asunder. Our fishy friend swims for dear life but is caught
 in a tumble of mud and darkness.

The murk becomes a panicked, slithering swirl of sea
 creatures.

Suddenly, 0 to a 100! A vacuum pipe sucks up the fish. We
 follow it through a series of funnels, pipes and conveyor
 belts until...

INT. TRIAD TRAWLER - DAY

LOUD INDUSTRIAL CACOPHONY of a trawler. The fish flops
 helplessly into a steel tray. A rubber-gloved hand snatches
 it up and runs it through a bandsaw. The fish head drops into
 an overflowing bin, mouth gasping for a final breath.

We follow a child, too young to be working on a boat, as he
 wheels the full bin away through a cramped processing
 facility...

...where gaunt, lifeless African line-workers gut one fish
 after another in an endlessly repeated monotony, under the
 watchful eye of an armed Chinese guard.

A young African DECKHAND runs past the bin. He is excited. We follow him through doors, up stairs, along hallways, and into a compartment with a small gym.

CHAOXIANG, a Triad Lieutenant in an all black cycling outfit, pedals like he is training for the Cape Epic. Sweat pours off him.

He slows, sits back, and takes a swig of water. Half-listening to the DECKHAND who interrupted him. And half-looking at the movie [The Mermaid (2016) Dir. Stephen Chow] playing on his stupidly expensive, satellite-enabled smartphone.

The deckhand holds out a shell-crusted artifact--a RUYI (Power Sceptre). SILENCE.

Chaoxiang stops cycling, unclips his cleats, grabs his phone and snaps up a towel. CLACK-CLACK-CLACK we follow him through corridors, steel gangways and a portal onto the deck.

EXT. TRIAD TRAWLER - DAY

Chaoxiang makes his way to the back of the trawler. Workers FIN SHARKS and SWEEP BYCATCH INTO THE OCEAN.

On the trawl deck, Chinese crew kneel by a drag net.

CHAOXIANG
(Cantonese)
Move.

The crew scatter revealing pieces of a shell-crusted statue of Chinese ocean goddess Mazu. Strange symbols adorn it. Chaoxiang scratches at the artifact, musing to himself...

CHAOXIANG (CONT'D)
On the other side of the world.

Chaoxiang whistles loudly to signal an imposing CHINESE MACHINERY OPERATOR. He heads to the bridge.

A sturdy cage on a thick chain is lowered to the deck. It is viciously barbed. Inside is a second cage--an empty spherical receptacle--on shock absorbers and electrical isolators.

INT. TRAWLER BRIDGE - DAY

A LARGE, DULL PEARL sits inside a gyroscopic stabilizer. It is surrounded by eight precision measuring scales with eight digital displays. Five show 0.00000mg.

Of the three displays pointing to the rear of the boat two reads 0.00001mg, and the display directly at stern reads 0.00003mg.

Next to the device, a CHINESE SCIENTIST plots courses on a map. Numerous lines criss-cross approximately the same spot.

Chaoxiang marches in. He halts the gyroscope.

CHINESE SCIENTIST
Wait, Chaoxiang. Just one more run!

Chaoxiang carefully lifts the pearl from the machine.

CHAOXIANG
You're done.

CHINESE SCIENTIST
It's a priceless cultural artifact.
You can't just--

One look from Chaoxiang shuts him up.

CHAOXIANG
On its own it's a trinket. On its own no-one gets what they want, do they? Right now, there is only one thing more important than this... object... and that is the thing that knows where the other one is.
(smiles)
Congratulations. I had my doubts, but we have JUST confirmed that you brought us to the right place. Be happy. You exceeded expectations.

Chaoxiang leaves.

CHINESE SCIENTIST
When the Japanese find out--

Another look from Chaoxiang. The Chinese Scientist drops his gaze.

EXT. TRIAD TRAWLER - DAY

Bleeding, finless sharks flop helplessly on deck. Crew hose down the deck, sweeping blood and by-catch through the freeing ports.

Chaoxiang, quite cheery, hands the pearl to the Chinese Machine Operator.

CHAOXIANG

Make sure it's secure. If we lose this it's war with the little Japanese devil and everything goes to shit.

CHINESE MACHINE OPERATOR

Got it, Boss.

By-catch and blood pours into the ocean. We see above and below the water-line.

Above, humans bustle. Seagulls swoop.

And under water, the shocking toll... dead fish, sharks, rays, crustaceans, rain to the ocean floor.

Among the carnage is the WIDE-EYED Chinese Scientist.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Xolani fails miserably at consoling Aiden. It is after school and sports teams are practising. Aiden and Xolani sit on the pavilion at the girls hockey fields.

XOLANI

Legit. That's a HIGH price to pay for a careless wank. And that includes that time Randy hooked his foreskin on that Goth ring-claw-jewellery-thing and had to get four stiches.

(greet a passing Goth)

Hey, Randy.

RUDY

For the love of ALL the gods. My name is RUDY. It happened three fucking years ago.

Xolani hardly notices his outrage. In a huff, Rudy hurls a mostly empty packet of crisps to the floor. It's an impotent gesture as the breeze whips the packet away. Aiden reacts.

AIDEN

Not okay, Rudy! Pick up your pollution.

Rudy stomps off, leaving Aiden to scurry after the packet.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Is it really that hard? It's like you don't care where this ends up at all.

(to Xolani)

You keep your mouth shut. That cannot be me.

XOLANI

Ooh. Ouch. What do you think I am? Some horrendous gossip?

AIDEN

Absolutely. That is absolutely what I think.

XOLANI

Whatever. What nickname will you even get? Rrrandy Rrrudy was right there. It just rrrrrrolls off the tongue.

Aiden waves the crisp packet at Xolani, showering him with crumbs.

AIDEN

Don't you dare. This is, like... 95% your fault! If you didn't send me that stupid hairy man-ass video, I wouldn't be dead broke.

XOLANI

No-no-no-no. Get the math straight. I made ZERO bad choices. And zero times whatever amount of blame you are trying to pin on me is still zero.

(wipes/eats crumbs)

Either way, I am sorry, man. All your savings. That's rough. What are you going to do?

Aiden stares blankly at the limited options ahead. Realisation dawns. He jumps up and runs, skids to a halt, returns for his bag. And he is off.

AIDEN

I'll phone you later.

XOLANI

(beat)

HOW? And he's the smart one.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Aiden bursts through the door. Breathless, he grabs an apron.

ANTHONY

There's a long line of people,
living in little plastic tents, who
would do this for half what you
get.

AIDEN

Well, that would explain why they
can't afford rent.

ANTHONY

You're late.

AIDEN

Uh... yes. My phone... broke... It
is... was my alarm. Sorry.

ANTHONY

Ja, excuses-excuses. This is a
business. And for that smart mouth
of yours, I am putting you up on a
warning.

AIDEN

I... Could I maybe pick up a few
more shifts?

Anthony rolls his eyes and stomps off. Aiden twists the taps
open. Klippies peeks through the back door.

KLIPPIES

Howzit. Anthony in?

AIDEN

Yuuuuuuuuuup.

KLIPPIES

I hear your phone's broken.

AIDEN

(confused)

Were you listening at the door?

KLIPPIES

What? No. Don't be ridiculous.
People talk. Tell that *tottiekop*--
never mind.

Klippies disappears with reflexes like electric snot. FRED, RESTAURANT OWNER, walks through the kitchen door heading to an office. Klippies slithers back when Fred is out of sight.

KLIPPIES (CONT'D)

My offer stands. I don't want to take advantage of the situation, okay. No pressure. I just know how it feels. I have been there. Many, many times.

(musing)

It's extraordinary what you'll do when you are really, really hungry.

(snaps back)

So, out of empathy... I am here to help.

He actually sounds sincere. It catches Aiden slightly off guard.

AIDEN

Listen. I appreciate it. But no. Even if I could, my dad would never forgive me. His boat was impounded for an entire season. Since my uncle got caught, it has been--

Realises who he is talking to.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Anywhoo. You know how he feels about you.

KLIPPIES

Look. Times are tough. Until you get back on your feet, borrow this one.

Klippies pulls a phone from his pocket. Aiden frowns.

KLIPPIES (CONT'D)

Relax. It's not stolen. I got an upgrade. See? My original number is still on the barcode. It's factory reset, and everything.

With wink and nod, Klippies hands Aiden the phone. Aiden glances over his shoulder as FRED stirs in the office. Klippies is gone.

Looking down at the phone, it starts up. HIGH-SPEED SETUP MONTAGE. Behind the phone everything blurs.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE LAB - DAY

Aiden looks up from the phone. Xolani, shell shocked, stares back. Where did he appear from? Behind him, students mill into class.

XOLANI

I swear, absolute friendship code,
I absolutely didn't say a thing.

SHANE (O.S.)

Hey! Ejaculaiden!

Shane laughs at the door with Jarod. Lisa happens to be right behind them, trying to squeeze by.

SHANE (CONT'D)

(jerk-off gestures)

One shot. Boom. From fisherman to
plumber.

JAROD

I hear you know how to clean the
pipes.

Aiden's HEART races. Lisa shimmies to her desk. She glances up momentarily and catches Aiden's eye with a look of encouraging pity. Aiden breaks eye-contact. He swallows down his nausea.

All he can hear is his own HEARTBEAT and a TINNITUS BUZZ. Somewhere far away is the muffled sounds of Mrs Mills shooing students to their seats.

Aiden is frozen in place. Around him the science class speeds up to a HYPERLAPSE. Motion blurred students make notes, and do experiments.

The BELL rings. The spell is broken.

Everything is back to normal speed as students exit the class. Shane, Jarod and Eric roughhouse on their way out.

Aiden launches after Shane.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PASSAGE - DAY

Aiden catches Shane off guard--pushes him up against a wall.

AIDEN

Who was it? Your fuckin' cousin?

From behind, Jarod hits Aiden in the kidneys and Shane finishes the job with a punch to the diaphragm.

Aiden is winded. He drops to one knee and gasps for air.

Xolani runs up to help, but Eric holds him back.

SHANE

Everyone is talking about it.

(pauses)

Oh, wait... you don't know?

Shane smirks gleefully and leans in closer.

CUT TO:

EXT. KALK BAY HARBOUR - AFTERNOON

Aiden grasps his yet-again-drunk father by the collar. A bottle dangles in Felix's hand. He offers no resistance.

AIDEN

You told the fucking plumber?

Multiple squid fishermen on the harbour wall laugh.

FELIX

In my defence. I probably might have let it slip, once or twice.

FISHERMAN 1

That's not a defence. That's pleading guilty.

FISHERMAN 2

Now, PROOF would be if there were evidence... or a witness.

AIDEN

(incredulous)

Did he tell... everyone?

Various nods, grunts and yups nearby. FISHERMAN 3 much further down the wall shouts back.

FISHERMAN 3

Sorry, lad.

Beat.

FISHERMAN 2

Life was less complicated when we had magazines.

Fury is replaced with a disappointed sneer as Aiden really looks at his drunk father.

An alarm sounds in Aiden's back pocket. We see "GO TO WORK".

He releases Felix. Disgust paints Aiden's face. Felix notices and his drunk smile fades slightly.

Aiden spins on his heel and stomps off screaming with frustration.

FISHERMAN 4 (O.S.)
I got one... he's literally TOSSING
his money down the toilet.

Laughter from the harbour wall follows Aiden.

Felix joins with a late giggle and a swig from the bottle.

INT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

We see into the kitchen through the round PORTAL WINDOW on the door. From the sound, the restaurant is bustling.

Aiden walks into the kitchen. He is clearly in a huff. He grabs a dishwashing apron and takes his spot by the sink.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Water pours into the sink. He reaches for the soap, but it's not in its designated spot. Neither are the sponges. Where are the dishcloths? Water pours.

Annoyed. Aiden squeezes three exact squirts of soap into the water. 1-2-3.

On exactly the same pace, 1-2-3: sponge, brush, cloth--he places all his implements in an exact row.

He clears the drying racks 1-2-3: shredder, pan, glass.

He obsessively folds the dishtowels. Fold, fold, hang; fold, fold, hang.

Water pours. Foam bubbles. Aiden takes a breath, but before he can breath out...

ANTHONY
Aiden! None of that. You want cash,
you work for tips at the front of
house. It's busy as hell.

AIDEN

But, Anthony, I'm not a waiter.

Thunk-thunk-thunk, the kitchen door oscillates on its swing hinge. Anthony is gone. Another KITCHEN-HAND snatches the dishcloth from Aiden and shrugs with a pitying smile.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

SLOW MOTION Heartbeat. Tinnitus Buzz. Through Aiden's eyes, an irate customer is seen talking. He gestures to his plate. SOLE BONES are neat on a side-plate. Fish fillets arranged on the main plate.

NORMAL Restaurant ambiance. Aiden's EYES flip up.

CUSTOMER (O.S.)

... think, I'm a baby ...

SLOW MOTION Heartbeat. Tinnitus Buzz. Through Aiden's eyes, at the far end of the restaurant Anthony stares straight back at him. He shakes his head in angry slow motion. Aiden looks down at a fish-knife and fork in his own hands. The customer's wife chews SLOW-MO and stares in disbelief.

NORMAL Restaurant ambiance. The penny drops. Aiden plonks down the cutlery like he's been caught with a murder weapon. It knocks the TARTAR SAUCE onto his crotch and onto his customer. People stare. Aiden tries not to make eye-contact.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - LATER

Aiden tries not to make eye contact with Anthony by wiping his trousers with a paper towel.

ANTHONY

I don't care if he was eating his
sole wrong, YOU don't cut a
customers fucking food for them!

Aiden is sheepish, but aggravated.

AIDEN

You shouldn't cut it. That's the
entire point! It just slides off if
you work it from the spine.

ANTHONY

As long as he pays for it, he can damn well suck it like a harmonica and use the bones to comb his wife's hoo-haa! The customer is always right.

AIDEN

(mumbles)

You're such a cliché.

ANTHONY

Sorry, what was that?

AIDEN

Nothing. I told you I am not a waiter.

ANTHONY

No. I heard that. You calling me a cliché? Here's one! You're fired.

Everyone in the kitchen stares. Aiden looks awkward.

INT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS - NIGHT

Felix slumps unconscious in the armchair with a bottle on his lap. Lettie watches *Gordon Ramsey's Hell's Kitchen* and eats.

The door bursts open. Lettie is startled. Aiden stomps past straight to the bathroom.

LETTIE

Aiden? Aren't you working?

AIDEN

They...

(hesitates)

...I spilled something. Just need clean trousers.

Aiden disappears into the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aiden rubs the sauce stains on his crotch with the corner of a wet towel. He wets it some more. As he rubs his crotch furiously, he looks at himself in the cheap bathroom cabinet.

He notices the much larger dirt shadow of the previous cabinet. A frown furrows his forehead. Aiden rubs at the shadow with the towel.

He notices a cheap, plastic shower curtain where the glass door use to be. He shakes his head in disbelief.

He takes a closer look at the toilet.

A cheap, thin plastic toilet seat drops with the opposite of a satisfying thunk, on a cheap, poorly installed, toilet bowl.

INT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aiden glares as he stomps from the bathroom. The expensive bottle of 15-year-old, barrel-aged brandy on Felix's lap draws his eye.

AIDEN

Did he buy the cheapest toilet he could find to buy more expensive booze with my ff... with MY money?

LETTIE

He's been under a lot of stress.
(stress eating)
He can't, you know, help it, right now. He IS still... your father?

AIDEN

That man IS two holes with feet. And you can pour alcohol into either one and shit will come out the other.

Aiden walks over and shakes Felix.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Wake up! Get yourself together!
It's been two years. Wake up!

Felix isn't home. Lettie, shocked, comes to his rescue.

LETTIE

He's a good man. He's just--

AIDEN

A good man takes care of his family! And even if he can't, at the very least, he tries.
(beat)
Does that look like trying, Mom? We need money and he's drinking it.

Aiden's attention snaps to wall hooks with an assortment of keys. To a WOODEN BOAT ANCHOR KEYCHAIN. A determined anger sets his jaw.

He stomps off to his room. Returns with a backpack, a jacket and a cap.

LETTIE

It'll be okay, Aiden. We just have to stay calm and; and stick together. You'll see.

Aiden takes house keys from the hooks. He hesitates almost imperceptibly before lifting the keys with the anchor keychain from another hook.

AIDEN

I'm going to work. Someone here needs to.

Lettie looks concerned as the door slams. Felix keeps snoring.

EXT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS - NIGHT

Aiden marches across the concrete playground in front of the flats. He stops for a second under a streetlight to check the number on the barcode on Klippies' phone.

He TYPES: "Your offer still good? It's Aiden." He slides the phone into his pocket but it beeps promptly just two steps away.

Klippies: "Great timing. Can you do a pickup here @ 11PM? GPS pin" Aiden checks the time and replies with a thumbs-up.

EXT. KALK BAY HARBOUR - NIGHT

Like a salted sailor, Aiden preps their fishing boat. He mumbles under his breath as he unhooks the mooring ropes.

The colourful wooden crayfish boat putters past the harbour lighthouse into the open ocean.

INT. FISHING BOAT COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Aiden check the GPS pin. He takes a breath.

AIDEN

What the hell am I doing?

Aiden turns the wheel to go back. A small waves rocks the boat. Empty bottles roll from beneath a bench. Aiden stares at it. Furious. Beat.

He turns the wheel. Back on course.

EXT. FISHING BOAT - CONTINUOUS

The boat completes a full circle and putters out towards Cape Point.

I/E. CAPE POINT - NIGHT

Majestic cliffs rise from the ocean on the Atlantic side of the Cape Point peninsula. The lighthouse fires its signature 3-flash beam into the night.

In the moonlight, Aiden's colourful fishing boat bobs near a sea cave and hidden beach.

On deck, Aiden nervously looks towards shore. The phone in his hand says he is exactly at the GPS co-ordinates.

A light flashes from the cave. Aiden signals back with a torch. There's movement on the shore. Two inflatable boats head his way (Gemmini Waverider 780 RIBS).

Heartbeats.

From the ocean-side Aiden hears an engine. When he turns he sees another dark rubber boat. HEARTBEATS! Is it coastguard? Police? It's a trap!

KLIPPIES (O.S.)

You're early! I like that!

AIDEN

Not cool! I thought you were coastguard.

The dark Gemini Waverider 550 pulls up at the stern. Patches and peeling paint cover the signature red and yellow of the NSRI.

A GOON (DEAN) pulls back dark camo netting to reveal four diesel drums. Klippies climbs aboard Aiden's boat with the end of a hose in one hand.

KLIPPIES

Here. Let's get some fuel in those tanks, eh.

AIDEN

Fuel? That's... thoughtful.

Aiden opens the fuel inlet. He feeds the hose in and uses a short length of rope to secure it in place. The fuel transfer pump starts up.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I was going to refuel with some of my pay...

The second boat pulls up at starboard with two strangers and a deck stacked with grain sacks.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

...ment. What's--

Two GOONS (KEAGAN and DYLAN), immediately starts transferring sacks to the fishing boat. Keagan boards. Aiden tries to make sense of the bustle.

KLIPPIES

Can't leave a man dry, right?

Dylan hands sacks up to Klippies. Keagan starts prepping the crane.

KEAGAN

Does this thing work?

AIDEN

Yes... NO! What?

The third boat arrives with two more GOONS (PJ and WILL), and even more sacks.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

This wasn't the deal. Where are the divers?

KEAGAN

We're divers. We just aren't diving right now.

DYLAN

The only thing you dive is muff, man!

KLIPPIES

Relax, Aiden. This is much safer than running away from cops on the coast. We're just making a little drop.

Aiden cuts one sack with a fishing knife. He pulls out a clear vacuum-sealed bag. Dried abalone. Dumbstruck.

AIDEN

Little? This is like a tonne of perlemoen.

KLIPPIES

Five, actually.

Klippies pats Aiden on the shoulder and opens the hatch to the hold.

KLIPPIES (CONT'D)

Cheer up! You chose a great time to call. Think of this as your Uber ride to riches. By this time tomorrow you'll be rolling in cash.

Aiden wants to object, but he is interrupted.

WILL

Move or start loading, kid. The quicker this shit's done the safer it gets.

PJ

Oi!

From the third Gemini, PJ swings a 20kg sack at Aiden. He drops everything to catch the sack. It knocks him into a stumble. Klippies grabs Aiden by the sack and saves him from a cold plunge overboard. He winks and starts shouting orders.

KLIPPIES

PJ, Will, clear this one so Keagan can fetch the next load.

Instant regrets. Aiden cradles the sack.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - NIGHT

The fishing boat putters along, alone on the dark waters.

INT. FISHING BOAT COCKPIT - NIGHT

Aiden is at the wheel. The monotonous roar of the diesel engine is overpowering.

AIDEN

I should've fuckin' known. This is how you got my uncle arrested.

KLIPPIES

Who's been feeding you that kak?

Klippies unlocks his phone with a FINGERPRINT. He shows Aiden a GPS live pin from "Mister C" on screen.

AIDEN

The only reason uncle Johnny started with the abalone is because of you. It ruined our family AND the business.

Aiden checks their bearing and adjusts.

KLIPPIES

Maybe you were too busy living it up with your PlayStation in the suburbs, or whatever, but Johnny didn't need my help to get in trouble.

(beat)

You know why his nickname is Johnny Klein Skippie? Because he lives in a bottle, like one of those little boats. But you know all about that.

AIDEN

Leave my dad out of this!

KLIPPIES

How? He's the reason Johnny got busted.

AIDEN

You're so full of--

KLIPPIES

You think your Pappie drinks like that 'cause he's got a clear conscience? He never showed up for the pick-up. And now, glug-glug-glug.

Aiden shifts uncomfortably.

KLIPPIES (CONT'D)

(reassuring)

You're not going to end up like that, Aiden. You're smart. You're sober. You've been on the ocean since before you could walk.

(offhand)

Besides, what are you now? 17?

(MORE)

KLIPPIES (CONT'D)

Even *if* you get caught, they can't send you to big-boy prison. You're a minor with a clean record.

A friendly tap on the arm from Klippies is hardly comforting.

EXT. TRIAD TRAWLER - NIGHT

Aiden's boat pulls up next to the massive, Chinese super-trawler.

Climbing the ladder behind Klippies, Aiden notices something stir in the water. CLANG--Attention snaps to a crane lowering a cargo net to the fishing boat.

Adrenalin twitchy. Aiden observes everything.

Workers aboard the trawler look mistreated. Nervous. Is that young African boy old enough to work? Are these people here of their own free will?

The two new passengers are escorted to the trawl deck. Here tightly-wound Chinese crew and heavily armed guards loom.

Chaoxiang is all charms. He exudes confidence.

CHAOXIANG

You've caught us at a busy time.

KLIPPIES

Sorry, Mister C. I had good weather and... an earlier opportunity.

CHAOXIANG

It is always a pleasure doing business with economically ambitious individuals.

Behind the trawler, thick black chains and power cables dangle into the Atlantic. It draws Aiden's eye.

Chaoxiang notices but it doesn't sway his charm. The deck crane hoists the abalone sacks aboard.

CHAOXIANG (CONT'D)

I see you have had a successful season.

(eyes flick to Aiden)

And this?

KLIPPIES

(suddenly nervous)

Oh, Aiden is an...

(MORE)

KLIPPIES (CONT'D)
 old family friend. And a new partner. Nothing to worry about. He's actually in school with my sister's oldest son. Really, a great worker. Wonderful, seaman. In many ways. Got us here really quick-quick.

AIDEN
 Big ship. You must catch a lot of fish.

CHAOXIANG
 That's the business, yes.

Dishevelled workers carry bag after bag of CRYSTAL METH, 4ookg, to a pallet for the deck crane.

The African DECKHAND brings a brick to Chaoxiang who offers it to Klippies.

CHAOXIANG (CONT'D)
 For your approval, of course.

Klippies fishes a small steel plate and a knife from his pocket. He stabs the brick expecting powder. Instead he pulls a massive clear crystal through the hole.

KLIPPIES
 Sho! Will you look at that! Paki-meth?

CHAOXIANG
 Afghan. But yes. I only deal in the best, Mr Klippies.

Klippies crushes the tip of the crystal between the plate and the blade.

KLIPPIES
 Always a good idea to see if it smells right. Am I right, or am I right, right?

AIDEN
 (softly)
 Jy't gesê kontant.

Snarfs up a big bump. Klippies pinches the bridge of his nose. Eyes water. Aiden is not a happy camper.

KLIPPIES
 Oooh... That's the good stuff.
 (to Aiden)
 (MORE)

KLIPPIES (CONT'D)

It's economics, Aiden. THAT is two and a half bar on THIS boat. And when we are done with it will be a cool 70 mil. Cash.

(Zef accent)

Because CT likes to paaaaarty, my bru.

(Die Antwoord Lyrics)

Rikke-tikke-tikkie...

Klippies, eyes suddenly wide. Looks impressed. To Chaoxiang:

KLIPPIES (CONT'D)

Pew-pew-pew. We have a deal, sir.

AIDEN

As hulle my hiermee vang maak my ouderdom fokkol saak.

CHAOXIANG

(irritated)

You seem like you have a lot to discuss. Perhaps you would like to do it in the privacy of your own... vessel?

AIDEN

Sorry. No disrespect. But I can't take this specific cargo. Would cash be an option?

A TENSE moment. Chaoxiang, jaw clenched in a tight smile. Klippies swallows. Will Chaoxiang do something violent?

I/E. TRIAD TRAWLER - CONTINUOUS

CLANG - Chaoxiang's attention snaps from Aiden to the chain at the stern.

The thick links rattle and the chain pulls taut. It strains like a fishing line.

CHAOXIANG

(in Cantonese)

Now! Bring it in.

The CHINESE MACHINERY OPERATOR slams a button. Electricity CRACKLES through the chain and cables.

A bright flash deep under water. The tension on the chain releases.

The winch RUMBLES to life. It's deafening. All attention is affixed on the chain. What is happening?

Klippies pulls Aiden close. Wired. Nervous anger.

KLIPPIES

Hou jou fokken cool. Of hierdie is
ons altwee se fokken begrafplaas.

On the bow of the trawler, a camouflaged blob shimmies up the hull. It matches the rust streaks and paint colours exactly as it flows over the lip, and into a shadow.

BOB'S POV: A worker hurries past. From above we see excitement on the trawl deck. Restless HENCHMEN (1 & 2) at the trawl slip. Chaoxiang dead still. Klippies berating Aiden as covertly as possible.

Chaoxiang waits patiently, calm, in control.

The camouflaged blob shimmies onto the bridge.

The CAGE rises from the water.

A gigantic tentacle is impaled on the barbed hooks of the cage. HENCHMAN 2 looks surprised. He is a handsome late-twenties Chinese man with a facial scar. Is this it?

He looks questioningly at Chaoxiang, whose eyes narrow a fraction.

A giant squid is dragged onto deck. Disappointment.

Chaoxiang unlocks the cage and chops through the tentacle to get to the pearl at the centre. It's fine. He removes it carefully.

CHAOXIANG

Check the cage for damage. Then we
prep the capacitors for another
run.

Commotion from the bridge. A burst of gunfire is cut short.

Lights flicker. A capacitor explodes. BOOM. Emergency lights cast their earlie orange glow.

A sailor screams.

On the top deck above, we see a man covered in a dark liquid furiously rubbing his eyes. He runs blindly into the railing and topples to his doom.

Sliced in half by a guide cable, his torso impales on a set of fishing harpoons and his legs slide to a stop between Aiden and Klippies.

KLIPPIES

Jissus. I see you are busy. We'll
get out of your hair.

Chaoxiang plucks a gun and a taser from his body holsters.

CHAOXIANG

Our business is not concluded.
(in Cantonese)
It's alive, or you are dead.

The armed guards holster their weapons in favour of cattle prods and tasers. They scurry to search for the intruder.

A scream. A splash. Aiden and Klippies, whip around, frantic for answers.

Gunfire. What the hell is happening? Klippies brandishes his pocket-knife.

Nearby movement. A goon crawls from behind a heaped fishing net. He foams at the mouth. Is that a bite on his neck?

From nowhere, a blur of moving background whips out. A tentacle wraps around Chaoxiang's leg, and drags him to the edge.

He rolls the pearl towards HENCHMAN 1 and fires his taser into the shadow. The tentacle releases. There's a splash.

Chaoxiang jumps to his feet and hurries to the port edge. Ripples in the ocean. Chaoxiang orders Henchman 1.

CHAOXIANG (CONT'D)

Get it into the safe.

At starboard, a strained grunt emanates from HENCHMAN 2. He walks stiffly to HENCHMAN 1 and grabs for the pearl.

It drops and rolls past Aiden and Klippies to the pile of meth.

Henchman 2 follows, but the deckhand snaps it up first.

Suddenly, Henchman 2 leaps at the Deckhand with the sound of CRACKING OF BONES--jumping further than any human should.

Mid-air, Henchman 1 tasers him. Henchman 2 falls behind the pile of meth.

Klippies runs up to check his crystal.

Aiden runs to help the henchman behind the pile.

He is contorted. Legs at strange angles--dislocated joints, a broken tibia.

A careful observer might notice the scarred face of Henchman 2 looks older. A few wrinkles, a few grey hairs. Eyes-wide.

Smoke rises gently off him.

AIDEN

How strong is that taser?

A tentacle shoots through the starboard freeing port--this time wrapping around the deckhand. He is whipped off his feet. Aiden grabs for the boy. He misses.

Chaoxiang fires his taser at the boy. Aiden ducks back--barely avoids getting tasered. The deckhand is plucked closer to the edge. The electrodes bounce off the nothing but metal.

The tip of the tentacle feels around, like it has a life of its own. It searches for the pearl in the boy's hand. It touches the pearl and recoils with an air of disbelief. Prod-prod. It IS the pearl.

Another tentacle whips over the edge. It wraps around screaming young boy.

He seems doomed for a watery grave--scratching desperately at the smooth trawl slip with one hand.

Aiden plucks the knife from Klippies' grasp. He slides across the deck to grab the deckhand moments before he is dragged overboard.

Chaoxiang rushes for the pearl, snapping up a cattle prod.

Aiden stabs a tentacle. It releases, but tightens again.

CHAOXIANG

No! Grab it! Hold on.

Aiden ignores the order. He stabs the tentacles twice, three times. It releases.

Chaoxiang skids across the deck, seizes the pearl, and stabs the sparking prod through the freeing port. Too late.

Chaoxiang watches the camouflaged creature splash into the water.

The deckhand grips his saviour. RELIEF and APPRECIATION on his face.

Chaoxiang is furious. Tasers Aiden with cattle prod. Once. Twice. A third time. Flopping on the deck like a fresh-caught snoek, Aiden blacks out.

EXT. TRIAD TRAWLER - LATER

BLACK SCREEN. Muffled sounds.

KLIPPIES

I am sorry, Chaoxiang. It won't happen again.

CHAOXIANG

Your memory is short, Mr Klippies. This was the "again". Now there are consequences.

AIDEN'S POV: eyes flutter open. The bleeding lower-body is dragged through Aiden's line of sight. Intestines dangles from the ragged stomach cavity. Klippies and Chaoxiang come into hazy focus.

KLIPPIES

Oh, shit. He's waking up.

Klippies crouches on his haunches next to Aiden.

He rummages in Aiden's pockets. Takes back his phone. Taps Aiden on the forehead with it.

KLIPPIES (CONT'D)

Sorry, buddy. This is not a great day for you.

Chaoxiang tasers Aiden again. BLACK.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - NIGHT

BLACK. Splash. Bubbles. Underwater Ambiance.

We see dissipating ripples.

Beat.

Clawing at the ocean, Aiden breaks the surface. Coughing. Gasping.

The boats are leaving.

Aiden screams after Klippies.

He swims frantically to the departing fishing boat.

AIDEN

Klippies! You fucking asshole!

KLIPPIES

Eish, China. Fishing is dangerous.
Accidents happen all the time.

The boat and trawler disappear into the night.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - LATER

Aiden swims on his back, like a frog. Alone, teeth chattering.

AIDEN

No. No. No. Stay warm. Stay warm.
Think warm thoughts. Swim.

(beat)

No-one's coming.

(beat)

For a fucking phone, you IDIOT!

He sob-giggles nervously. So cold. The Milky Way above him is stunningly bright.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Don't see that in the city.

(beat)

I CAN'T FUCKING BELIEVE THIS!

(beat)

Stay positive. Stay positive. Think warm... At least my money troubles are over. HA!... Don't have to worry about passing any more exams...

(beat)

Wanted to be a marine scientist to spend the rest of my life in the ocean. Check on that one.

(beat)

Getting laid? Never gonna happen.

(beat)

I'm going to be missing toilet-wank guy, FOREVER! FUCK!

Aiden checks the Southern Cross.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
South. Check. So cold. SWIM! Swim.
Swim.

Beat.

Hypothermia kicks in.

Aiden loses consciousness. He dips below the surface and splutters back.

Something bumps against him.

A fin in the darkness. It's a gigantic shark.

Aiden shouts at the heavens.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
It couldn't just be a peaceful
drowning? Could it? YOU ASSHOLE!

The shark turns and speeds up.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry! I didn't mean it!

Somewhere deep below: a quick, bright, flash. The shark shoots past, slamming into Aiden in its haste to get away.

It disappears into the night.

For a moment Aiden rejoices.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
Jesus! Ha, H--

Then something tugs on his leg.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
Nope.

It pulls him under. He flails back to the surface. Gasps for breath. A glow beneath him gets brighter.

Something attacks Aiden mercilessly. Aiden struggles as he is pulled deeper and deeper from the starlight.

Shimmering bioluminescent pulses light up plumes of blood bubbling through the churning water.

The light pulses explode into WHITE.

FADE TO WHITE

TENTACLES

EPISODE 2 - ENTANGLED

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I/E. DREAM SEQUENCE

OPEN ON WHITE: Fade in

MONTAGE: Incredible unspoilt underwater paradises flash past. Scenes of Pacific Ocean gods fuse seamlessly into the next.

-- Aiden is on an INCA THRONE. He is Viracocha, in full ceremonial garb.

He looks down at water splashing against his feet. It pulls back, revealing a sandy beach.

The water pulls back further and further from the beach. Fish flop on the sand. Is a tsunami coming?

-- Aiden is a Korean villager. The TOWN behind him indicates he is in ANCIENT KOREA.

Out to sea, a JAPANESE FLEET. Behind the boats a huge swell rolls in.

Villagers scream. Korean Aiden calmly picks up a large flopping fish from the sand.

-- When he gets up, he is covered in ancient Polynesian tattoos. He is Maui.

He walks from the beach into a POLYNESIAN VILLAGE. Revenant onlookers stop what they are doing.

Maui-Aiden offers the fish to a chieftain. He squeezes the shoulder of the chieftain as he walks past.

As he continues into the forest, he picks up a small white pebble and flicks it playfully into the air. Once, twice,

-- For a third time, the pebble flips over and over in the air and drops into a waiting palm.

The pebble is placed on a GO board.

Aiden is dressed as an ancient Chinese villager. He plays Go with a merchant. They are in a deep forest on a mountain-side above a river.

An onlooker, CHINESE WOODCUTTER WITH AN AXE, is mesmerised by the game.

The man rests his axe against a tree.

Timelapse: HANDLE ROTS and AXE RUSTS. Fungus sprouts from the tree. A vine grows into...

-- ...a coastal forest in CENTRAL AMERICA.

A celebratory procession follows Aiden, dressed as a young Aztec man. PRIESTS flank him and the CROWD carry effigies of Chalchiuhtlatonal.

They reach the shore, where Aztec Aiden smiles at a crying WOMAN (mother). Behind them, Aztec temples rise from the forest canopy.

Aztec Aiden walks into the ocean. Waist deep he is violently plucked under. Plumes of blood churn.

-- Underwater, dark clouds of blood plume from the bleeding chest of a JAPANESE WOMAN (Tamatori-hime). She swims away from Aiden. A bright halfmoon of light shines from a cut under her breast.

EXT. KALK BAY HARBOUR - NIGHT

A bright halfmoon of light shines in/on the dark ocean. Suddenly, Aiden bursts through the surface and leaps out of the water like a dolphin.

He lands dexterously on the Kalk Bay harbour wall. His head lolls. Is he unconscious or dead?

His arms and legs flail like tentacles as he scuttles to the first shadow.

Between the streetlights, from shadow to shadow--every time Aiden enters the light, he walks like a different octopus. Shimmying on all fours. Prancing on tippy-toes like a Coconut Octopus.

There are people ahead. Aiden's body flops from side-to-side as it looks for cover that is nowhere to be found.

Moments before being discovered, the lights go out.

PEDESTRIAN 1 (O.S.)
Jirre. Loadshedding. Again?

There is a slithery popping sound in the darkness. Two human shadows pass, none the wiser.

EXT. SOUTH CHINA SEA - NIGHT

ROUGH SEAS. An ancient Chinese fishing boat capsizes in a storm. A FATHER AND THREE SONS, fight the churning ocean. Can anyone survive this?

Like a switch flipping, the weather seems calm around them. Miraculously, their boat slowly turns right-side up. A disembodied voice cries in Mandarin.

LIN MO'S MOTHER (V.O.)
Lin Mo! Lin Mo! Wake up.

The boat strains. Weather turns.

LIN MO'S MOTHER (V.O.)
Lin Mo!

Lightning strikes the boat; It shatters the hull and breaks the mast. TIM-BER. The mast plunges with deadly accuracy onto the four men.

INT. ANCIENT CHINESE VILLAGE HOUSE - DAY

AIDEN wakes up in an epileptic fit. He wears a RED DRESS. He is in a CHINESE ROOM, in a small seaside village. He turns to a CRYING CHINESE WOMAN. Replies in perfect Mandarin.

AIDEN
Why? I almost had them!

Distraught, Aiden runs from the house.

EXT. ANCIENT CHINESE VILLAGE HOUSE - DAY

Outside in the storm, Aiden morphs into a young, Chinese woman LIN MO--destined to become the Ocean Goddess MAZU. She dashes to the cliff edge to see two of her brothers struggling to shore on wreckage.

The body of her father between them. One brother missing. Lin Mo breaks. She suffers another seizure. Her mother arrives, villagers in tow. She hugs her daughter.

LIN MO
Why did you bring me back?

VILLAGER 1
Look!

Surprised to see the men far below the cliff, they scramble to help. In the water a snaking bioluminescent swirl looks faintly familiar? Is that a Chinese sea dragon?

LIN MO
I could have saved them.
(pensive)
I can save them. All of them.

LIN MO tears herself from her mother's embrace. She storms to the cliff and, without missing a stride, leaps to certain death. Shocked screams. The village is stunned.

AIDEN plunges to the swirling waves. A burst of impossibly bright bioluminescent light burns a column into the sky. As the afterimage fades... Aiden/Lin Mo is gone.

EXT. KALK BAY STREETS - NIGHT

Predawn. Aiden has his jacket hoody up, and he is still soaking wet. He walks more human-ish with every few steps-- like he is calibrating.

Just as he gets a good stride, he walks into a lamp-post. He spins and flails his body like a ragdoll until he catches his balance.

He takes a few more steps and walks into a stop sign. Again flails like a ragdoll.

A homeless man sleeping in a dark corner near the RESTAURANT wakes to the commotion.

Aiden recomposes. Beat. He takes two steps and walks solidly into a wall. Another ragdoll moment. Beat.

Aiden's arms swing up into the classic Frankenstein/Undead Mummy position. He takes a tentative step, feeling with his foot before taking the next tentative step.

HOMELESS MAN 1

My bru? You have some for me?

Aiden hops to attention, straight as a board. His eyes pop open, but the blank stare says no-one is home.

AIDEN'S POV: His vision is poor. Unfocussed. A blurry homeless man on cardboard boxes, sits upright.

Aiden coils closer to the man. His mouth pops open. Sound comes out, and his jaw flaps, but his lips don't move--like a possessed ventriloquist dummy.

AIDEN

Klippies? Where f-f-f-find
Klippies? N-n-n-Know?

HOMELESS MAN 1

The bottle store opens at 9.

AIDEN

NEED! ... Klippiieeeeees.

HOMELESS MAN 1
 Nay, man. Best I can do is a Paarl.
 You want 'n klein sopie?

Holds a bottle of Paarl Perle sweet white wine to Aiden.

AIDEN
 Want I? ... I... want... shiny
 balls.

The homeless man retracts his bottle protectively.

HOMELESS MAN 1
*Fok, my bru. Dis next-level blink
 gedrink.*

Without warning, Aiden runs backwards to the restaurant back door. He dexterously hops over obstacles, like he has eyes in the back of his head.

EXT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Aiden skids to a halt with his back to the door. He hops 180 degrees and caresses the door. He explores the edges of the frame, looking for gaps with his fingers. Beat.

Aiden tries the handle. Locked. Beat. He wiggles the handle furiously. Nothing.

Bangs a shoulder against the door. Nothing.

He pushes strongly. The door strains. PING! CRACK!

HOMELESS MAN 1
 No-no-no! *Voertsek!* You're going to
 trip the alarms. *Jy fok met MY*
spot, man!

EXT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN SECURITY CAMERA - CONTINUOUS

SECURITY CAMERA POV, NO SOUND. The homeless man shoo's Aiden away. He steps between Aiden and the door--gestures wildly as he shouts unheard abuse.

The barrage of insults halt. The homeless man seems dumbstruck. He raises both his hands in a desperate gesture that can only mean "whoa-whoa-jissis-stop".

He dives to the side. A SUZUKI JIMNY narrowly misses him as it flies past, and smashes through the restaurant door and wall.

A dust cloud obscures the security footage. It shorts out.

EXT. CORAL REEF - DAY

A hurricane churns the water. Lightning flashes. We don't see the speakers.

CEPHALOPOD 1 (O.S.)
YOU have NO respect for the decree!

Fish and seals and sharks escape the wrath of the voice. Aiden sits in a flurry, looking left and right from unseen speaker to unseen speaker.

BOB (O.S.)
The bond--

CEPHALOPOD 1 (O.S.)
They are not ready!

BOB (O.S.)
She is. She speaks to our mind. It is time to bring back the--

CEPHALOPOD 2 (O.S.)
We know about the others!

A tentacle flashes past in the angry waters. Aiden struggles to breathe.

CEPHALOPOD 3 (O.S.)
This is not the first time you have disregarded the warnings.

BOB (O.S.)
They can show us so many new things.

CEPHALOPOD 1 (O.S.)
Even now. Desiring new, new, new. Ignorant! They will use you to break our world.

Aiden tries to swim to the surface, but he is dragged down. Lightning hits the water.

INT. RESTAURANT FRED'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

ALARM blares. And orange light flashes in the dusty haze. In Fred's office, one hand rummages through papers. The other taps the keyboard. The computer is password protected.

The dust is thick. In the revolving orange light we see a whip-like silhouette. It sweeps through the dust.

Aiden's droopy-eyed, slack-jawed countenance flops into view.

AIDEN

Where Klippies... my fok?

Aiden looks up at the car partially jammed through the back door. The dust is sucked away and ALARM FADES. Aiden looks up at the KITCHEN LIGHTS flickering on. He looks down to reveal:

MEMORY:

POV from Fred's office door of PREVIOUS SCENE when we first met Klippies (Ep1 p7):

Aiden scrubs dishes. Anthony yells across the kitchen.

ANTHONY

Aiden! Glasses. Now!

Aiden drains the water. He places pint glasses carefully in the sink. Klippies pops his head through the backdoor.

KLIPPIES

Anthony around?

AIDEN

Yup.

PRESENT:

DUST billows, ALARM SOUNDS. We are back with the destroyed kitchen.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Anthony?

MEMORY:

POV from Fred's office door of PREVIOUS SCENE when Aiden gets fired.

ANTHONY

As long as he pays for it, he can damn well suck it like a harmonica and use the bones to comb his wife's hoo-haa! The customer is always right.

AIDEN

(mumbles)

You're such a cliché.

ANTHONY

Sorry, what was that?

AIDEN

Nothing. I told you I am not a waiter.

ANTHONY

No. I heard that. You calling me a cliché? Here's one! You're fired.

Everyone in the kitchen stares. Aiden looks awkward.

PRESENT:

DUST billows, ALARM SOUNDS. Rage boils over. Aiden grabs the PC monitor and hurls across the kitchen and through the door.

AIDEN

Too... Anger! Inside burns.

The haze gets disco. Red and blue flickers join the orange. It's a party out there.

With the SUZUKI jammed through the backdoor, the POLICE only have one route to rush into the kitchen: Through the clown-car.

They storm in... one-by-one, sliding from the car with riot shields and guns high.

One, two,

Three, four, five,

Six, seven, eight, nine, ten

They take up positions...

Behind them, ADT SECURITY GUARDS pile in. 10 more follow.

A security guard stops the alarm.

The kitchen is empty. A lone cricket: Crick-crick

A shattering of glass draws twenty synchronised gazes to the restaurant lounge.

A splash.

INT. WHITE VOID

In the white void. Cosy, watery echoes. Bubbles pop, hiss. Every sound has an echoing psychedelic edge.

Barely perceptible rainbow auras dance through the void, like living liquid.

Countless shimmering strings of energy stretch from every molecule of matter into a vast eternity. The strings congeal into something that feels like the suggestion of scenery.

Sand. Rocks. A Beach.

In the middle stands Aiden. He strains to see the tips of the shimmering lines. They become swirling vines.

The closer he looks, the more it seems like every string ends in a miniscule tentacle. A writhing fractal geometry of coiling tentacles in a churn of colour that repeats endlessly, like a kaleidoscope trapped between two mirrors.

The environment morphs into a surrealistic Incan version of Kalk Bay beach. The train tracks resemble Cumbe Mayo, an Inca aqueduct. The mountain is a towering ziggurat.

A warping surrealist painting, that inches ever closer to reality. Actual Kalk Bay buildings materialise but some have Japanese roofs, another sports a Polynesian thatch.

A LIGHT-HEARTED GIGGLE echoes through the void. Suddenly, the churn of colour settles into a solid place.

EXT. KALK BAY BEACH - DAY

From Aiden's POV: The sun speeds across the sky--six seconds to every hour. On the beach, a YOUNG FELIX, healthy and strong, tosses a FOAM TENNIS BALL at Aiden.

We see 3-year-old Aiden. The ball arcs slowly between his outstretched arms. He misses by a mile.

The easiest possible catch concludes as a SHIMMERING TIDE STONE plops onto the sand between Aiden's feet.

FELIX

(proudly)

Aiden is going to be a top notch fisherman! He will rule the seas.

LETTIE

What makes you think he'll follow in your footsteps?

Aiden bends to pick up the Tide Stone, but rises with a PRETTY SHELL instead. It's far more interesting.

He wanders to the water to wash it.

FELIX

Because... He is abso-freaking-lutely not going to be a cricket player.

In the BACKGROUND, it's the Kalk Bay railway bridge, but many of the buildings look Japanese.

At the water's edge, a mix of JAPANESE and SOUTH AFRICAN KIDS harass a HUGE SEA-TURTLE. They try to flip it over. Ancient Japanese fisherman, URASHIMA, hurries over to stop them. He look strikingly like his comic book version from Ep 1.

URASHIMA

Yamete!
(gruffly)
Yamero!

The turtle crashes onto its back. Kids scatter with mocking laughter.

URASHIMA (CONT'D)

Urusai gaki-domo!

Toddler Aiden and Urashima lock eyes for a moment. Urashima gets to the business of flipping the turtle back. Aiden hurries over to help. Together, they watch the turtle swim away.

Aiden rinses his shell.

When he looks up, BAM! 17-year-old Aiden is centimetres from his face, staring back.

Like rotating on the axis of a mirror through time, we...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. AIDEN'S ROOM - MORNING

Aiden stands in front of the mirror. In some other teen movie, he would be giving himself a pep-talk or telling himself off. Instead, he's out cold.

He stares sightless at his limp countenance. Did he have a stroke? Because he drools like a brain damaged boerboel. Beat.

The wet whip of a thick tentacle slaps him awake.

CONFUSED. Is he dead? Why is he dressed for school? How did he get here?

He checks the view from his window. Is it actual Kalk Bay, or is it some alien hallucination?

His ordinarily perfect room is an absolute mess. Clothes everywhere. He picks up a Science Olympiad Trophy and puts it on its designated spot.

An overturned laundry basket spills from the closet. Aiden picks up used underwear from the floor. His face screws-up. Why the awful taste in his mouth?

INT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Scrambled eggs are scraped around in a pan. A toaster pops. Lettie yawns at the stove.

Distrustful of reality, Aiden looks around the apartment. He pokes his mom. Is she real? She looks real?

LETTIE

Stoppit.

(sees the confusion)

Ja. That's what happens when you don't sleep.

AIDEN

When did I get in?

LETTIE

Too late.

Aiden picks up the toast and scrambled eggs.

AIDEN

Oh, woah, that's salty, Mom.

LETTIE

Jissis. Criticising without even tasting. That's the last time I worry about you.

Aiden sees the kitchen clock. Pats his pockets. NO PHONE.

AIDEN

SHIT! My alarm. I'm going to miss the train.

Aiden abandons breakfast. Grabs his bag.

Lettie tastes the eggs--way too salty. She eyes the rubbish bin. The door slams.

Lettie gazes at Felix sleeping the armchair, still cradling the brandy. Thinly veiled disgust paints Lettie's face. She sprinkles even more salt onto the eggs.

LETTIE

OI! Your breakfast is ready.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Break time. Xolani and Aiden eat sandwiches under a tree. Rudy waves from afar. He is ecstatic to be replaced as #1 target for humiliation. Gives his flexed bicep a dainty squeeze.

RUDY

Hey! Ejaculaiden! My man! Looking buff.

AIDEN

I... the stress of it all is maybe getting to me.

(beat)

I dreamt I died last night. Proper murdered by Shane's reject cousin.

(beat)

And instead of going to heaven or hell, I went to, like, China?

(beat)

And I was a girl! I totally spoke Mandarin, and shit. And then...

(beat)

I committed suicide by jumping off a cliff.

XOLANI

That's a lot to unpack.

AIDEN

I know, right!?

XOLANI

You're... safe, though? Not thinking of... ?

AIDEN

What? Oh, no. It's fine. Just a dream. I think it was that manga with the turtle-guy. Must've gotten stuck in my subconscious.

XOLANI

Urashima? That's not Chinese. It's like a Rip van Winkel story. Falls asleep. Wakes up centuries later.

(bite, chew)

Only with Urashima, the turtle was the daughter of an ocean god, and she takes him to an underwater palace for three days.

(swallow)

But when he gets back to the surface, it's 300 years later. Then he opens this, like, Pandora's box she told him never to open and he gets old and dies. It's Japanese, though.

(bite)

Chinese version is different.

(chewing)

About a woodcutter who gets distracted by the gods playing a game. And when he wakes up he's all like "Why is my brand new axe all rotten wood?"

FLASHBACK: Aiden remembers the stone placed on a Go board. Fungus growing out of a rotting axe.

RRRRRRING - Break over.

XOLANI (CONT'D)

Here we go. Make-up test.

AIDEN

That's NOT today!? Crap, crap, crap. I didn't study. Oh, the scholarship? No! Stoppit! Positive thoughts, Aiden!

Xolani grabs Aiden's shoulders, looks into his eyes, and inhales deeply. Aiden follows. Breath, hold, exhale. Breath, hold...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE LAB - DAY

Aiden stares at the sheet. EXHALES WITH A SIGH. Lisa writes furiously.

Xolani smiles his best "you can do it" smile. Two thumbs up.

Even Shane looks like he is prepared. Eish.

Aiden knows he is doomed--fiddles with the paper. Looks at the clock. And first question--a complicated organic chemistry equation.

Muffled whispers, like inaudible voices. Aiden raises an eyebrow. Surprised. Does he actually know the answer? He snaps up a pen. It's go time!

The long hand on the clock spins. 90 minutes.

Mrs Mills collects the answer sheets from each row. Aiden sighs. He doesn't look confident as he hands over his paper.

MRS MILLS

Looks like it went better?

AIDEN

I... wrote some stuff? Don't know.

STUDENT 1

Ma'am, can we get the answers? The stress of waiting for results is a trigger for me.

SHANE

Me, too. I identify as a trigger warning.

MRS MILLS

Oooooh... so close. Just for that, you'll have to wait until next week. You know how I feel about--

STUDENT CHORUS

Trigger warnings are a myth that reinforces the false belief that trauma is a part of your identity. You are not your trauma. Talk about it.

MRS MILLS

Will you look at that. I guess repeating things like a parrot works. Okay. You get one.

STUDENT 1

The bacteria picture.

Mrs Mills flips through slides on the projector - stops at different types of plankton. Looks around the room. Some hands shoot up.

Whispers echo in Aiden's mind. In ten different languages!

LISA
Zooplankton.

AIDEN
(Mandarin)
But, that...
(English)
is holoplankton. Weak swimmers.
They stay plankton for their entire
lifecycle... and phytoplankton,
photosynthesising micro-algae on
the left. And meroplankton, bottom.
Crab and lobster in larval phase...
I think.

Mrs Mills checks her book. Lisa nods in agreement. Glad to see Aiden is studying again.

MRS MILLS
Getting back on track, Aiden! Well done.

SHANE
That's not the only thing he does well. Né, Etterblaps!

Laughter. Aiden sinks in his chair.

Mental whispers echo over each other. "Smite the insolent ape!" "oooh, that's new." "I'm kinda hungry." Rainbow auras-- a psychedelic edge--it bleeds off the fringes of every object in class.

Aiden's heart races. Tinnitus buzz. The students morph into the sea creatures they most resemble. Potato bass for the gentle giant in the back. Skinny girl faffing with her pencils becomes a cleaner shrimp. Jarod, a laughing hammerhead shark.

Desks branch into corals and seaweed. Lisa, a flamboyant MANDARIN GOLPI in a school uniform leans over.

LISA
Are you okay?

Mrs Mills, with the head of a PARROT FISH. Crunches a big bite from a piece of coral.

There's a terrible taste in Aiden's mouth.

BOB (O.S.)
Oh, shit.

SILENCE. Everything looks absolutely normal. Mrs Mills, concerned, chews on a rice-cracker. Aiden sees Lisa. He claws himself from the verge of a panic attack. Gets up, abruptly. Confused.

AIDEN

Can I? I just need to wash my face?

MRS MILLS

Sure. Take all the time you need.

She cracks an encouraging smile as Aiden rushes past.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL BATHROOM - DAY

Aiden vomits in the sink. Rinses his mouth. Deep breaths. The BELL RINGS.

He wanders to the urinal. Unzips. Instead of a penis, an octopus tentacle flops from his pants. WHAT? Is he still hallucinating? It plucks itself back.

0 to MANIC. Aiden tears at his zip, fumbles his belt open, pulls pants and underpants to his ankles.

Through his legs, we see his upside-down face DESPERATELY INSPECTING his junk. Behind him feet round the corner. [Framed by Aiden's legs--a dangling testicle silhouette hangs where Shane's head is supposed to be.] Jarod chokes on his cream soda vape.

They catch Aiden squarely with his dick in his hand.

SHANE

Hey everybody! Ejaculaiden is at it again.

Aiden, fumbles to get his pants back up and trips himself. It's Operation Face-plant. Target: the urinal... as we...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. AIDEN'S ROOM - DAY

Aiden hits the bed face-first. He rolls to his side and we see a BIG bump on his forehead, a swollen, black eye, purple cheek and a angry, stitched cut on the eyebrow. Eina.

He sniffs a dark T-shirt on the bed before a lacklustre attempt to get out of his school uniform.

He sees himself in the mirror. Does he look way more buff? Is he wearing some kind of suit that makes his torso look bigger? He flexes his bicep. It does look too big.

AIDEN

What the...? Did someone spike me?

FLASHBACK: SNARF in the dark. Klippies wipes his nose.

Aiden shakes his head, confused.

FLASHBACK: For a moment, Aiden's stands in the CLASSROOM aquarium hallucination. Xolani--a turtle--winks at him with two thumbs up.

NOTE ON BOB'S VOICE: For ease of recognition Bob's English voice is the same as Maui--Maori accent

BOB

Yeaaah... sorry about that. Got lost in a thought there for a moment.

Aiden looks around his room.

AIDEN

Where the--

BOB

In my defence... you were definitely going to die. Like one hundred percent. Dead.

Aiden screams. Bob muffles him with a wet slap. A tentacle mohawk stretches from his chin to the nape of his neck.

The pulsating suckers are way too lippy for Aiden's comfort. The tentacles move--camouflaged against Aiden's skin, we see coils shifting around his arms and legs.

What was that sound? Feet in the hall?

LETTIE (O.S.)

Aiden?

The door handle turns.

Lettie, concerned, bursts into an empty room. That's odd.

LETTIE (CONT'D)

Aiden? Are you...? Aiden?

We see a barely noticeable irregularity--corner of the ceiling--above the bed.

It's like seeing one of those 3D side-walk sketches from the wrong angle. Is that a bruised eye? Hovering in mid-air?

Lettie looks around. No-one? Surely that was a scream? She leaves.

LETTIE (CONT'D)

Felix?

The door closes and we hear muffled voices.

LETTIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Did you see Aiden leave?

FELIX (O.S.)

No. But, the principle just called for a meeting. I think he's avoiding us.

The corner of the room churns like liquid as Bob shifts position.

Aiden's muffled face appears. His frantic eyes flutter. Is he passing out?

BOB

I'm gonna let you...ooh... that's tingly.

Popping like stepping on bubble-wrap. The camouflage in the corner transforms into a limp Aiden wrapped in the mantle of a gigantic octopus-like creature.

Bob and the boy drop face first onto the bed. We see the multi-coloured, bioluminescent octopus in his natural state covering Aiden like a wet blanket. Aiden gasps awake.

BOB (CONT'D)

Ooh-Wee... Forgot for a moment you are breathing for the both of us. Breath. Deeply. Please.

Aiden looks up. How? Was I just stuck to the ceiling? Urgent whisper. Spit flies.

AIDEN

That wasn't a fucking hallucination.

The tip of a tentacle gently strokes Aiden's hair.

BOB

Shhhhhhh. There, there. Another
deeeep breath. Speak in your head.
In your head. I am already there.

In the mirror, Aiden sees tentacles unfurl. Gawks over his
shoulder. OMG. It's totally there in real life.

AIDEN

How... Dear baby Jesus. I--

An epic FREAK-OUT is about to drop.

EXT. BEACH OF A VOLCANIC ISLAND - MAGIC HOUR

WHITE: Aiden's feet on white sand. He is alone on white sand.

The scene unfolds like a painting as more textures are added.
White sand stretches to coconut trees. A smoking volcano in
the distance.

An attractive Chinese woman with clinging wet clothes walks
from the water. We have met her as LIN MO, now she is MAZU
the Chinese goddess of the sea.

Aiden, speechless, gawks at the scenery.

MAZU

(in Mandarin)

It's... like... a memory. You are
the first in a long time. But you
are not the first.

He sneaks a sideways glance at Mazu, a goddess in the GQ
centrefold sense.

AIDEN

(in Mandarin)

I died, didn't I? This is the
afterlife. I knew it!

Touches his mouth. How am I speaking Mandarin?

MAZU

No. You *almost* died. But not quite.
I saved your life. Now, I need your
help.

Mazu holds a shiny TIDE STONE (20CM PEARL) in both her hands.
Aiden can't help but notice her nipples on either side. He
swallows. A tentacle from behind Mazu's back appears with
another Tide Stone.

MAZU (CONT'D)

They have something I have been looking for, for a very long time. And you are the reason I don't have it right now... so you are going to help me get--

Mazu sees Aiden is distracted. She catches his sneaky peek at her breasts. Mazu sighs and rolls her eyes to Aiden's embarrassment.

AIDEN

(shy)

I'm 17! I can't help it.

MAZU

I am MAZU! Goddess of the seas. I deserve some RESPECT!

Punctuating the sentence, Mazu kicks Aiden in the testicles triggering, quick, violent backflashes: -- Memories of Klippies -- abalone -- tik -- Tide Stone rolls across the deck -- Aiden stabs tentacles -- tazer -- Chiaoxiang -- overboard -- shark -- Bob attacks -- bright light.

INT. AIDEN'S ROOM - DAY

Aiden vomits in his waste paper basket. Crawling to the bed, he wipes his mouth with a shirt and tosses it to the overturned laundry basket.

AIDEN

Ugh. That actually happened? They totally murdered me.

He looks in the mirror and sees Bob in human form as MAUI, an impressive tattooed Polynesian man. *Maui will be Aiden's companion--a mental projection.* In the reflection behind Maui we see the volcanic island.

MAUI

(in Maori)

This is maybe a bit easier. Just for the moment.

He winks suggestively. In a thick Maori accent:

MAUI (CONT'D)

You wouldn't have any feelings about this fella, would ya?

Maui flexes and kisses his own tattooed bicep.

The room whips through a 180 degree arc--pivoting on the edge of the mirror as we drop into the reflexion.

EXT. BEACH OF A VOLCANIC ISLAND - MAGIC HOUR

We arc around Maui to see Aiden standing before him on the beach. Maui clears his throat and tries to be all stately and powerful. His deep voice booms authority.

MAUI

My species, and your species share a complicated history. In this form I was known as MAUI.

(echoes)

Long ago, we worked together in a true symbiosis. But you humans grew angry at nature.

A comet streaks overhead. Aiden gawks at the sky.

AIDEN

You're an alien?

MAUI

(drops the stately act)

No, damnit. That's the comet that nearly wiped out your ancestors. You are not the first species to evolve sentience on this planet. You are just the last.

(to himself)

Ugh. We used to be gods, for gods sake.

(smile)

Well... I was hoping to do this with a bit more decorum. But here we are. And I think you

(forehead poke)

and I both know that we are some ways past doing things with dignity.

(flicks Aiden's nuts)

Maui takes Aiden by the shoulders with an encouraging smile.

MAUI (CONT'D)

Hey fella, look at me.

Maui slaps Aiden hard. His smile is now an eager grin.

MAUI (CONT'D)

You need to trust me. This is going to hurt.

DOWNLOAD MONTAGE:

A quick-fire data-dump assaults Aiden's mind. Like being riddled by an AK-47, Aiden convulses as *The Big Bang Theory* title sequence speeds into his mind - Birth of the planet, volcanos explode, evolution from bacteria to massive underwater dinosaurs--Jellyfish, Octopuses, Creature Crawl from the Oceans, Dinosaurs, Human Pre-history, Ice Ages, Warming Periods

MONTAGE PAUSE:

EXT. ANCIENT UNDERWATER CITY - DAY

An underwater volcano spews lava. Pipes run to a monumental underwater construction--an ancient, yet futuristic Atlantean-style city.

INT. ANCIENT UNDERWATER CITY - DAY

In a laboratory with a moon pool at the centre, humans with cephalopods attached to their backs work dexterously, hands and tentacles in harmony. Incomprehensible technologies are at work.

WOMAN 1 with arms wrapped in tentacles swings a massive hammer at a frail, empty, glass sphere. The thick handle snaps, but the orb is untouched.

Above a workbench, a heavy stone door slides open on a machine in a wall. Steam escapes with a hiss. It dissipates revealing a DULL ORB. Blacksmith tongs grip it.

Two pedestals coated in glowing runes stand next to the moon pool. One pedestal already holds another DULL ORB. The new orb is placed on the second pedestal.

A man and woman each dip a bucket into the pool. Nervous energy. Everyone stops to watch.

Their tentacles take the buckets and decant water onto both orbs. Bolts of lighting crackle between the pedestals. Onlookers shield their eyes. When they look again, the two orbs glow iridescent. Excitement in the room.

The woman sets her bucket aside and steps between the pedestals. Her tentacles reach out to caress both orbs. An airy hum, like listening to a shell, fills the room.

An earthquake hits. The tentacles work the orbs. The shaking subsides. From the moon pool a sphere of water rises into the air. A cheer erupts.

WOMAN 1

The Tide Stones are entangled! We
are free.

DOWNLOAD MONTAGE CONTINUES:

MACHU PICHU: Cephalopods fly in for a mountain holiday.
EGYPT: Symbiotic creatures direct floating blocks at the
construction of the pyramids... an interstellar Tide Stone
amplifier. EASTER ISLAND: statues with gigantic bodies float
into place. Lightning. A comet burns through the atmosphere.
Explosion. Great floods.

MONTAGE PAUSE:

EXT. UNDERWATER RUINS - DAY

Cataclysmic clouds boil over the ocean.

Many cephalopods hold a meeting in the ruins of an underwater
city.

CEPHALOPOD 1

Too many of us have died. This is
not only their catastrophe.

BOB

But we are so much stronger when we
work together.

CEPHALOPOD 2

IF their species survives, we can
discuss the bond, again.

CEPHALOPOD 1

You have seen the ones that are
left. They are... too angry.

CEPHALOPOD 2

No. They ARE unfit.

CEPHALOPOD 3

It is impossible to control the
stones if the bond is corrupted by
useless emotions like anger.

BOB

The results are erratic, but they
need--

CEPHALOPOD 2

The bond is forbidden!

Lightning strikes the ocean above. An abundance of marine fishes can be seen in the water column.

INT. AIDEN'S ROOM - DAY

Aiden's eyes roll back and he foams at the corner of his mouth.

DOWNLOAD MONTAGE CONTINUES:

Ice Age. A small group of humans trek through a blizzard. Images from human history: ancient civilisations rise and fall. From hiding in caves, defending villages, [fighting nature for survival, building barriers against nature].

Emaciated man hunting food vs a trophy wall packed with animal heads.

Tending the wild--gathering wild food vs destroying ecosystems for agriculture.

Tree-stumps stretch as far as the eye can see; a Redwood falls. A wooden beam is hoisted into place in the frame of multistorey building. Around it the San Francisco city-scape sprouts. The city burns. The forest burns.

Pollution, mines, industry, swarms insects, swarms of birds. Pesticides, dying insects and birds squirm on a dirt road.

Chemical warfare, WWI, chemicals dumped in the ocean, dead fish, burning Amazon forest...

Beat. A cow in a pasture says "moooooooooo".

A nuclear explosion. A salvo of nuclear tests around the planet. Bob's people send a signal into space. They get a response. Bob's people leave -- BOB'S POV as he drops from space.

Floating plastics, massive nets, collapsing glacier, bleaching coral, marine animals choking on plastic, fishermen discarding gear in the ocean, bird skeletons filled with plastic.

A storm brews. Lightning strikes. In the water column, there are no more fish. A wrapper for fish-cakes floats by.

END DOWNLOAD MONTAGE.

INT. AIDEN'S ROOM - DAY

Aiden stumbles a few steps as he mumbles, dazed.

AIDEN

I mind lookey I thhhh-inkey? It
hats clean boo-boo hadeda. Mooooo.

Aiden frowns directly at the camera. One eye twitches uncontrollably. He looks closer, like he sees the audience watching him. Aiden looks behind him. Are you looking at something behind him? No.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

That was too...

Breaking the 4th wall, he looks around your house, through the screen.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

...much?

He drops like a rock. Aiden flops on the floor. It's a seizure. He foams at the mouth.

BLACK SCREEN. Silence.

MORE BLACK Tinnitus buzz.

BOB (O.S.)

(muffled)

Come-on buddy. Peek-a-boo.

Wiggling slits of light jet across the darkness. Aiden is being shaken awake. The slits expand to show an arial POV view of Aiden's floor and bed. The shaking stops.

BOB (CONT'D)

There we go!

Aiden, drenched in sweat, raises his head.

BOB (CONT'D)

Sorry about that. I forget--you
humans and the whole one brain
thing.

In the mirror, Aiden sees himself dangle from tentacles attached to the walls and ceiling. Bob's square-pupil looks over his shoulder.

BOB (CONT'D)

Hi, I'm Bob. ... What? It's a fine
traditional name for a body
language species.

AIDEN

What the fuck, Bob?

BOB

Could've been FLOAT. Imagine!
Still, it's nowhere near as awkward
as introducing cousin Squirt to
your girlfriend.

AIDEN (V.O.)

THAT'S NOT WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT!
There's an octopus stuck to my
back! Put me down!

Bob sits Aiden down on the bed.

BOB

Listen, kid, I know. This is a lot.
But our two species working
together; It's a beautiful thing,
IF you're working with the right
kind of human.

(echoes)

And from what I can see in here,

(normal)

you're one of the good ones. What
do you say? You scratch my back,
and I'll, you know, gently massage
you as you fall asleep.

Aiden giggles like a school girl. He recoils in realisation.

AIDEN

Stoppit!

BOB

Aiden. Things are bad out there.
It's getting real lonely. You know
it is. You see it. It's more
garbage than fish at this point.
I... I can't take much more.

AIDEN

They... We... I... Ffff. I know.

BOB

That stone--it's the only way I can
find my people. Whatdayasay?

(beat)

I have a new home. Waiting out
there. Help me find it, and...

(cheeky)

I promise, I'll get all the way off
your back about it.

Aiden considers.

AIDEN

Bob, huh?

BOB

That's me.

AIDEN

Fighting international gangs? I'm not... I'm not great with taking risk.

BOB

Of course you are! You already tried risky, and...
 (puppeteers Aiden's lips)
 "by the way, thank you, Bob, for saving my life out there. I sure am glad I wasn't, you know, torn apart by a starving shark."

Aiden slaps the tentacle from his lips.

AIDEN

How long are you... riding me?

BOB

Riding? Never so crude! Imagine you're... wearing... you know... an independent sentient mind that interfaces between your brain and eight extra independently thinking and tasting limbs that are fused into your upper-spine.
 (sensually)
 Your going to LOOOOVE it.

Aiden cringes. Looks Bob in the eye.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - MORNING

Aiden plonks down at his desk. His wounds are almost gone. Students shuffle into class.

XOLANI

Aiden? Are you okay? Oooh, those stiches look... actually, they don't look too bad. Wow. Have you seen--

Aiden has murder in his eyes. He stares straight through Xolani. It's disconcerting. MR PETERS, their burley homeroom teacher marches through the door.

MR PETERS

Xolani... sit. Good morning,
people. I trust you won't burn the
school to the ground today.

Xolani waves as he tries to get Aiden's attention.

MR PETERS (CONT'D)

Although I am not a betting man, I
am sure you'll find something to--
XOLANI!

Xolani frowns. Why is Aiden being weird? He scrunches up a
page from his notebook.

MR PETERS (CONT'D)

Anyway, Miss Abrahams.

ABRAHAMS

Present

When Mr Peters looks down, Xolani tosses a ball of paper at
Aiden. It hits the target, but Aiden completely ignores it.

For Aiden, however, Maui is blocking the view.

MAUI

...then the pharaoh said, I kid you
not, he said "Well, we will just
tell them it was 20,000 slaves and
it took 20 years, and milk it for
the tourism." And he was absolutely
right. It toats worked. That's the
Greeks for ya. Believe just about
anything if it's presented in a
toga... Wow, classrooms have
changed quite a bit. Look at that
stupid cat; "Hang in there". I
mean, Squirt wasn't very happy when
they started carving little
pictures onto his hard work 10,000
years after he finished
construction. And when they
pillaged the capstones they reduced
the broadcast range to 17.4 Million
light years. Can't pierce the
fabric of reality without a
sharp... tip; Ya know? But, hey,
they reeeeaally figured out how to
squeeze blood out of rock, those
Egyptians. Talk about embracing
reduce, reuse, recycle as a
philosophy, am I right? No! Come
on! Aiden. Don't do this to me.

(MORE)

MAUI (CONT'D)

Don't leave me in the dark. Open
your eyes, mate. Look around. I
don't want to stare at the inside
of a jacket all d--

THUNK-THUNK-THUNK-THUNK-THUNK-THUNK Aiden knocks his own
forehead against the table. It echoes through a stunned
class.

MR PETERS

I said "Mister Florez"

The whole class stares.

XOLANI

He's going through some--

AIDEN

SHADDUP! For the love of God! SHUT
THE F--

The PA System sounds three electronic bells.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

The main school building seen from a distance. A crackling
voice echoes through the school.

SCHOOL SECRETARY (O.S.)

Can Aiden Florez please report to
the Principles office? ...That's
Aiden Florez to the Principles
office. Thank you.

ENTIRE CLASS (O.S.)

Oooooooooooooh!

A door slams.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

POV looks across the desk to the SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, a stern
woman. Behind her the self-righteous school COUNSELLOR/PT
TEACHER hovers with arms crossed.

PRINCIPAL

...and then the janitor had to help
get his pants back on, before
taking him to the nurse.
Unfortunately, the pictures were
already taken.

The POV swings to Aiden. He is distracted, but something registers.

AIDEN

Huh? What... pictures?

The POV swings back to the Principal--she looks nervously to the counsellor.

PRINCIPAL

You're not on X? The gram?

END POV. Felix's Adam's apple jumps as he swallows. He looks sober and somewhat overwhelmed. He even wears a tie.

AIDEN

I don't have a phone.

PRINCIPAL

That's perhaps for the best, then.
I would like you to remind yourself
that adversity builds resilient
adults. We all have things we have
to... get over... as we grow up.

COUNSELLOR

(at Felix)

I believe you understand why we had
to call you--

FELIX

Ja, ja, of course. Uh? But what do
you want me to do about it? It's
not like I'm holding his hand when
he... Uhm. You know?

COUNSELLOR

Well, set an example, for goodness
sake.

FELIX

Facedown in a urinal with his pants
on his ankles?

(sheepish)

Sounds about right, ja.

PRINCIPAL

This is more a matter of the public
nature of the... exposure. Although
Aiden's current bursary is
contingent on his academic
performance, the school board is
nervous... about the image of our
institution--

Aiden stares out the window. The Principle, Counsellor and Felix fade to a muffled blah-blah-blah.

BOB (V.O.)

...no, we need the element of surprise. Yes. Get back to that ship. Sneak aboard. Sink the mother-fucker. And get the Tide Stone. Pry it from that assholes cold dead hands. Oh, I can feeeel it. Aiden! There's so much anger in here. How do you keep it all so neatly bottled up?

AIDEN (V.O.)

Bob! Please. I am begging you. SHUT --- UP! I really need to focus. It's the Principle. This is important for my future!

Maui paces around the office, hyper. He flexes his hands, like Aiden's anger is giving him an adrenalin rush.

FELIX

...and I haven't perhaps set the best example...

AIDEN (V.O.)

And you are not sinking a ship!

MAUI

That's not me. That's all you. That's going on in your head! But what a good idea. It's so easy. First we must find it. My Tide Stone only connects when both stones are wet. They'll be waiting. And they'll have so many more weapons after last time. We need the element of surprise.

Maui grabs a potted plant. Like the final pose in the Haka, Maui sticks his tongue out and hurls the plant to the floor.

Aiden flinches. The Principle notices. The pot is still on the Principle's desk. Aiden shifts in his seat.

AIDEN (V.O.)

Klippies had a live location for the abalone drop.

Maui leans over, and sticks his fingers into Aiden's skull. Aiden cringes. FLASHBACK: Klippies unlocks his phone and shows Aiden the screen.

MAUI
You have history with this,
Klippies.

AIDEN (V.O.)
Stop reading my thoughts! Do you
have any idea how invasive that is.

Maui morphs into Lin Mo. Felix's voice is audible.

<p>LIN MO (alluring) Would it be easier for you if I were a female?</p>	<p>FELIX ...dealing with... <i>issues</i>... at home... and none of this would have escalated if I kept my mouth shut--</p>
---	---

AIDEN
(to Bob)
Fuck-off!

PRINCIPAL
Aiden! That's extremely rude. This
is serious.

AIDEN
I'm so sorry. I wasn't--

FELIX
He shouldn't have to--
(to Aiden)
You don't apologise to me. This is
not your fault.

Aiden sits up straight. He doesn't make eye-contact.

COUNSELLOR
Just expel him already. Dis net
dagga en draadtrek met hierdie
generasie.

The Principal gives the Counsellor a scathing look.

FELIX
Aiden's right. The "issues" at home
is me. I drink. It's just that we
lost the facto--
(beat)
Since my business closed Aiden has
had to grow up too fast. I haven't
been a great role model, or father,
the last couple of years.

PRINCIPAL

I understand. Thank you, for your
candour, Mr Florez.

(to Aiden)

Aiden, I do sympathize with your
situation. And Mrs Mills assures me
that you have improved,
drastically, despite everything.

The principal lifts a sheet of paper off the desk and hands
it to Aiden. It's the biology test. Written in red ink: a
smiley face "98% I knew you could do it! Well Done."

BOB

98%? There is no way. That's
offensive! Which one was it?
Show me. Show me. Show me.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

(muffled)

I am inclined to defer to her
advice on the matter. How did
she phrase it?

AIDEN (V.O.)

Bob! I swear, I will bathe you in
barrel of crude oil, if you don't
shut it, immediately!

PRINCIPAL

"It might be beneficial if you kept
your hands busy with something more
creative. And less procreative."

(beat)

You are to resume your duties with
the upcoming beach clean-up and
recycling drive. Which I am told
was instigated by you. And you will
be in charge of oversight of the
Grade 8-1 class--a humbling
experience, by all accounts.

COUNSELLOR

Any more of that two-cups-one-girl
funny-business and you can find
some other school to finish matric.
Little pervert.

Principal rolls her eyes. Felix and Aiden both shift
nervously.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PASSAGE - DAY

Aiden strides along the passage. Felix hurries to catch up.

FELIX

I really am--

AIDEN
Maybe later.

FELIX
That's fine.
(beat)
The coast guard brought my boat
back this morning. You wouldn't
know--

AIDEN
It's hardly my responsibility to
keep track of what you do when
you're drunk.

Felix is hurt. Aiden knows he's unfair, and thaws slightly.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
I have to get to class. I'll see
you at home... Dad.

Aiden leaves Felix behind.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

From a desk behind Shane, Aiden scans the room. Everyone's attention is on a Sex-Ed documentary on STDs and condom use.

ON PROJECTOR SCREEN: an attractive woman opens a condom wrapper ECU.

CHARACTER 1
Wrappers are made to open easily by
tearing from the jagged edge.

A camouflaged tentacle snakes from Aiden's trouser leg.

CHARACTER 1 (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You should never use your teeth to
open a condom. You may puncture the
latex and then it will break during
intercourse.

The tentacle reaches into Shane's bag. It snakes back up his leg with a phone.

Aiden unzips under the desk. The sound attracts a suspicious look from Rudy. He leans slightly forward to check under Aiden's desk.

Aiden pretends to scratch his neck and places both hands on the tabletop.

STUDENT 1

Ma'am, I think this documentary is more age-appropriate for grade 8.

The class laughs. Rudy loses interest.

ON PROJECTOR SCREEN: a hand pinches the top of the condom and slides it over a demonstration shaft.

There's movement in Aiden's crotch. It rises. Aiden shifts uncomfortably.

Shane's phone slides out. One last scan of the room. The coast is clear.

Aiden checks the oily streaks on the screen. It's an "S".

AIDEN (V.O.)

Shane, you're filthy. Ugh. And his initial? Super secure, moron.

He traces the pattern front to back. The phone unlocks. Aiden's face pulls like he tastes something awful.

AIDEN (V.O.)

That's horrible. It's like old cooking oil, and hair wax, and tomato sauce, and, and... it seems familiar. What is that?

BOB

Not bad, Aiden! But I would stop questioning while I'm ahead if I were you.

The phone browser opens on hardcore porn.

BOB (CONT'D)

Never mind.

Aiden dry heaves. He frantically wipes his finger on his clothes.

AIDEN (V.O.)

How do you go through life tasting everything you touch?

Aiden opens WhatsApp. Searches Klippies. Nothing. Uncle K.

BOB

Hey. YOU are the species that routinely poisons itself with its own food. So... yeah...

There's a group. Titled DELETE. An unread message: "When did you take that toilet picture you posted? Delete it. Delete this group."

Aiden types: "What's it to you?" Moments later Klippies replies "Delete it you little shit."

Aiden types: "Whatever. Fine. Can I come see you tonight? Where will you be?"

The video seems to be wrapping up. Aiden's nervous. Klippies types.

Xolani sees Aiden with the phone.

A message pops up: "The boys are celebrating up in Hangberg. I'll be at Ed's until 8. After that things are getting rough." Aiden deletes the messages and the group.

He pretends to stretch forward and drops the phone into Shane's bag. Xolani sees it.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Aiden marches through the school gate--a man on a mission. Xolani tries to catch up, but Aiden doesn't slow down.

XOLANI

Aiden? Aiden! What the hell?

Aiden barely registers that his friend is talking to him.

AIDEN

Huh, oh, Xolani. About earlier. That wasn't about you. It's... something else. My issues.

XOLANI

I'm worried, man.

Maui pops in over Xolani's shoulder.

MAUI

Tick-Tock, Aiden.

AIDEN

Can we maybe chat tomorrow?

MAUI

People won't understand.

AIDEN (V.O.)

This is my best friend.

XOLANI

I saw you toss a phone into Shane's bag? What's--

AIDEN

Another time. I have to be somewhere. Really. It's not you.

Aiden rushes off, leaving Xolani behind.

XOLANI

I know it's not me! I'm fucking perfect. Weirdo.

EXT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS - DAY

Aiden and Maui walk across the concrete playground in front of the Fishermen's Flats. A couple of police vehicles are parked in front.

EXT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS STAIRS - MOMENTS LATER

Karla, hungry for gossip, hovers near the open front door to the Florez's apartment. She sees Aiden approach and scuttles back into her apartment.

Through the crack in her door she whispers to Aiden.

KARLA

If they drag him off, you don't worry, okay. We'll make a plan.

Slam.

FELIX (O.S.)

Karla! Mind your own...

Felix gets to the door.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Aiden... Uhm. The police are here for you.

INT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Aiden peaks nervously through the door.

AIDEN (V.O.)

Bob?

BOB

I did nuffin'. You're the one
consorting with criminals on the
high seas.

Three uniformed officers and a couple of detectives stare at
Aiden.

AIDEN

Uh? How can I help?

DETECTIVE 1

Where were you on Thursday morning
at 4:23AM?

LETTIE

We already told you he was asleep
in bed.

DETECTIVE 1

Ma'am, I am not asking you.

AIDEN

Ja. I, I was. Asleep.

DETECTIVE 2

And were you involved in an
argument with one, Antonio Gallo,
earlier, on Wednesday evening?

AIDEN

Anthony? Why? What did that useless
coke addict say about me?

The detectives look at each other.

DETECTIVE 2

(whispers)

He was... jittery... wasn't he?

DETECTIVE 1

What was the argument about?

AIDEN

It wasn't an argument. He fired me
for getting flustered during the
dinner service.

(beat)

But HE forced me to waiter. I... I
just want to wash dishes. I'm good
at dishes. Ask Fred, the owner.
He's the one who gave me job in the
first place.

DETECTIVE 1
 So you had reason to drive a SUZUKI
 Jimny through the back wall of the
 restaurant.

AIDEN
 What?
 (V.O.)
 ...DID YOU DO, BOB?

Nervous giggle from Bob.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
 No... I can't drive. And why would
 I destroy the restaurant to get
 back at Anthony? That makes no
 sense.

DETECTIVE 2
 Which brings us to the next
 question. Do you own a grey hoodie?

AIDEN
 Of course! Do you own a grey
 hoodie?

Two of the uniformed officers nod even though they weren't
 asked.

DETECTIVE 2
 Yes, Well... that's not the point.

DETECTIVE 1
 I think we can leave this line of--

DETECTIVE 2
 But that's what he said.

DETECTIVE 1
 The drugs make sense, no?

DETECTIVE 2
 We still have to...

DETECTIVE 1
 Fine.

DETECTIVE 2
 Are you... Did you... Maybe let me
 just check.

Flips through note book. Reads:

DETECTIVE 2 (CONT'D)

"That Aiden! He did it. I am telling you. He is the fish demon that tried to suck the thoughts out of my brain. He was wearing a grey hoody. He's the one that smashed through my--"

DETECTIVE 1

For goodness sake. Did you attack Mr Gallo yesterday morning?

A nervous giggle from Aiden. HEARTBEAT and TINNITUS BUZZ slowly gets louder.

AIDEN

Oh. You're serious. No, no, uhm. I definitely did not.

(beat)

But Anthony has been funnelling seafood, illegal seafood, from a gang, a really dangerous gang, of poachers through the restaurant. For years. Fred doesn't know. If anyone wanted to hurt Anthony... well, I'd ask him about that.

The detectives get up, say their greetings. All we hear is the HEARTBEAT and TINNITUS BUZZ. Aiden shakes hands, nods, smiles, takes a business card. He looks nauseous.

INT. AIDEN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Door slams. Aiden paces.

AIDEN (V.O.)

We are done! Get off my back!

Maui with his hands up submissively.

MAUI

Take a breath. It's not that bad. Your having a little panic attack.

AIDEN (V.O.)

I have been helping you for one day, and you already destroyed my relationship with my best friend!

(hyperventilating)

And there are, what? Photos of me half naked with my face in a piss pot?

(MORE)

AIDEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And now I find out, while I was
 asleep, you crashed a car into the
 restaurant AND attacked Anthony.

MAUI
 I though it might be the quickest
 way to get to Klippies. I am sorry.
 I was planning to be gone before
 you even noticed I was there.

AIDEN (V.O.)
 GET OFF MY BACK!

MAUI
 Aiden! I haven't told you the
 entire story. I didn't want to
 alarm you. This is bigger than me
 getting back to my people.

AIDEN (V.O.)
 You lied to me, Bob. That's not how
 trust works.

Maui looks at a poster on Aiden's wall that reads "Save the Planet".

MAUI
 Aiden. I know you are angry. This
 is about saving the planet. The
 longer that stone is in human
 hands, the more danger we are all
 in.

INT. GERMAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM LAB 1943 - AFTERNOON

A Tide Stone, suspended in water, is hooked up to all sorts of wires and magnets. As we pull back through a portal on a sturdy brass tank, we see Aiden looking in.

BOB
 Once, your scientists studied my
 Tide Stone.

A comically vast host of microphones, antennas, prods, and mushroom-headed light bulbs aim, like a torrent of sperm, to penetrate the secrets of the brass egg. Men being men.

A hand plunges into the tank and pulls out the nucleus. A skittish GERMAN SCIENTIST disconnects the wires.

He stuffs the Tide Stone into a lunch box with a half-eaten sandwich and hides it in his leather briefcase.

Papers on his desk draw his attention. He picks up pages of calculations and nuclear diagrams. Markings read: "Streng Geheim" and "VS-Vertraulich". He sweeps his gaze over the desks, the instruments. It's all important.

A desk drawer slides open, revealing half a bottle of scotch and a potent schnapps.

Paper baskets filled with confidential, irreplicable research go up in flames under a couple of desks.

The scientist drenches as much paperwork as possible with the booze. He takes a last swig to calm his nerves before he flips open the gas taps on the Bunsen burners.

INT. GERMAN MILITARY FACILITY - HALL - CONTINUOUS

The scientist scampers down a hall. Oh, No! A couple of SS Officers in earnest discussion approach.

The scientist slows his hurried shuffle to a less-conspicuous walk. He greets with a half-committed "Heil Hitler" as they stride past.

He glances back. Did they notice? Fear paints his face. He clutches his briefcase to his chest... and runs.

One SS Officer frowns at the interaction. He turns to confront the scientist. What? Look at him go! Way down there, at the end of the hall the scientist skids around and corner and disappears.

The SS are only briefly confused before realisation dawns in slow-mo: A sudden bright light illuminates their faces. BOOOOM. The glow increases until everything is bright white. The SOUND of the explosion rolls over.

CUT TO WHITE:

INT. MANHATTAN PROJECT TEST BUNKER - DAWN

Continuous SOUND of the explosion. WHITE. White cloth texture. We pull back. The white is a star on an American flag on a bunker wall.

American generals, scientist, and men in suits gaze through a slit in the concrete of a shielded bunker. Round welding goggles and very dark sunglasses protect their eyes. An intense streak of light cuts across their faces. Beat.

Dark lenses on a pair of heavy-duty goggles reflect the atomic mushroom cloud outside.

The skittish GERMAN SCIENTIST lifts his goggles with a jittery hand.

He turns his horrified gaze to the DISTINGUISHED GENERALS who are, at this moment, shooting slow-motion finger guns at each other while laughing. Behind them two scientists chest bump.

QUICK MONTAGE:

- A hand snatches the Tide Stone from a lab. A leather briefcase snaps shut.

- Booze is poured across surfaces. A waste paper bin flames to life under a desk.

- Bunsen Burner taps are twisted open.

EXT. US MILITARY FACILITY 1944 - NIGHT

All is quiet. The GERMAN SCIENTIST scampers across the base like an incontinent chihuahua. He clutches his briefcase to his chest.

Behind him a building explodes.

Against the backdrop of boiling flames, the shuffling scamper is not exactly a heroic stride, but it will have to do.

EXT. BOAT IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC - DAY

From the beach of a tropical island, a boat can be seen. Tiny in the distance. On board, the German Scientist, dishevelled, with a beard and bloodshot eyes, chains the Tide Stone to a massive concrete block.

He cries as he tosses the keys in the water. His mourning is premature.

The block is too heavy for him. It's an incredible struggle. He uses his legs, but his arms are weak. The weight barely rises above his knees.

He drops it. Over and over. Can't get it up. He heaves and hoes.

Finally, he uses a paddle as lever to get it onto a crate. Manoeuvres it onto the edge. And finally drops it overboard.

He sinks to the deck and starts crying.

BOB (V.O.)
 Getting that stone back... it was
 like a weight had been lifted. But
 the damage was done.

Tentacles crawl over the side of the boat like it is about to
 ATTACK the scientist.

EXT. SOUTH PACIFIC: BIKINI ATOLL - DAY

MAUI and Aiden stand on the beach. Out over the lagoon, a
 column of radioactive water blasts a mushroom cloud into the
 heavens. The blast wave, like a tsunami, flattens palm trees
 and homes.

MAUI
 When your surface wars ended, you
 started a war with us. You
 destroyed our cities and poisoned
 our food.

EXT. UNDERWATER RUINS - DAY

A massive crater under the water. Aiden and Maui Stand on the
 edge. Shattered corals and the ruins of an ancient city
 surround it. Dead fish float by.

MAUI
 One stone. Look what humans have
 done with a fraction of its
 secrets.
 (beat)
 Now, you and I have a chance to get
 the other one to safety. Before
 humans can...
 (beat)
 ...well; let's just say with your
 modern technology, that stone is
 more than this planet can handle.

A mortally wounded crayfish drags itself from the crater on
 two remaining legs. Aiden sighs, depressed.

AIDEN
 For the planet?

MAUI
 It's the right thing, Aiden. Real
 action.

INT. AIDEN'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Black. Wardrobe doors open. Aiden, shirtless, peers in. Tentacles rummage to Aiden's annoyance. He slaps a tentacle that messes with his underwear.

From the top shelf, Aiden retrieves a couple of ratty old backpacks. Maui stands next to Aiden, staring down at the options on the bed. He doesn't look convinced.

AIDEN

Pick one.

Tentacles behind Aiden are digging through the closet, while another lifts one of the backpacks.

Maui considers it for a moment and tosses it aside. Bob swings a knitted children's bag into view. It's shaped like the back of a dragon with orange spikes running down the spine--adorable.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

That doesn't exactly scream "covert mission".

MAUI

Neither does passing out in the street. 30% of what we are breathing comes through my skin. In that plastic rubbish it will be all you. Besides... it's cute, don't you think? Reminds me of my time as Ao Guang, Dragon King of the East Sea.

PREP MONTAGE: Aiden looks for a shirt to ruin. Tentacles flail behind him as Bob works on the backpack with a carpet knife, slicing holes in the pack. Aiden cuts a hole in a shirt. Bob stretches it, but it tears.

AIDEN

No, man. There's only so many shirts I can turn into rags.

The door opens a crack. It's Lettie.

LETTIE

Aiden?

A tentacle lashes out and forces the door shut?

AIDEN

I, I... uh, am a little busy, Mom.

LETTIE
Who are you talking to?

AIDEN
Mumbling to myself. Nothing to
worry about.

Lettie releases the door handle.

INT. FISHERMEN'S FLATS - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Lettie wanders in. Felix pages through a book. He's sober for
a change.

LETTIE
I think he's at it again.

FELIX
It's that age.

LETTIE
Should we be worried? Does he have
a problem?

Aiden marches past in an old hoody and the dragon backpack.

AIDEN
Back later. Going to... look for
work. Bye.

He is out the door before they can even react.

FELIX
If he's that quick he might have,
yes.

LETTIE
It's time he starts doing his own
laundry.

EXT. CHAPMAN'S PEAK DRIVE - MAGIC HOUR

Aiden zips along Chapman's Peak Drive on a bicycle.

Tentacles wrapped around his legs supercharge every pedal.

The sun sets majestically over the ocean. Sentinel Peak is
silhouetted against the sky.

EXT. HOUT BAY HARBOUR - NIGHT

Aiden stops at the ruins of the fish meal factory. He looks up and down the street and pull his hoodie over his head.

Cycling further he passes Snoekies and turns up the street into the neighbourhood of Hangberg.

EXT. HANGBERG - NIGHT

From the concrete playground in Salamander Road, at the foot of Sentinel Peak, the view of the lights in Hout Bay below is mesmerizing.

A woman removes laundry from the playground fence. Locals amble home. Neighbours share gossip and a cigarette on the street.

As Aiden cycles up, they eye the stranger. Aiden, hoodie up, glances around nervously as he chains his bike to a fence post near Raj's Cash'n'Carry.

AIDEN (V.O.)

This isn't like Shane's greasy-ass phone screen. Klippies uses his fingerprint.

BOB (V.O.)

So we need his finger. Got it.

AIDEN

What? NO!

(V.O.)

We have to quietly swipe his phone right after he uses it. And keep it unlocked. Simple... I think.

Avoiding eye-contact with people on the street, he approaches Ed's GrillPit. It's an informal joint hidden among the wood and corrugated iron of the patchwork homes of Hangberg.

BOB (V.O.)

Leave it to me.

Aiden walks past the small restaurant. Raucous laughter spills into the night. Klippies, in a merry mood, hobbles down the steps. He taps his phone screen. Aiden scurries out of sight. Klippies shouts back into the joint.

KLIPPIES

Ja, get me another one. We're rich, my china. Tonight, it's gaan groot of gaan huis toe.

(MORE)

KLIPPIES (CONT'D)
 (puts phone to ear)
 Hey tottiekop, where the fuck are
 you? I told you *before* 8.

Aiden scrunches up his face.

AIDEN (V.O.)
 Shit-shit-shit. We're too late.
 Shane's going to tell him I'm
 alive.

KLIPPIES
 What do you mean, "What do you
 mean?"

Failure is imminent. Their opportunity may be squandered
 before they even get a chance to--

Tentacles lash out from Aiden's hiding spot. One snatches the
 phone while another shoves Klippies into the street.

BOB (V.O.)
 Run, Biped, Run!

Aiden hesitates for a moment. Klippies, livid, struggles to
 his feet. Aiden is off. Running up the mountain between the
 shacks. Klippies whips out a firearm and squeezes off a shot.
 People on the street dive for cover. His inebriated cronies
 pour out of Ed's.

KLIPPIES
 Some asshole just ripped me off!
 Kill him! Wait. No. Don't kill him.
 I want to kill him.

Aiden hustles between the shacks to get back to his bike.

AIDEN (V.O.)
 Whatever you do, don't let it lock.
 Just keep scrolling. This is not
 the best place to stop.

Bob scrolls an instagram/tiktok feed.

BOB (V.O.)
 Honestly, what's the fascination
 with these things anyway?
 (scrolls)
 Oooh... that is quite satisfying.
 Very smooth.

Aiden spots one of the poachers--KEAGAN from the abalone deal--
 running down Salamander Rd below. He waves a gun and shouts
 at bystanders. They gesture a hoody and point to his bicycle.

Aiden scurries back up the mountain and ducks behind a pile of rubble.

Suddenly a social media video starts playing at full volume on Klippies' phone.

AIDEN

Give it!

Tap-tap-tap. Aiden pauses the video. Goes to settings.

AIDEN (V.O.)

Where's the screen time-out? There.
Boom max. 10 minutes. That gives us
a--

Just as Aiden rises to run, a gunshot rings out. The phone flies from his hand. Three goons, Keagan, WILL and DYLAN approach fast.

Aiden hurries around the corner of a corrugated shack. He scans the ground. There it is--facedown on the floor. Aiden makes half an attempt to retrieve the phone, but more shots send him jumping for cover.

AIDEN

BOB?

Aiden's backpack splits open.

Keagan, the front-runner, gestures to Will to flank Aiden from the East. Keagan and Dylan hurry to where they last saw Aiden. Keagan spots movement from the corner of his eye.

Was that a phone zipping across the ground? Weapon held high, he searches the shadows. Nothing.

Behind him Aiden uncloaks.

Dylan suddenly sees his friend fly past. THUD--Keagan hits the wall of an abandoned ruin. He drops to the ground and stays there.

Dylan runs around the corner with nothing but a knife. Greeted by a monstrous silhouette, he screams like a little girl. It scares the daylights out of Aiden and Bob, who join in the scream. Bob's squirt reflex kick in.

Two more GOONS, PJ and DEAN, are hot on their heels, but they screech to a halt when Dylan, sightless, covered in ink, spitting in vain, stumbles towards them.

DYLAN

It's in my mouth. I can't see. It's disgusting.

PJ

Klippies! Over here!

Guns high they too rush to meet the intruders. Will arrives from the other side, trapping Aiden and Bob between them.

BOB (V.O.)

Close your eyes. NOW!

Bob's uncanny bioluminescence fires up. It's an explosion of light. A hundred meters away Klippies and his crew shield their eyes.

From Hout Bay Beach, the beam of light can be seen searing into the sky.

Aiden kicks PJ squarely in the gooleys. Bob hurls Will through a nearby shack. The occupants--a half-naked young couple--are in the process of condomising.

A wide-eyed woman with a condom wrapper between her teeth looks past her fella's rump at the carnage. Behind Aiden and his majestic tentacles (Hero-pose), a blinded Dean shuffles around with outstretched arms. The stunned woman spits the wrapper to the side.

Aiden, high on adrenalin, stares for a brief moment from the condom to the naked young man's junk.

AIDEN

Safety first. Good, good.

Klippies yells nearby--the gang is getting too close.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Time to pull out.

(runs away shouting)

You shouldn't use your teeth to open those. They can puncture.

Aiden darts up the Sentinel. Bob wraps around his legs to give him a boost. They dive into the fynbos to catch their breath.

Bob hands the phone to Aiden--Smoking bullet hole.

BOB (V.O.)

What do you think?

AIDEN

Lost cause. I have the worst luck
with phones.

BOB (V.O.)

No other choice then?

Flashlights and phone torches make their way up the Sentinel,
searching for the intruder--a modern-day monster hunting mob.

Aiden and Bob run up to the peak. It's a sheer overhanging
cliff that leans out to the ocean. Far below, the waves crash
on the rocks. Behind them the relentless search continues.

AIDEN

There is no way.

BOB (V.O.)

Trust me. I've been through worse.

KLIPPIES

Up there!

A shot rings out. Bob grabs the rocky outcrop, and catapults
them over the edge. Aiden screams.

They will surely hit the rocks beneath, but Bob wraps his
tentacles around Aiden's arms and legs and stretches his
mantel like a wing-suit to guide them into a high-speed
flight over the water.

Aiden's scream of terror transforms into whoop of pleasure.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - CONTINUOUS

Aiden and Bob swoop across the ocean. Aiden can see his
moonlit reflection. It's mesmerizing.

Then he hits the surface like a rock skipping across a pond.
Grunting with every hop. Hop-HOP---hop-hop-HOP-beat-plunge.

EXT. HANGBERG - MOMENTS LATER

Klippies, out of breath, clasping his side, reaches the peak.
There is no-one. No corpse below. What the hell is happening?

Dylan, gasping for breath, catches up. His phone's torch
shines on Klippies--livid--eyes darting as he calculates.

Klippies snatches the phone from Dylan.

The light illuminates Dylan's face. Klippies recoils in disgust. It's a horror-show.

KLIPPIES

Woah, jissus.

His ink-streaked lips and face are plump. His blood-shot eyes look ready to pop. His swollen tongue barely gets the syllables out.

DYLAN

Wha? Is i ba?

Klippies opts for a "no comment" shrug and dials a number.

Keagan and three more GOONS show up only to escalate Dylan's paranoia. They poke his lips. Will dry-heaves at the sight. Soon the crew pose for selfies with Dylan.

Klippies crouches at the edge of the cliff looking out over the water. Scheming, he sucks at his teeth. The call is answered.

KLIPPIES

Chaoxiang? Mister C? How much is
that thing you're looking for worth
to you?

Moonlight glistens on the dark ocean.

FADE TO BLACK

ESSAY/PROJECT COVER SHEET

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TOPIC or OPTION No.: Minor Dissertation: Screenplay
Tentacles: a Limited Series
DUE DATE: 4 January 2024
SUPERVISOR: Dr Ian-Malcolm Rijdsijk

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Date: 31 December 2023

***Tentacles*: a limited series—Ecocritical Screenwriting as Entertainment Education**

By Hein de Vries

Introduction:

Tentacles (2023) began as a core intention to write an environmentally themed screen story with educational ambitions. My original, limited series screen story comprises two screenplays of 52 minutes and a full-season story arc for eight episodes with the potential for further seasons. (See Appendix A for the full synopsis). It is a richly detailed, fictional eco-narrative anchored in environmental fact. *Tentacles* blends the popular genres of comedy, action, science fiction, superhero fiction, history, and mythology into an entertaining multimodal end-product intended for an audience of teenagers and young adults. By employing popular entertainment as a vehicle for an environmental message, I intend to reach an audience that would not actively seek out pro-environmental documentaries, like *Seaspiracy* (2021) or *Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet* (2021), or nature-centred arthouse productions, like Godfrey Reggio's *Qatsi Trilogy*. The narrative aims to transfer information, spread awareness, and fuel public discourse through the inclusion of realistic issues pertaining to Cape Town, the deteriorating ocean habitat, the fishing industry, and the socio-economic impact of a sick ocean on the people. *Tentacles* is deliberately designed as a space to raise these issues into the public consciousness and stimulate discussion.

The screen story was conceptualized as a response to a common criticism of fictional eco-narratives: that ecological issues are merely as a backdrop for the story or that they offer no solutions to the problems they present (Hamish Fahey, 2020; Svoboda, 2020). In larger than life climate disaster films, like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *Geostorm* (2017), any objective truth, historical facts, or accurate physics are barely recognizable. This creates misconception about the effects of climate change and “offer[s] [no] concrete docking points to normal citizens, who continue to remain unclear about the relation between climate change and their own lives, and, specifically, about the impact of their own actions and choices on global climate change,” (Kluwick, 2014:505). As BBC journalist Becca Warner (2022) points out, often “the nightmarish post-apocalyptic worlds painted by the likes of *Snowpiercer* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*

rely on just one tool in climate storytellers' armoury: fear.” Citing a study by O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole (2009), she notes the counter-productive results of an audience left hopeless.

Tentacles attempts to do something different. The screen story blends the joy of pure, fantastical, entertainment spectacle with factual realism. It foregrounds ecology, the environment and environmental activism in the story. While still deeply vested in entertainment, *Tentacles* also affirms a pro-active outlook in tackling environmental issues, promotes knowledge-seeking behaviours, and encourages engagement with the natural environment. Through the act of watching the final production viewers may learn about the environmental, social, economic, historical, and geopolitical forces at work in the oceans around Cape Town. Even if they turn a blind eye to factual programming that address such issues, viewers may gain a functional understanding and a greater appreciation of the complex environmental situation through their consumption of entertainment.

Method

During the creative process, I kept a reflective journal and carefully catalogued research sources. I then extensively researched academic developments in entertainment education and ecocriticism to finetune the lens through which to consider the screen story. I applied this lens both to story development and for the purposes of this analysis.

Having provided background in the introduction above, the following section of this essay is a brief synopsis of *Tentacles*. For a comprehensive synopsis of the series see **Appendix A**. Thereafter, I overview academic developments in entertainment education, ecocriticism, and specifically ecocinema. In each of the sections, I link reasoning behind creative choices in *Tentacles* to aspects of the academic discourse that influenced it.

In the discussion section, I turn to the research embedded in the screenplays. I have selected six elements in writing the screen story that I consider representative contributions to the academic discourse in the related fields.

Synopsis

Overviewing the core premise, *Tentacles* is a science fiction comedy about Aiden, a down-on-his-luck, high-school environmentalist from a fishing community in Kalk Bay. He is a good kid with lofty ambitions to become a marine scientist. His once upwardly mobile family suffered a series of setbacks, like losing their fish processing factory and his father drowns his sorrows with much of the available income. Aiden's only path to success is a prestigious marine sciences scholarship. He needs good grades, and he even instigated an environmental awareness programme at school to raise his profile. However, the environment and his grades have to take a backseat to his immediate economic needs. Aiden works night shifts as a dishwasher at a restaurant to replace his broken phone. Officially he needs a new phone to study and build an underwater photography profile. Unofficially, he wants to impress his secret crush, Lisa.

When Aiden's honest efforts to save for a new phone end in a series of embarrassments, he foregoes his principles and chooses to make some quick cash. He teams up with Klippies, the leader of an abalone poaching cartel, for a once-off gig ferrying divers to shore. Unfortunately, he is dragged into a massive drug deal with the Chinese Triads on the high seas. During the exchange, a creature that is being hunted by ruthless Triad lieutenant Chaoxiang attacks the ship. Aiden lets it get away and Chaoxiang promptly tosses him overboard for the offense.

Aiden finds himself in the precarious position of imminent death in the icy south Atlantic when his hypothermic body is hijacked by the mysterious creature, a sentient cephalopod named Bob. Bob is on a mission to retrieve a lost piece of ancient quantum technology that is on the Triad trawler. Bob is thousands of years old and has, over the millennia been worshipped as an ocean deity in numerous cultures. More recently, he was abandoned by his species when they fled their home planet, Earth, amidst nuclear war—an onslaught human governments labelled “atomic bomb tests”. His technology, a Tide Stone from Japanese mythology or Dragon Pearl in Chinese mythology, is one of a pair of gravity-bending orbs that can help him escape to the stars to find his people. Chaoxiang is using it as bait to catch Bob for his own nefarious purposes. Bob's initial efforts to use Aiden's unconscious body for his mission fails, and he is forced to reveal himself to Aiden. From this point onward, the fused, dual character of Aiden and Bob—human and nature, land and ocean, young and pre-historic—are forced to work together to accomplish both of their goals.

For a more comprehensive plot synopsis of the series, see **Appendix A**.

Entertainment Education and Ecocriticism/Ecocinema as guide to creative screenwriting

The following section provides an overview of academic discourse in the fields of entertainment education and ecocriticism/ecocinema as they relate to screen stories. This includes how these specific fields are defined, the overlap of the two fields, and the perceived effectiveness of each to influence an audience. This section also positions and comments on *Tentacles*, as it relates to each section.

Entertainment Education

Definitions of entertainment education are exceptionally broad. While long-running children's shows like *Sesame Street* (1971-present) immediately spring to mind, Entertainment Education is any "entertainment programming designed to exert some known, prosocial effect on viewers (e.g., providing information, reducing stigma, promoting healthy [behaviours])" (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010:27). In their much-cited work dissecting the mechanisms of narrative persuasion, Emily Moyer-Gusé and Robin Nabi (2010:27) point out that entertainment education, or E-E, is often as sparse as a single "scene, episode, or storyline" in a larger production. They also highlight that E-E, as with environmental activism, may strive to transfer information, inspire behavioural changes, or effect a shift in attitude.

This definition confirms *Tentacles* as E-E. The narrative transfers an abundance of facts from systemic social issues and the city's impact on the ocean to industrial fishing ills like overfishing, ghost gear, pollution, and poaching, etc. It also portrays positive environmental actions—like responsible trash disposal, recycling, activism, connecting with nature, and pro-environmental knowledge-seeking behaviour—and negative behaviours—like poaching in the face of economic hardship.

Ecocriticism/Ecocinema

Kiu-wai Chu (2016:11) attributes the foundation of "ecocriticism" to Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. In the opening pages, Glotfelty defines the field as an "earth-centred approach" that considers "the relationship between literature and the physical environment," (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996:xviii). Since then, ecocriticism has spread to every other field of study.

In this section, and the rest of the essay, I include academic works spanning diverse discourses in ecocriticism, including ecocinema, ecocritical media studies, and ecocritical social sciences. While it initially seems confusing, I have found that all references to ecocriticism relates to an overarching approach (perspective/point of attack) that analyses the innumerable touchpoints between the

environment and any specified field of study. Should there be any confusion when the term “ecocriticism” is used interchangeably with a specified field, consider the above reading.

Ecocinema, or ecocritical film and media studies, has expanded rapidly over the last two decades. Some scholars make convincing arguments that the field of ecocinema should be the purview of focused media artifacts like nature documentaries, biocentric experimental works and arthouse productions that foreground the environment as its subject matter (Boczkowska, 2021; MacDonald, 2013; Willoquet-Maricondi, 2010). Although MacDonald (2013:20) advocates against “narratives shot in a conventional Hollywood manner” in favour of “*new kinds of film experience*” (emphasis in the original), the ability of popular entertainment to reach mass audiences cannot be overstated.

I am more inclined towards a wider reading advocated by Pat Brereton (2015:258) who believes it is “more beneficial to broadly accept that all types of film” is ecocinema if it can “consciously or unconsciously foreground ecological issues and help situate these concerns within the general public consciousness.” As Sean Cubitt argued in 2012, “ecocriticism has to get beyond the stage of special pleading for a single cause, and to consider what, uniquely, it can offer as the holistic mode of critical thought in the 21st century” (277).

This wider approach has come with its own issues as research “remain[s] relatively scattered” (Chu, 2016:12) and the scope of ecocinema studies has perhaps expanded beyond reasonably achievable boundaries. As Rust, Monani and Cubitt (2023:6) state in their second anthology of ecocinema readings in 2023, “ecocinema studies aspire to total knowledge of texts and contexts, which is both true and either absurdly ambitious or completely unachievable.” I discovered this in my own research, as the volume of intertext embedded in just the first two episodes of *Tentacles* prevents holistic presentation within the boundaries of this essay.

The rapid expansion of ecocriticism and ecocinema tracks with our current climate reality. As more data, better climate models, and escalating natural disasters force humans to face the effects of anthropocentric climate change, the realisation is finally dawning on the public that everything we do has an impact on the environment, and vice versa. James Cantrill (2015:49) notes there are “a myriad of factors that influence the warp and woof of human interaction with and about the dynamic environment around us”. That is perhaps why scholarly contributions over the last decade have “significantly extended the historical and theoretical reach of ecocritical film and media studies” (Rust, Monani & Cubitt, 2023:4).

Situating *Tentacles* firmly in the ecocritical and ecocinematic tradition, my ambition with the story is “to help create public spaces for debate and argument over the claims of the environment for a place in political life” (Rust, Monani & Cubitt, 2013:3). Albeit not a single “cinematic” feature, *Tentacles* is ecocinema designed to be analysed through an ecocritical lens by the audience. Its job is to penetrate cognitive resistance, plant the seeds of attitudinal change, and stimulate debate. As Scott MacDonald said “the fundamental job of an ecocinema as a retraining of perception” (cited by David Ingram in Rust, Monani and Cubitt (2013:45)). The multi-episode format of *Tentacles* may be particularly effective in achieving this goal and could arguably increase its value as E-E.

Overlaps in entertainment education, ecocinema, and its perceived effectiveness

Repetition is a cornerstone of learning. Watched over a span of time, *Tentacles* seeks to repeat and extend environmental messaging with every episode. It takes the viewer on a journey of transformation to activate their ecological identity so they may engage in their own knowledge-seeking behaviours. Taking learnings from Sarah McFarland’s criticism of Hollywood’s happy endings that “precludes the kind of ending that a genuinely environmental film would have—one that makes us rise and leave the theatre with a sense of urgency, a clearly defined action plan, and a desire to make a difference” (McFarland & Hediger, 2009:103), limited series is a far better tool than feature film to achieve an effect. The fact that each episode has its own ending that can simmer until the next episode means a variety of strategies can be implemented over the course of a season. While one episode may leverage fear to drive urgency, another may end with positive and achievable action plan to inspire hope.

Considering the immense overlap in the desired outcomes of entertainment education and ecocinema, there are comparatively few studies discussing ecocinema and eco-narratives as entertainment education (Belinaso, Estevinho & Brasil Ramos, 2018; Chen & Lin, 2014). In discussions about the ability of fictional eco-narratives to induce pro-environmental behaviours and social change, researchers and commentators often repeat that there are doubts about the effectiveness, and ecocritical media scholars tend to focus on the detrimental effects of mass media on the environment and on environmental identities (Good, Jennifer Ellen 2007; Good, Jennifer Ellen, 2009; Good, Jennifer Ellen, 2013; Oppermann, 2011; Shanahan, McComas & Deline, 2015). Pat Brereton (2015:259) writes “psychologists and film scholars frequently affirm how we cannot expect dramatic changes in worldviews as a result of simply watching a movie.” Without indicating any studies, Chu (2016:14) also highlights that “very few eco-film scholars have asked [...] how, or how effective, does ecocinema encourage viewers to think and act ecocritically?”

Oppermann (2011:164) comments that “no *worldly* grounding of ecocriticism has enabled any reduction of carbon emissions in the real world, or that no thematic readings of *any* literary text has motivated anyone to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle,” (emphasis in source). Jennifer Good believes television viewing does have an effect, but not the right one. Espousing Cultivation Theory that investigates the effect of television on our understanding of the world, she draws the link between heavy TV viewers and increased materialism. Good (2007; 2009; 2013) noted that increased consumption of television means less time outdoors—a sentiment echoed by Shanahan, McComas and Deline (2015) in their 1999 and 2015 prime-time content studies. Good found that “the brightest of television’s viewers (i.e., those high in NFC [Need For Cognition]) are also most likely to suspend disbelief, or be “transported” by television (Shrum et al., 2005), and these are also the individuals who are also most likely to be cultivated by television to have less concern about the environment” (Good, Jennifer Ellen, 2009:294).

Despite the uncertainties regarding the ability of eco-narratives to reach their E-E goals, other social issues, especially healthy sexual behaviour, have been successfully addressed in the media. Indeed, in the South African context, entertainment television has played an important educational role. Shows like *Yizo Yizo* (1999) were instrumental in stimulating public discourse on hard-hitting social issues like violence and rape (Modisane, 2010), and soap operas like *Soul City* (1994) and *Generations* (1994) addressed public health issues and HIV stigmatization by portraying HIV infected characters in a positive light. (Struthers & Ridgard, 2010). More overt E-E productions like *Intersexions* (2010) traced the spread of HIV by following a number of character on their relationship journey (Honorine, 2013). Notably, a viewer of *Intersexions* (2010) commented that she associated with the plight of a nanny portrayed in the show, being a nanny herself (Honorine, 2013). At the time of writing, the latest instalment of *MTV Shuga Down South* (2017) is taking aim at the spread of HIV through “blesser” culture in South Africa (Luthuli, 2023).

Examples on the international stage include the ongoing Netflix comedy series, *Sex Education* (2019), which successfully imparts knowledge on all manner of sex and gender related topics. The show explores awkward medical issues that may affect people too shy to ask, addresses false beliefs and misinformation about STI’s, and demystifies fluid gender dynamics. While the South African examples are largely dramatic soap operas, *Sex Education* frames its often-overt educational goals in the objectively hilarious and relatable awkwardness of the sexual coming-of-age of teenagers. Its main target audience is teenagers and young adults.

This audience strategy, and that of the South African examples mentioned, ties in to research by Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010:26) that found “identification with characters in the narrative reduced counterarguing and increased perceived vulnerability”. Their investigations into overcoming resistance to narrative persuasion also found that high resistance to a particular persuasive message can be overcome by underplaying the “perceived persuasive intent” (48) and strengthening “parasocial interaction” (30) or the perceived relationship between the viewer and the character. Additionally, to increase a sense of vulnerability in the viewer the focus should be strategies of “empathy and perspective-taking rather than merely developing similar characters” (48).

Although the cited study by Emily Moyer-Gusé and Robin Nabi looked at the effects of E-E on teen pregnancy—aligning it well with sexual health examples—the mechanisms of persuasion amidst resistance are the same as those found in pro-environmental messaging. Why then are there such widespread doubts that ecocinema can be effective in promoting behavioural change? (Brereton, 2015; Chu, 2016; Good, Jennifer Ellen 2007; Good, Jennifer Ellen, 2009; Good, Jennifer Ellen, 2013)

Indeed, rare studies focussing specifically on audiences exposed to eco-narratives and ecocinema show promising positive results. Taiwanese researchers Tsai Chen and Ju-Sen Lin (2014) found that their research subjects displayed attitudinal shifts towards pro-conservation behaviour after exposure to the Canadian ecocinema production *Fly Away Home* (1996). Even though the research subjects were Taiwanese, they attributed their attitudinal shift from the control group to association with the main character, portrayed by Anna Paquin. Considering that viewers generally experience greater identification with characters that are similar to themselves, this result “demonstrated that entertainment is indeed a powerful educational tool” Chen and Lin (2014:384). More recently, a study based on a short edutainment documentary by Topp, Thai and Hryciw (2019:697) found that “perceived entertainment increased cognitive engagement associated with climate change”. These studies seem to support the hypothesis that ecocinema and environmental entertainment education can encourage viewers to think and act ecocritically.

The reason environmental messaging in the media is not inspiring societal behaviour change is perhaps a two-part problem of the message format and the delivery of the content to the audience.

Considering the message format, environmental messages are often seen in documentaries and niche experimental and arthouse productions along with news reports on the latest climate disaster. Mass appeal of these formats is low, and often resistance is high. Simply making these productions more

entertaining is not the best strategy. Investigating a shift in factual entertainment television (documentaries) featuring environmental risks and natural disasters, Vincent Campbell (2014) found that the adoption of “more entertainment-oriented topics, styles and formats” (60)—to entice audiences—reproduces “existing problematic representational frames of the environment seen in other media forms” (71). By highlighting “visual spectacle” without “causal imagery linking disasters to human agency,” and by presenting “disaster participants as socially de-contextualized individuals,” the producers of these shows fail at to provide “warnings intended as environmental advocacy, or a call to action” (72). Reversing the formula by presenting fleshed-out fictional characters struggling with the cause and effect of environmental issues within a rich contextual environment—something ideally suited to multi-episode storylines—may yield far better results than documentaries and news. As Vian Bakir (2010:9) points out, “it is through fiction, rather than journalism, that the media most thoroughly contemplate future challenges that risks might pose, including what happens when things go wrong, so enabling us to explore moral, ethical and social consequences of certain actions.”

Considering delivery of the message, as Holbert et al. (2005:508) highlights, when it comes to the influence of television on human minds, “prime-time entertainment television may be particularly influential in constructing and maintaining political attitudes”. The prominence of environmental messaging in prime-time entertainment media does not, however, reflect the urgency of the crises at hand. In their research on *Representations of the environment on television, and their effects* from a Cultural Indicators perspective, James Shanahan, Katherine McComas, and Mary Beth Deline (2015:244) found that “environmental themes are often kept separate from the main themes of family, relationships, crime, and sex that dominate entertainment TV.” Updating their own content research from the 1990’s and comparing it to 2012, they found little variation in the virtual absence of nature themes in primetime entertainment TV with only “28.5 minutes out of [...] 71 hours” of programming allocated to nature themes in 2012.

In a joint project with the National Center for Science Education, *Our Changing Climate* (2020) analysed 30 years of American television comedy to reveal that “climate change has gotten comparatively tiny amounts of screen time.” Moreover, portrayals of climate change and environmental action were dominated by misrepresentations “that casts doubt on its existence, treats activists as scam artists, and discourages action.” One of the most recent studies found that “less than 0.56 percent of scripted TV and film released between 2016 and 2020 mention the term ‘climate change,’” (Good Energy, N/D). This study was commissioned from the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center’s Media Impact Project by Good

Energy, a group focussed on promoting climate narratives in entertainment media. These findings are surprising considering the escalating impact of extreme weather linked to anthropocentric climate change over the last two decades. It does, however, track with the polarised political climate in developed economies that pits climate against economic advancement (Finnegan, 2023).

Integrating learnings from Shanahan, McComas and Deline (2015) into *Tentacles*, my story approaches environmental themes as inseparable from family, relationships, crime, and sex. Relationships, coming-of-age, and sex is leveraged as a metaphor for human relationships to nature, with unfettered urges, a drive towards instant gratification, and a focus on the self instead of considering the other leading to embarrassing conflicts and misunderstandings. This fusing of “dominant programming themes” (Shanahan, McComas & Deline, 2015:243) with environmental themes says to the audience that we cannot keep thinking of climate change as some separate problem. The things of humans and the things of nature are at all times affecting one another. It is deeply ingrained in our systems and our social structures.

Discussion:

Maximizing entertainment by blending genre effectively with a strong focus on comedy

As seen in the previous section, it is especially necessary for environmental narratives to lay claim to prime-time television slots or to cut through the clutter on streaming services. One route to achieve this is genre. In North America, action (22.33%), adventure (26.63%), and comedy (13.70%) have dominated the industry for nearly three decades, holding more than 60% of the market share for cinematic releases (The Numbers, 2023). *Tentacles* leverages the narrative conventions and subject matter of these genres to create a widely appealing entertainment product that increases its potential reach. My story fuses the highly popular genres of action, adventure, comedy, science-fiction, and superhero fiction, and multimodal animation. Among these, comedy may be particularly effective since humour, used well, is an excellent tool to trigger empathy and lower resistance to the pro-environmental message.

Emma Carroll-Monteil (2023) looked specifically at the effectiveness of scientific stand-up comedy that aims to transfer climate-related learnings. She found that humour did create a “positive learning experience,” and comedy made participants feel more hopeful, even though high levels of fear was found to accompany beliefs about climate change. Importantly, her research supports theories that

indicate humour as an effective tool to “allow for the audience to reflect on their own behaviour without feeling attacked” (2023:584).

Carroll-Monteil’s findings are echoed among numerous studies researched by Kaltenbacher and Drews (2020:720) who note that “humour opens up spaces of engagement that are otherwise not accessible” and provides an effective way to deal with negative emotion (p721). While their meta study found that humour was excellent at raising awareness and influencing perceptions about climate change, arguably the most important metric is whether humour is an effective tool to influence pro-environmental behaviour. A Swiss study found that humour in an anti-littering poster campaign was far more effective than authoritative messaging, leading to “a significantly higher reduction” (721). Other studies also found humour to be effective at “influencing immediate voting decisions” and stimulating intentions to engage in activism. Two other studies cited in Kaltenbacher and Drews (2020:721) found that humour may be less effective, or even detrimental, when it comes to specific environmental issues and scientific research—either through lowering fear, or by making the topics trivial.

While *Tentacles* is entertainment and not academia it is important to keep it in mind that humour must be applied thoughtfully to be effective. A strategy I employ in *Tentacles* is to situate serious environmental issues in a narrative that is humorous, but that does not specifically make fun of environmental concerns. *Tentacles* is funny for other reasons, and by juxtaposing the stark realities of pollution and overfishing with other lighter jokes, the jarring contrast seeks a bigger emotional response with a higher likelihood of creating long-term memory events.

Homing in on a relevant, thematic environmental issue

The screen stories I developed prior to *Tentacles* started with high-concept scenarios or clearly defined characters, however, this specific tale sprung from a deep concern for the environment. I wanted to design a narrative with a strong environmental message, and having recently relocated to the city, I wanted to set it in Cape Town.

I did not, however, want to fall into one of the numerous Hollywood-traps where environmental catastrophe is often a doomsday spectacle, as in *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), or a self-flagellating post-apocalyptic backdrop to tell an unrelated story, as in *Snowpiercer* (2013) or *The Last of Us* (2023).

More problematic is the trend of framing the villain’s motivations as some form of zealous environmentalism. Josh Brolin as Thanos in *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) destroys half of all sentient beings in the universe to restore balance to nature. Samuel L. Jackson as eco-terrorist Richmond

Valentine in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014) wants to reduce population by triggering homicidal violence via cell phone signal. Patrick Willson as King Orm of Atlantis wants to stop ocean pollution by wiping humans off the face of the planet in *Aquaman* (2018). While it is effective to help the audience understand the villain's motivations, environmental consciousness is literally vilified by framing it as the driving motivational force of the archnemesis. It leaves the field wide open for franchises like Marvel to push an endless stream of consumer merchandise on their audience.

Keeping these pitfalls in mind, the brief to myself was to conceptualise a story based in Cape Town that has the potential to inspire environmental activism and that would spread awareness. Additionally, I wanted to see if I could generate humour by subverting and ridiculing mainstream consumer culture messages, i.e. by destroying every phone Aiden lays his hands on, or by framing a hero against the backdrop of a fiery explosion as "scampering like an incontinent chihuahua" instead of the traditional heroic stride.

The choice to centre *Tentacles* on ocean health is because promoting food systems transformation is a significant part of my day job. I am acutely aware of the real threat of complete planetary biome collapse, in large part the result of how we eat. As it stands, the food system contributes a third of all greenhouse gas emissions, and in terms of sheer area, is by far the biggest contributor to deforestation (90%) and biodiversity loss (60%) (Chironda, 2023). On land, the natural habitat destruction due to monoculture is clearly visible. The situation in the hidden oceans is far worse.

Over-exploitation is the status quo. As Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said "Close to 90% of the world's marine fish stocks are fully exploited, overexploited or depleted. Basically we have reached the limits of perhaps one of the last natural harvesting human activities on the planet" (UNCTAD, 2017). Thanks to industrial fishing, popular species like "Pacific bluefin [...] is just 2.6 percent of its original size" (Nickson, 2016). Similar drastic declines can be seen with the common octopus in Mauritania and Galicia, Spain (Taylor et al., 2023). Beyond grievous overfishing, the continued use of destructive techniques, like bottom-trawling that scrapes the ocean floor, inflicts virtually irreparable damage to the sensitive sea-bottom ecosystems, turning it "into a desert" (Dekimpe et al., 2022). The ocean is in a truly dire state.

Compounding the problem of what we are taking out of the oceans is what we are putting in: waste, chemicals, plastic, and heat. Sewage, pesticides and fertilizer run-off from farming have created massive dead zones in the ocean (Lu, 2020; Scavia, 2018). Localized examples like Florian Seltmann's chronicle of

the deoxygenation of the Sea of Marmara in *A Dying Sea* (2022) paints a grim picture of the future of the Mediterranean. Plastic food packaging has become ubiquitous, and it is not the worst offender floating in the waters. Approximately 10% percent, and by some accounts 50%, of the plastic pollution in the ocean is ghost gear—discarded nets and tackle that continue luring in and killing untold numbers of sea life (Environmental Justice Foundation, 2022; Tabrizi, 2021; Villette, 2020). A Greenpeace International (2019) report contextualises the 640,000 tonnes of fishing gear abandoned each year as “equivalent in weight to more than 50 thousand double-decker buses”. Additionally, the oceans have absorbed 90% of the excess heat generated by anthropogenic climate change. In concrete terms, imagine that the ocean soaked up enough heat in 2022 “to boil 700m kettles every second” (Readfearn, 2023). This has led to year-on-year coral bleaching events that have decimated the protective breeding grounds of many of our edible fishes, as Sylvia Earle highlights in *Mission Blue* (2014) and Jeff Orlowski chronicles in *Chasing Coral* (2017).

Although the term rarely appears in the articles I encounter in my daily research, the only proper word to describe human impact on the environment is *ecocide*. Our quest for cheap food has destroyed the oceans’ ability to supply it. Therefore, the theme for *Tentacles*, as stated by Aiden’s mom, Lettie, in the first episode is “The ocean will provide.” The series explores whether it still true and ask what needs to be done to make it so.

Exploring the main environmental issues to address in the screen story

Although I was not familiar with the exact situation I would uncover in Cape Town, I knew there would likely be relevant issues to explore in my screen story. Thus, I began my inquiry into the state of the marine environment, the blue economy, and its impact on the people of the city. The picture that emerged is complex. Wherever you look, the impact of people on the ocean environment is ill-balanced with their utter dependence on it to survive.

Ecologically-speaking, beach walk-outs of hundreds of thousands of rock lobsters due to red tide and foreign phytoplankton blooms (Engel, 2022a; McCain, 2023) and inexplicable yearly mass die-offs of poisonous pufferfish that wash ashore (Jantjies, 2022) are a small indication that the ocean around Cape Town is very sick. A deluge of barely-treated human sewage is pumped off-shore by the city, far exceeding sanctioned limits (Goodall, 2023; Petersen, 2023). This may be the cause of serious gastrointestinal infections (Kretzmann, 2023) that plague Cape Town residents at the end of the busy tourist season every year. From a biodiversity perspective, fishermen note that some fish species, like

Stumpnose, Cape Salmon, and Cobb, are no longer found in False Bay. They attribute it to plastic pollution and garbage dumped into the waters, as well as subsidised commercial overfishing (Barefoot Workshops, 2013; Louw, 2019; Mike Wright, 2019; Siziba, 2021; Thompson, 2019).

The pervasive global scourge of ghost gear is also a problem in Cape Town, with gear washing up in Simon's Town in 2020 and beach-goers recorded rescuing entangled seal pups from nets in September 2023 (Garg, 2023; Villette, 2020). A comprehensive report found that South Africa's fishing industry seems well managed with "only minor gear loss", but it also noted room for improvement with a myriad of actionable steps to ensure accountability for ghost gear (Randall, 2020:19).

Beyond man-made environmental disasters Cape Town's sanctioned fishing industry is eclipsed by a lucrative black market. Demand from criminal syndicates in Hong Kong and mainland China has entrenched abalone poaching in the city's gang culture, and abalone is often traded for methamphetamines or precursors to manufacture it (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2021; van As, 2022). Driven on one hand by organised crime and on the other by the desperation of impoverished local fishermen, illegal fishing and rampant poaching of abalone and West Coast rock lobster, whose numbers are now at 1.6% (McCain, 2023), have pushed these species to the edge of extinction (Cochrane, 2022).

Many small-scale fishermen say they have been driven to illegal fishing because of systemic corruption and the shambolic handling of the Fishing Rights Allocation Process by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (Carte Blanche, 2022; Engel, 2022b; Pinnock, 2023; Siziba, 2021). In Kalk Bay specifically, fishers were left without licences for years, leading to the failure of a locally owned and staffed fish factories (Engel, 2022b).

Additionally, South Africa has almost no ability to police the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This has made the country an easy target for looting by international fishing fleets with China at the top of the list of offenders (Kings, 2016). The Chinese fleet is particularly destructive with their actions described as "vacuuming the oceans" (Bergman, 2021). Distant-water, or deep-water, fleets from the Far East are linked to forced labour, debt slavery, human trafficking, and outright murder of migrant workers at sea. (Pinnock & Marschke, 2023; Urbina, 2023a).

Key choices made to integrate the research into the plot

With such an abundance of issues to address, communicating the situation to the audience can be overwhelming. For this reason, I start the pilot episode with a nuclear weapons test—the symbol of the

Anthropocene (Carrington, 2023). While it lays the groundwork for future developments in Bob's arc, I include it at the start of the series to represent the deluge of issues and draw a direct parallel between our current decimation of the ocean and the total obliteration of nuclear war.

In the first 15 minutes of the expositional first episode, many of the environmental and resultant social issues affecting Cape Town are introduced in both the dialogue and the mise-en-scene, with the main topic being poaching. A drunk Felix, Aiden's father, laments losing his fish factory and he blames his brother's poaching for it. We see plastic pollution in the harbour. A news anchor on TV addresses abalone poaching, the fishing black market and illegal fishing by Chinese trawlers. Aiden and Lettie's responses to it introduces permit shortfalls for small fishers, depleted fish stocks, and the repercussions of industrial overfishing. Later, a poacher, Klippies, sells illegal crayfish to a shady restaurant manager and tempts Aiden with easy cash. Aiden chooses to follow the ethical path in accordance with his environmental ideals. All is well, until he loses his earnings in a humiliating accident. The lure of easy money and his distressed emotional state leads him to take Klippies up on his offer. This fateful choice spirals out of control when Aiden discovers the 'quick evening of poaching' he signed up for is a drug deal on a Chinese trawler. At school, Aiden's teacher, Mrs Mills, tries to instil ecocritical thinking in the students. Her class presents pufferfish die-offs while a joke from one of the students references sewage in the ocean.

Presented among the detrimental issues are pro-environmental behaviours with Aiden looking to return bottles for the deposit and casually picking up trash on the street to throw in a bin. Aiden is engaged in the arrangement of a beach-clean-up. This event will morph into a far more comprehensive celebration of nature identity as the series progresses. Finally, Mrs Mills repeats humorous mantras in class to motivate students to action instead of despondency.

Although my presentation of the big issues touches somewhat on the deeper, individual human experiences, it is through an ecocritical lens that the true implications of the screen story are revealed. As Simon Estok said, "If ecocriticism is committed to making connections, then it is committed to recognizing that these issues (ecophobia, racism, misogyny, homophobia, speciesism) are thoroughly interwoven with each other and must eventually be looked at together." (Estok cited in Oppermann (2011:165)). As such, my character choices were heavily influenced by their ability to represent and address wide-ranging issues and approaches to the environment and its social impacts. Similarly, the settings chosen for the heroes and villains allow for multi-layered investigations into place. Seeking to explore the environmental and human impact of the fishing industry *Tentacles* thus follows a teenager of

Filipino descent in a fishing family in Kalk Bay Harbour. His local nemesis is the leader of an abalone poaching outfit operating out of Hout Bay harbour. And the main villain of the series is a Triad lieutenant on a Chinese trawler hunting the last sentient cephalopod on the planet, Bob, who represents and speaks for non-human life in the oceans.

Authentically integrating unique aspects and issues of the Kalk Bay setting

Working off James Cantrill's (2015) social science approaches to environment, media and communication, my main character's setting of Kalk Bay is ripe for analyses of environmental economics, environmental history, environmental human geography, environmental politics, environmental and conservation psychology, and environmental sociology.

In terms of history and human geography, Kalk Bay was a whaling station rendering the blubber of Southern Right Whales for candles until the whales' near extinction (Khan, 2021). Many of the families working in Kalk Bay at that time were Filipino ship-jumpers who escaped from the Spanish fleet in Simon's Town between the 1830's and the 1850's (GroundUp News, 2022; Victory Street Productions, 2019). The multi-ethnic community of Kalk Bay was, for a time, exempt from forced relocations under the Group Areas Act during apartheid, because Kalk Bay was a working harbour. Most of the original families were forced to sell their homes in 1967 (Khan, 2021). The choice to make Aiden a fictional descendent of the Filipino settlers opens investigations into these histories and the effect of people on places. Although it is not delved into in the first season, forced labour and plight of migrant workers from the Philippines and Indonesia on Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese vessels, could further be explored with Aiden's shared ancestry as a possible point of connection.

Environmental economics and politics at play in Kalk Bay are extremely layered. Today, Kalk Bay is a tourist hotspot listed by *Lonely Planet* as the best place in Cape Town for a "local experience" (de Bruyn, 2023). Kalk Bay is turning into a "rich man's paradise", as local Tony Trimmel points out, with foreign money pushing locals out of the property market in search of the next, most authentic "big thing" (Victory Street Productions, 2019). The original fishing community can't afford it anymore and it is only a matter of time before the colourful fishing boats in the harbour are replaced by pleasure boats. For the fishers, depleted resources mean the once booming fishing harbour now delivers tiny catches of snoek and rock lobster that hardly justifies the diesel (GroundUp News, 2022; Mike Wright, 2019). Rampant corruption in the allocation of fishing licences in the DFFE and tiny fishing quotas for small-scale fishermen amounting to a meagre R20,000 of income a year have broken the back of many career

fishermen (Engel, 2022b; Pinnock, 2023). This has led directly to the closure of local fish processing factories and a loss of jobs that has further impoverished the community. The very recent allocation of rights to small-scale fishers have been met with mixed feeling as it comes on the back of a further reduction in allowable catch to protect the highly endangered West Coast rock lobster. As Human (2023) reports, fishers are upset with the “crumbs” with one fisher, Rovina Europa saying that “from Northern Cape to Cape Agulhas, ‘most households’ depend on rock lobster for their livelihoods because ‘they know it is the only income which they can rely on’.” Inevitably, with no way to support their families and limited options for a legal income, many fishers turn to poaching abalone and illegally fishing for rock lobsters.

This intersection of human need and the environment’s ability to deliver asks big questions of concern in environmental and conservation psychology. The most prominent being: Is there any motive for impoverished people to conserve the environment when their immediate existential needs are of much greater concern? Kalk Bay provides an interesting juxtaposition in the exploration of conservation psychology. As documented in *Tidal* (Heide, 2018), Capetonian Lisa Beasley discovered nudibranchs in the tidal pools of Kalk Bay and campaigned to work with the city to protect the resident nudibranchs from toxic cleaning chemicals traditionally used to wash the pool walls. In *Tentacles*, Aiden wants a new phone so he can take pictures of the nudibranchs to support his scholarship application. In Kalk Bay, the tiny molluscs have become a point of pride, and educational murals of nudibranchs adorn the seawall by the St. James Beach tidal pool. The existential plight of the fishing community, who campaigned for years to get fishing permits, stands in stark contrast with the conservation campaign by the more affluent inhabitants of the village, that received support from the city with relative ease.

As with Kalk Bay, I situate Aiden’s mirror villain, Klippien in Hangberg, a neighbourhood above Hout Bay harbour. It is a setting equally rich in offerings for ecocritical analysis. Although I am not unpacking it in this essay, it is worth noting that Hangberg is considered a “poaching hub”. Tik, or crystal methamphetamine, is a pervasive problem with many youths in the impoverished neighbourhood succumbing to addiction. These two trades, tik and abalone, are intricately linked. (de Greef, 2018)

Building relatable and empathetic characters to drive the story

Aiden, the protagonist

Aiden and his family, Felix and Lettie Florez, their neighbour, Karla, and the community living in the fishermen’s flats, *Die Land*, embody the plight and the history of the small-scale fishermen of Kalk Bay

(Louw, 2019). Taking a cue from the findings by Chen and Lin (2014), that pro-conservation behaviour may be influenced by association and empathy with the main character, Aiden is designed to connect with the viewer. With climate anxiety affecting the teenage and young adult audience on one hand, and the ubiquitous consumerist addiction to smartphones on the other, Aiden's ambitions to be an activist and his struggles with his broken phone mirror behaviours the audience may see in themselves. His teenage desires, coming-of-age embarrassments, classroom dramas with grades and bullies, and his hopes for a better world also seeks to establish associations and emotional similarities with a young adult viewership. Additionally, his steadfast commitment to overcome adversity, to earn his own money, to help his father when he is inebriated, and to do good for the environment garners empathy which aids perspective-taking when Aiden does the wrong thing.

As Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) found, both these persuasive techniques—identification and empathy—have different results. Aiden is a flawed environmental idealist truly looking to foster positive change in the environment, but he is hypocritically tempted by poaching to alleviate his financial shortcomings. The intention is to establish audience association with a character that also has to navigate conflicting inner modalities. I want to use the empathy it generates to guide the viewer into pro-environmental attitudes as Aiden embraces his ecological identity in the course of the season.

Bob, the second protagonist

As a sentient cephalopod, Bob, gives a voice to the oceans. When one human tells another human to stop polluting the ocean, it is easy for denialists to compartmentalise it as the rant of an overzealous fanatic and shed the guilt. Bob can lay blame at human feet as he is directly affected by the state of the ocean, and thus the audience is forced to consider his first-hand account and face the impact they are having on ocean inhabitants. With the reprimands coming from a personable, anthropomorphic character the intention is that the audience will be less guarded to the criticism, allowing the message to sink in. Bob becomes a vehicle for empathy and self-reflection as he points out just how bad the pollution in the ocean really is. This is not unlike the mechanisms at work in *Puff: Wonders of the Reef* (2021), that follows the life journey of a pufferfish and asks viewers to experience his magical underwater home and contemplate what we are doing to it.

Bob's function in the story is, however, more complex. Unlike short-lived standard octopi, Bob is ancient. His longevity serves much the same function as the time-lapse photography in *Chasing Ice* (2012) or the data-visualisation in *An Inconvenient Truth* (2012). As Brereton (2015:259) notes, "environmental science

deals in effects that are often too vast, too slow, or too dispersed to be observed photographically.” In *Tentacles*, Bob fills a function of condensed ecological time. As a prehistoric creature of indeterminant longevity Bob provides a *Then and Now* mnemonic function.

Bob’s memories of the world before industrialisation and rampant pollution, of a previous Ice Age and the rise of human cultures allow for the juxtaposition and comparison of historical images that drive home the vast, slow effects mentioned by Pat Brereton. Bob’s accounts also allow for the communication of the stark differences that have occurred in the last 100 years. This is particularly evident in episode 2 (p22-24) when Bob downloads a chunk of his memories to Aiden. This sequence starts with a fast-paced flow of images that summarises the first three billion years on Earth. Sandwiched between a shot of a water-column teeming with fish and a fish-cake wrapper in an empty ocean, the sequence concludes with a series of *Then and Now* juxtapositions and historical markers that highlight humanity’s struggles against and eventual decimation of wilderness.

The fusion of Aiden and Bob

Fusing a human character and nature character into one being in *Tentacles - Episode 2* is not exactly a subtle hint. Locked in an endless struggle between order and chaos and forced to negotiate a vast grey area between their different experiences, this new compound being asks the audience to think about nature as a part of the self. Symbolically, it strips away the “binary oppositions that once separated humans from nature” (Rust, Monani & Cubitt, 2023:7) by fusing their life-support, their nervous systems, and their memories. In fact, together Bob and Aiden are far stronger than either alone; they are a superhero. The message embedded here is that our species can be so much stronger if we work with nature rather than against it.

When Bob and Aiden become one creature it is not without resistance from both. It is a source of tension and conflict and humour—all essential aspects of good entertainment. The conflicts are also ripe nodes for ecocritical analysis—consider for instance Bob’s disorganised chaos versus Aiden’s meticulous need to order things unnaturally and the eventual harmony they discover as the series progresses.

After the fusion, Aiden learns that Bob and his species have bonded with humans for millennia. With their incredible powers, which are all exaggerations of biological traits of different cephalopods (Boyle & Rodhouse, 2005; Hanlon & Messenger, 1996), these fused beings were revered as gods. Bob’s memories of an environmentally pristine past combined with ancient mythologies attempts to “[foreground] what can be defined as environmental nostalgia, coupled with its powerful emotional appeal” (Brereton,

2015:260). This is especially true for the character of Mazu, a revered ocean deity in Southern China and Taiwan (Dean, 1993:31) that protects seafarers and fishermen. Her good nature is somewhat intended to guard against vilification of Chinese people by balancing the villain, Chaoxiang. Mazu's main purpose is to awaken a deep environmental nostalgia in, specifically, the Chinese viewers. While Chaoxiang is a reprimand for the actions of Chinese fishing fleets, Mazu becomes a vehicle for positive identification and contemplation of environmentally respectful, animistic value systems that have been lost.

Chaoxiang, the villain

Chaoxiang is the main nemesis in the first season. His name means "Expecting Fortune" and that is certainly his goal. The choice to make the villain Chinese was unfortunately an easy one. The government-backed Chinese distant-water fleet of approximately 17,000 vessels is the biggest and most destructive in the world (Bergman, 2021). Following a four-year investigation at sea, a recent, damning exposé by Ian Urbina of The Outlaw Ocean Project revealed the Chinese fleet is conducting a highly coordinated and systematic plundering of the world's oceans. They have no regard for environmental sustainability, marine protected areas, or Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), often switching off their radio identification beacon to loot in forbidden waters. Captive workers are modern-day slaves who often experience violence, inhumane living conditions, untreated medical distresses, and prolonged malnutrition leading to death. (Urbina, 2023a; Urbina, 2023b; Urbina, 2023c; Urbina, 2023d) Investigating an unseaworthy Taiwanese deep water fleet vessel impounded in Cape Town Harbour, a similar report by Don Pinnock and Melissa Marschke (2023) highlights the human suffering aboard vessels that come to loot the unprotected South Atlantic. Forced labour, inhumane treatment and death of migrant workers seem to be the status quo.

Placing Chaoxiang in control of a super-trawlers is not completely accurate. While China's fleet has an estimated five-hundred sanctioned and unsanctioned vessels stripping fish from the South African EEZ, most are smaller, run-down trawlers. Compared to South Africa's "14 vessels, four naval helicopters and five planes" available to police 1.5 million square kilometres of ocean, South Africa can do virtually nothing to stop foreign fleets from looting in its waters (Kings, 2016). As I found out first-hand, the beaches along the De Hoop Marine Protected World Heritage Site are polluted with Chinese food packaging, drinks containers and cleaning products. If not an eye-witness account of poaching in a protected reserve, it is a clear indication of the persistent presence of Chinese vessels. Similar destructive fishing practices from the Chinese fleet have been documented in the Galapagos Islands Marine Protected Area (Urbina, 2023d).

The character of Chaoxiang allows for ecocritical analyses that looks deeply at the issues mentioned above, but it also opens investigations into historical cultural events, like the Maoist famine and its impact on Chinese society (Tesini & Zambenardi, 2022) and current government actions driving ecological destruction in China ("Poison from the dragon's belly", 2008). While popular and recognisable movie villains, like the Triads, are a convenient shorthand for audiences to understand and decode overt criminality, the real villain is the Chinese government who owns the fishing fleet. To signal this (especially to Chinese viewers), I include symbols like the five-clawed dragon when I foreshadow the arrival of a tentacled-beast during Aiden and Xolanli's visit to the comic bookstore in episode 1. Historically, only the imperial dragon has five claws (Ripley, 1913). While subtle, such inclusions provide a geopolitical commentary and raises questions about China's nefarious political motivations, like squatting on unregulated ocean resources as a means to stake a future claim to it (Urbina, 2023b).

Conclusion:

A Canvas for Ecocritical Exploration

While much is left unsaid in this essay, my goal is to demonstrate that ecocriticism can be valuable in the creation of richer eco-narratives. Ecocritical perspectives can guide research investigations and shape multi-layered stories that offers both overt and more nuanced interpretations to the viewer. With *Tentacles*, I aim to create a canvas for exploration of self and society. I want viewers to delve into the text and come away with a richer understanding of our relationship with the ocean, whether their engagement with it is purely for entertainment or thorough academic textual analysis. In this, *Tentacles* is more than social commentary, but rather a site for ecocritical discourse. A poignant observation by Rust, Monani and Cubitt (2023:10) that summarises my ambitions with *Tentacles* is that "[contemporary] cinema has the potential to become a mediating interface that at last allows us to comprehend what we have done, to the world and ourselves, but also how and where we might begin remaking that relation: in the image, in the imagining, of a healed world."

Taking it further by integrating learnings from entertainment education, it is possible to leverage mass media and ecocriticism into *more* than a tool for contemplation. It has the potential to inspire and align action towards "a healed world". However, it is barely utilised. As a creative and a filmmaker, my hope is that projects like *Tentacles* can fill the gap in environmentally responsible mainstream entertainment to

reach mass audiences with factual information and actionable insights as we work towards a just and balanced world.

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Fly Away Home 1996. Produced by C. Baum & Directed by Ballard, C. Canada, United States, New Zealand: Sony Pictures Releasing.

The China Syndrome 1979. Produced by M. Douglas & Directed by Bridges, J. United States: Columbia Pictures.

Nimona 2023. Produced by K. Ryan, J. Zackary and R. Lee & Directed by Bruno, N. & Quane, T. United States: Netflix.

Whale Rider 2002. Produced by J. Barnett, F. Hübner and T. Sanders & Directed by Caro, N. New Zealand, Germany: Pandora Film, Newmarket Films

Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our planet 2021. Produced by A. Fothergill, C. Butfield, K. Garwood, K. Scholey and J. Zeitz & Directed by Clay, J. United Kingdom.

The Midnight Sky 2020. Produced by G. Heslov, G. Clooney, K. Redmon, B. Dorros and C. Roberts & Directed by Clooney, G. United States: Netflix.

Leviathan 1989. Produced by A. De Laurentiis, L. De Laurentiis, C. Gordon and L. Gordon & Directed by Cosmatos, G.P. United States, Italy: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Filmauro.

The Red Turtle 2016. Produced by T. Suzuki, I. Takahata, V. Maraval, P. Caucheteux and G. Sorlat & Directed by de Wit, M.D. Japan, France: Wild Bunch, Toho

The Day the Earth Stood Still 2008. Produced by E. Stoff, G. Goodman and P.H. Boardman & Directed by Derrickson, S. United States: 20th Century Fox.

Geostorm 2017. Produced by D. Ellison, D. Devlin and D. Goldberg & Directed by Devlin, D. United States[Warner Bros. Pictures.

The Day After Tomorrow 2004. Produced by M. Gordon and R. Emmerich & Directed by Emmerich, R. United States: 20th Century Fox.

2012 2009. Produced by H. Kloser, M. Gordon and L.J. Franco & Directed by Emmerich, R. United States: Sony Pictures Releasing.

Moonfall 2022. Produced by R. Emmerich and H. Kloser & Directed by Emmerich, R. United States, Canada, China, United Kingdom,: Lionsgate.

Net Free Seas 2022. Produced by Environmental Justice Foundation & Directed by Environmental Justice Foundation. Thailand: EJF.

Woman at War 2018. Produced by B. Erlingsson, C. Leblanc and M. Slot & Directed by Erlingsson, B. Iceland, France, Ukraine.

Venom 2018. Produced by A. Arad, M. Tolmach and A. Pascal & Directed by Fleischer, R. United States: Sony Pictures Releasing.

Annihilation 2018. Produced by S. Rudin, A. Macdonald, A. Reich and E. Bush & Directed by Garland, A. United Kingdom, United States: Paramount Pictures, Netflix.

An Inconvenient Truth 2012. Produced by L. David, L. Bender and S.Z. Burns & Directed by Guggenheim, D. United States: Paramount Classics.

Ragnarok 2020. Produced by S.M. Madsen & Directed by Hagedorn, M., Johansen, J. & Thulstrup, M.K. Norway, Denmark: Netflix.

Fast Color 2018. Produced by J. Horowitz, M. Liddell and P. Shilaimon & Directed by Hart, J. United States: Lionsgate, Codeblack Films.

Tidal 2018. Produced by L. Kidson & Directed by Heide, T. South Africa.

IO: Last on Earth 2019. Produced by J.M. Berman and L. Rister & Directed by Helpert, J. United States: Netflix.

Snowpiercer 2013. Produced by J. Tae-sung, S. Nam, P. Chan-wook and L. Tae-hun & Directed by Joon-ho, B. South Korea, Czech Republic: CJ Entertainment, The Weinstein Company

Okja 2017. Produced by D. Gardner, J. Kleiner, L.T. Kim, D. Choi, S. Woo-sik, B. Joon-ho and T. Sarandos & Directed by Joon-Ho, B. South Korea, United States: Netflix, Next Entertainment World.

The Sailor 2021. Produced by N. Klujev & Directed by Kasová, L.: Film Expanded (Slovakia), Waterbear.

2067 2020. Produced by L. Shaunessy, J. Taylor and K. Croser & Directed by Larney, S. Australia: Umbrella Entertainment (Australia), RLJE Films (US).

GUTTED - THE FIGHT OF KALK BAY FISHERS | DOCUMENTARY 2019. Produced by M. Rainers and S. Zahara & Directed by Louw, A.C.: Greenpeace Africa.

Love and Monsters 2020. Produced by S. Levy and D. Cohen & Directed by Matthews, M. United States: Paramount Pictures, Netflix

The Last of Us 2023. Produced by G. Spence and C. O'Conno & Directed by Mazin, C. & Druckmann, N. United States: HBO.

Don't Look Up 2021. Produced by A. McKay and K. Messick & Directed by McKay, A. United States: Netflix.

Sweet Tooth 2021. Produced by E. Moore, M. Turner and C. Ham & Directed by Mickle, J. United States: Netflix.

Paul 2011. Produced by N. Park, T. Bevan and E. Fellner & Directed by Mottola, G. United Kingdom, United States: Universal Pictures.

Artifishal 2019. Produced by L. Wagner & Directed by Murphy, J. United States: Patagonia Films.

Pulau Plastik (Plastic Island) 2021. Produced by L. Moira & Directed by Nasution, R. & Laksono, D.D. Indonesia: Netflix.

The Black Mermaid 2022. Produced by Z. Ndhlovu and H. Coleman & Directed by Ndhlovu, Z. South Africa: Waterbear.

Mission Blue 2014. Produced by R. Nixon, F. Stevens, J. Youngelson and P.R. Livingston Jr. & Directed by Nixon, R. & Stevens, F. USA, Bermuda, Ecuador: Netflix.

Chasing Ice 2012. Produced by J. Orłowski, P. DuPré Pesmen and J. Aronson & Directed by Orłowski, J. United States: Submarine Deluxe.

Chasing Coral 2017. Produced by J. Orłowski and L. Rhodes & Directed by Orłowski, J. United States: Netflix.

My Octopus Teacher 2020. Produced by C. Foster & Directed by Reed, J. & Ehrlich, P. South Africa: Netflix.

Koyaanisqatsi 1982. Produced by G. Reggio & Directed by Reggio, G. United States: Island Alive, New Cinema.

Powaqqatsi 1988. Produced by M. Lawrence, G. Reggio and L. Taub & Directed by Reggio, G. United States: The Cannon Group.

Naqoyqatsi 2002. Produced by S. Soderbergh, J. Beirne, G. Reggio and L. Taub & Directed by Reggio, G. United States: Miramax Films.

Puff: Wonders of the Reef 2021. Produced by P. Ayers, N. Robinson, D. Stoupin and P. West & Directed by Robinson, N. United States: Netflix.

How it Ends 2018. Produced by P. Schiff, T. Duncan, K. McCormick and P. Newall & Directed by Rosenthal, D.M. United States: Netflix.

Avengers: Infinity War 2018. Produced by K. Feige & Directed by Russo, A. & Russo, J. United States: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.

A Dying Sea 2022. Produced by F. Seltmann & Directed by Seltmann, F.: Waterbear.

Venom: Let there be carnage 2021. Produced by A. Arad, M. Tolmach, A. Pascal, K. Marcel, T. Hardy and H. Parker & Directed by Serkis, A. United States: Sony Pictures Releasing.

Resident Alien 2021. Produced by C. Sheridan & Directed by Sheridan, C. United States: Syfy.

The Sinner 2021. Produced by D.E. Bloom & Directed by Simonds, D.

WALL-E 2008. Produced by J. Morris & Directed by Stanton, A. United States: Walt Disney Studios, Motion Pictures.

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty 2013. Produced by S. Goldwyn Jr., J. Goldwyn, S. Cornfeld and B. Stiller & Directed by Stiller, B. United States[20th Century Fox.

Seaspiracy 2021. Produced by K. Andersen & Directed by Tabrizi, A.: Netflix.

Silent Running 1972. Produced by M. Gruskoff, M. Hornstein and D. Trumbull & Directed by Trumbull, D. United States: Universal Pictures.

Kingsman: The Secret Service 2014. Produced by M. Vaughn, D. Reid and A. Bohling & Directed by Vaughn, M. United Kingdom, United States: 20th Century Fox.

Cowboy Bebop 2021. Directed by Yost, C. & Nemec, A. United States: Netflix.

Making Waves 2020. Produced by L. Zephirin & Directed by Zephirin, L. United States.

Appendix A

Tentacles Series Synopsis

(Ep.1) On 15 August 1977, mere minutes after the infamous deep-space Wow! Signal reaches Earth, a gigantic silvery tube breaks through the ocean surface. On the tip of the craft a majestic octopus-like creature brandishes an orb as he flaps unceremoniously in the breeze. This is BOB, begging in vain not to be left behind. Against the backdrop of a massive nuclear mushroom cloud, his cephalopod compatriots are not feeling particularly forgiving, and they abandon him on Earth.

In present day Kalk Bay, AIDEN is gatvol of being poor. His family's fishing boat bobs idly in the harbour while his father FELIX eagerly awaits their long-overdue fishing permits in the cosy liquid embrace of cheap Old Brown Sherrie. XOLANI, a flamboyant Xhosa manga-nerd is Aiden's best friend and his only confidant. Aiden has been washing dishes to save for a new phone that he hopes will improve his social status, his grades, and his chances with the ladies. Unfortunately, his prospects get even worse when his cracked phone and its bulging battery blows up both the toilet and all his savings in a humiliating WhatsApp porn mishap in the family bathroom.

Desperate for cash, Aiden is tempted into using his father's boat for abalone poaching by KLIPPIES, the leader of an abalone cartel in Hangberg. It sounds simple enough, until Aiden is trapped into transporting tonnes of dried abalone to a Chinese trawler in a major criminal transaction swapping the molluscs for meth. Things go south when Bob interrupts proceedings in a desperate effort to steal an orb (a mythical TIDE STONE) from the boat. CHAOXIANG, a Triad Lieutenant, is livid when Aiden lets Bob get away, and he promptly tosses him overboard. Just as Aiden accepts his inevitable watery grave, he is mercilessly attacked by Bob.

(Ep.2) Bob hijacks Aiden's unconscious body, probing the boy's mind for a link to Chaoxiang. He leaves a trail of destruction as he tries to find Klippies before the sun rises. No such luck. After a nightmare-riddled sleep featuring surrealistic flashes of Pacific Rim ocean gods and oriental mythologies, Aiden wakes up in his room dressed for school. Getting progressively weirder, the day takes a turn when a tentacle flops from his pants at the urinal. Aiden pulls his trousers to his ankles, just in time for his classroom nemesis, SHANE, to catch him with his dick in his hand. The incident earns Aiden an awkward chat with the principal and extra work at the upcoming Eco Day Beach Clean-up.

Back home, Bob reveals himself. His species are the original earthlings. Throughout history, they have helped humans by posing as oceanic gods, until humans decided that nature is the enemy of civilisation. This prehistoric sentient cephalopod saved Aiden's life by attaching to his spine, and now needs his help to retrieve one of a pair of Tide Stones from the Chinese trawler. This powerful ancient technology can finally help Bob get off the planet.

To find Chaoxiang, Aiden and Bob go on a clumsy covert mission to Hangberg in Hout Bay to steal Klippies' phone. Seeing a smidgen of an opportunity, and with zero impulse control, Bob lashes out from their hiding place to shove Klippies into the street and snatch his phone. The chase is on through the patchwork shacks of Hangberg. Unfortunately, when Aiden stops for a second to catch his breath, the phone is shot to smithereens. Their mission turns into an ink-splattered shitshow, but between eight tentacles and four limbs they fight their way out. Leaping from Sentinel Peak, they disappear into the safe embrace of the ocean... where they promptly get caught on a discarded fishing net. Ugh, Humans. Klippies puts 2 and 2 together and sees a lucrative future snitching to Chaoxiang.

(Ep.3) Amidst dire warnings of ancient tsunamis and ultimate disaster if both stones fall into Triad hands, Bob takes Aiden to fetch the second Tide Stone hidden in an abandoned cephalopod city on the cliffs of the continental shelf. It is a risky move. Both Tide Stones in human hands can spell disaster, but Bob hopes his one will guide them to its partner.

Aiden discovers that Bob is a pathological hoarder. His underwater bachelor's pad reveals that he pines for a lost connection with Chinese ocean goddess Mazu, and although Bob is happy to share his past openly, there is a specific cave that Aiden is not allowed to see. We learn it is filled with hundreds of skeletons and elderly human bodies. Distracting Aiden with his biggest want, Bob takes him to get a nearly new phone from a sunken shipping container.

Aiden's underwater experiences bring him to a realisation about the school Eco Day. He uses his new phone to implement a new strategy of nature experiences. It impresses his favourite teacher, MRS MILLS, and his secret crush, LISA. Aiden is ecstatic when Lisa suggests they join forces on a school project.

(Ep.4) As Eco Day draws closer, Xolani is under pressure to finish the posters. He wants to draw the ultimate inspirational superhero, but he can't seem to get past Aquaman rip-offs. Procrastinating with other people's problems, he becomes obsessed with a rumour of a monster in Hout Bay, and he hounds Aiden who has been avoiding him. Xolani gets all his questions answered when he witnesses a botched

attempt by Klippies and Chaoxiang to kidnap Aiden. Chaoxiang fumes at their failure. He reluctantly calls in reinforcements and is forced to bow the knee to his co-conspirator, a Japanese Yakuza named TAISHIRO—who loaned him the Tide Stone.

Meanwhile, Lisa is bitterly disappointed when Aiden misses their study date. They have so much in common. They are both passionate activists, they both want to pursue a career in sciences, and they both like girls. Lisa wants to introduce Aiden to her partner, but since he stands her up without explanation, perhaps he is not the right friend to confide in.

(Ep.5) Eco Day is underway, and Xolani's Tentacle Hero Eco Day posters make an impression. The whole school participates in a big beach cleanup and recycling drive at Muizenberg Beach, supported by a major recycling company. Environmental activists, surf schools, dive centres, fishing clubs, and a slew of scientists from Two Oceans and UCT introduce the kids to the magic of the ocean. Inheriting Bob's octopi ability to taste through touch, Aiden gets a taste of tetrodotoxin when he touches a dissected pufferfish.

Bolstered by the success of the Eco Day, Aiden pressures Lisa to go on a real date. She tells him in confidence that she is gay and is honestly keen to be friends. The news hardly has time to sink in as the festivities get busted by a horde of gangsters. Triad rubber ducks from the ocean and Klippies' goons corner Aiden in broad daylight. Klippies and Chaoxiang grab Aiden's "girlfriend" as hostage, prompting Aiden to out her in front of the whole school. But she's not the only one to be outed!

When trigger-happy gangsters threaten the kids, the tentacles come out in the mid-day sun for all to see! Bob and Aiden work well together to protect the students. They even save Shane's miserable life. Unfortunately, Aiden's reputation takes a knock as all the girls now see him as a gross monster. Chaoxiang looks quite pleased with the distraction, and Aiden realises a number of the rubber ducks went to Kalk Bay. His parents and the Tide Stone are in danger.

(Ep.6) Aiden and Bob fight the gangsters until the police arrive before swimming for Kalk Bay. They know it's a trap, but they have no choice. In their living room, Felix and LETTIE have swords at their throats. Aiden comes face-to-face with Taishiro, a bastard son of the Japanese Imperial line... Bob's descendants. Aiden learns that severing the bond with Bob will cause him to age and die within hours, just like Urashima in the old Japanese fairy tales. Taishiro convinces Aiden that Bob has been using him all along. Bob is a parasite, and only good for one thing—being the guest of honour in an age-old ritual among the

Yakuza elites. In fact, Triad and Yakuza bosses are on their way to Cape Town to feast on Bob's living flesh and extend their lives by decades.

In a last-ditch effort to make things right, Bob dumps memories into Aiden's mind and severs himself from the two tentacles connected to Aiden's spine using a kitchen knife. He lashes out with his six remaining tentacles and electrocutes himself along with Taishiro and the guards. Aiden is in excruciating pain. His mind warps. Echoes urge him to grab the Tide Stone from his aquarium. Meanwhile, Chaoxiang approaches outside. The Florez's barely escape with the help of next-door neighbour KARLA.

(Ep.7) Aiden is gone, assaulted by seizure after seizure. Bob's memory-dump has locked him into a perpetual flashback. Aiden sees that Bob really did believe humans and cephalopods should work together, but human emotions are dangerous. It corrupted his daughters and put Tide Stones into human hands. It led to wars and the fall of civilizations.

We learn that Bob's worst mistake is that he was the German Scientist that helped to build the atomic bomb. He did it to destroy the other Tide Stone. A laboratory in Japan was on the verge of ripping a hole in reality that would have folded the solar system into a black hole. He was desperate to stop the sequence he had put into motion. But the cost was unthinkable. His people never forgave him for his ignorance in trusting the humans. When the weapons he made to destroy his second Tide Stone failed AND was then used against his own people, the cephalopods abandoned Bob to live in the misery of his creation. His punishment is to watch humans destroy the planet he loves.

When Aiden awakens, Felix is getting an earful from Karla. Her deep animosity stems from him giving up after his business tanked. It cost many jobs in the community and choosing the bottle over the community was an affront to the people who were loyal to him.

Aiden struggles with a depressive emptiness inside. Bob's missing voice leaves a deep void. Aiden ponders the meaning of community while he struggles to get control of the two tentacles on his back. Jam-packed with neurons the tentacles literally have a mind of their own, and Aiden is too angry. The tentacles destroy innocent doylies and fluffy pillows. It attacks anything that looks at them funny, like plush toys and the mirror. Aiden must find a way to deal with his worst emotions if he is to continue. In his moment of greatest despair, his friends surprise him when they rally to save Bob from becoming a meal.

(Ep.8) A plethora of over-the-hill crime bosses, eager to extend their unsavoury lives, meet in the Potluck Club on the Old Biscuit Mill near Cape Town harbour. Unbeknownst to all, the gathering was a

trap that Chaoxiang has been planning for years. With all the crime bosses in one place he can finally dispatch them and build a new evil empire.

Aiden interrupts proceedings to rescue Bob. Taishiro desperately wants the second Tide Stone. He offers Bob's life in exchange. To Aiden, Bob is more important. He makes the exchange and gets Bob back. Bob has been mutilated—another tentacle has been chopped up and served to the crime bosses. Touching the feast, Aiden realises that it is soaked in tetrodotoxin. He warns them, but Taishiro has already eaten his share. Chaoxiang is furious at Aiden for derailing his devious plan!

Failing to poison all the bosses, Chaoxiang uses the Tide Stones and Bob's blood to trigger a massive tsunami before escaping to the safety of a waiting helicopter. He's willing to sacrifice the entire city to clear his way to power.

As the tsunami rolls over Robben Island, Aiden and Bob reunite in a final race against time to get the Tide Stones from Chaoxiang. The battle is fierce, and to make things worse the blooded Tide Stones generate uncontrolled anomalies that tear through buildings and scuttle ships in the harbour. The tail is torn from the helicopter. Bob taps into his own anger—a lesson learned from Aiden—to overcome Chaoxiang and liberate the Tide Stones. The shimmering pearls are flung from the helicopter.

Far below, the tsunami crashes through green point stadium, and the waterfront. Screaming masses flee in panic but are swallowed up by the churning waters.

Aiden leaps from the helicopter. He catches one stone in a tumbling dive and launches into a death drop, reaching, reaching, reaching for the second stone. A piece of helicopter knocks Aiden away from his target. NOOOO! Then it strikes the stone, sending it careening past Aiden. Without a thought he lashes out with his arm at full stretch, making an impossible catch! (Thus, redeeming himself for the comic number of missed catches throughout the series).

Now, he must bring his emotions under control to activate and use the stones. And he must do it before he hits the ground! He disappears in front of the colossal tsunami wave. The helicopter crashes into the ocean! Is Bob dead? Is this it? Is this FAILURE? Yes, it is. NO! Look at that!

Suddenly the wave halts, like the water molecules themselves are being gripped in place. Aiden rises majestically into the air with a stone in each hand. He did it! Slowly, then faster, the waters are sucked out to sea. The wave spits out drowning people as it retreats.

Later, Aiden and his friends and father are out on the open ocean on the fishing boat. Felix shows the kids how they clip the tails of the crayfish when they are found with eggs, to show all the fishermen they are breeders. Aiden stares knowingly out to sea. Does he miss Bob?

From the waters, a liquid craft rises into the sky. It's Bob. He is alive. His severed tentacles are already growing back. For a moment it looks like he might head off to find his people, but instead he starts lowering a massive net onto the boat. He has found his people, and together they are cleaning up the ocean.