

COMFORT ZONE

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COMFORT ZONE

The Arts Minister's coming and the media's on their way, but still there's not enough balloons for the launch of next year's theatre season! In the upstairs office of a small inner city theatre an ugly battle for ultimate power is in full swing. The Artistic Director, the Yes-man, the writer and God forbid, even the cleaning lady are slamming doors and opening windows in this fast paced, action-packed tour de farce that takes a knife to this incestuous theatre industry. *Comfort Zone* tells the story of a woman with more power than she deserves, whose lost touch with the reality of the industry she claims to have single-handedly created. Deirdre James is a protagonist clinging to the last bastion of power (let alone integrity) and in between programming her friend's work and shagging the Art's Minister's PA, she flaunts herself with an air of superiority wrapped round a Greenroom Award. This is a woman who can make or break the drug and alcohol addictions of many aspiring playwrights. When Deirdre's sexual favours for arts funding backfires, she is faced with a financial ultimatum that is delivered by a socially misfortunate lad who works for the Arts Minister. His news wreaks havoc upon their fragile lives. While the cleaning lady mutters about the terrible injustices she's suffered, the Yes-Man is secretly plotting his artistic coup, all until Deirdre returns from lunch to select the final play for next year's season - in time for tonight's big launch. As one hopeful script goes out the window another one catches fire, and so is the selection criteria of Deirdre James.

Comfort Zone was first performed at the Bedford Hotel, North Melbourne on 28th September 2005, with the following cast:

DEIRDRE JAMES	...	<i>Alexis Beebe</i>
YES-MAN	...	<i>Timothy Wotherspoon</i>
SHEREEN	...	<i>Melanie Sharpe</i>
BRIAN	...	<i>Izeqiel McCoy</i>
GRANTLEY MCPORPUS	...	<i>Steven Sparke</i>

The upstairs overcrowded theatre office of DEIRDRE and YES-MAN is dim and dusty. One door leads to the downstairs auditorium, and a second door leads to a small kitchen. Next to the kitchen door is a window overlooking the main entrance to the building.

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***SHEREEN** enters from the auditorium carrying a pile of scripts. In the pockets of her clean apron she carries a roll of paper towel, a spray bottle, crumpled white garbage bags, cigarettes and a lighter. She places the scripts on the left side of Deirdre's desk and wipes down both desks. As she tidies the office and empties the office bins into a large black plastic bag, she randomly steals stationery. She begins to sort a second pile of scripts to the right of Deirdre's desk, placing three scripts on Yes-Man's desk. She picks up the Cavanaugh script with a green cover sheet from Yes-Man's desk and throws it out the window. **YES-MAN** enters from the kitchen, holding an empty Tupperware container.*

YES-MAN: You're nearly finished, aren't you Shereen? Deirdre and I are finalising next year's season this afternoon. I need everything perfect for when the Arts Minster arrives for tonight's launch.

SHEREEN: Just gotta do the phones.

***SHEREEN** glares at **YES-MAN**, there is an awkward moment until...*

YES-MAN: Right. Is there anymore of that yummy teacake you made?

SHEREEN: Guzzle-guts ate it all.

YES-MAN: I know Deirdre has her faults, but she is *truly* an inspiring woman; think of all the incredible things she could have done for this theatre. More scripts submitted by those wonderful playwrights, hmmm.

SHEREEN: Yes.

YES-MAN: It's a shame the funding bodies over look them, I wouldn't put them into my season.

SHEREEN: Your season?

YES-MAN: What! Nothing...

***YES-MAN** exits to the kitchen. **SHEREEN** cleans the phones.*

SHEREEN: Pity you don't have any talent, academic knob. Who does he think he is? I've been here longer than him and that bitch, put together. Mind you, without him, she'd be out in the street hocking her box. She's got as much creative talent as a D.I.Y. hysterectomy. Have you seen half the shit that gets put on here? Probably not, nobody else has. They're all industry based plays that nobody understands; they start off all right, but deteriorate into an offensive, self-indulgent pieces of shit that ends up all over the adjustable seating.

Her hands shake as she lights up a cigarette. She continues to clean.

SHEREEN: This theatre belonged to my family and I'm going to get it back. I've read every script that has come through this place. Them and their stupid bloody launch; wait and see what I've got in store. My dad owned and operated this theatre. Back then, it was always buzzing with actors and technicians and writers and... it was a little cultural hive everybody talked about, it was alive, it breathed. But, my dad was forced to sell the theatre, so Deirdre's father, Barnaby James, bought him out then sacked him. Now it's just a piss trough, for drunken bastards. Him and his impotent penis and prostate cancer. No wonder Deirdre's mother was having an affair. This theatre should belong to me. I'm the one with the hidden talent. Wait till they discover my...

DEIRDRE enters from the auditorium with the Cavanaugh script and places it on her desk.

DEIRDRE: I can't stay too long Yessie. Oh, it's you...

SHEREEN: So it is.

DEIRDRE: Where's my Yes-Man?

YES-MAN: (*Off stage*) Please stop calling me that, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE: I was just having lunch with Bert and Moria. The bookshop called, they said my order has arrived and I have to pop in to pick it up this afternoon. Someone's been a busy boy in the auditorium, haven't they Yessie? Downstairs looks adequate, but what about some more balloons? You have organised the hot food and drinks? Oh and don't forget the media this time, Yessie. Yessie?

SHEREEN throws the script with the green cover sheet out the window as YES-MAN enters from the kitchen with a cup of tea.

YES-MAN: I'm not a 'Yes-Man'. I have a name you know, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE: I want everything perfect for when Max arrives.

YES-MAN: Yes Deirdre. I suppose he's getting here early, should I make myself scarce again? What about the Arts Minister?

DEIRDRE: Darling, I don't even know what he looks like.

YES-MAN: It's a she. The media will be here and as you saw downstairs, the cold food is set, the hot food will be delivered at seven, and I couldn't possibly blow another balloon.

DEIRDRE: And that's why you'll never get anywhere in this industry, darling.

DEIRDRE sits at her desk and begins to browse over the pile of scripts.

YES-MAN: I have a couple of new submissions for the last place in next year's season.

DEIRDRE: It's not the last place. It's just a difficult timeslot on the calendar.

YES-MAN: Yes Deirdre. I didn't mean to make it sound mediocre.

DEIRDRE: You can put the new submissions on that pile.

YES-MAN takes the pile of three scripts from his desk and places them on the pile to the left of DEIRDRE'S desk.

DEIRDRE: Three.

YES-MAN: I'm sure there were four.

DEIRDRE: Well, let's eliminate these three for being late.

DEIRDRE throws the three scripts in the bin. YES-MAN retrieves them.

YES-MAN: But, but, I promised these playwrights they would at least be considered.

DEIRDRE lights up a cigarette. Her hands shake.

DEIRDRE: I don't like your tone. You can tell these playwrights, darling that they have been considered, late. Now let's get to those a little more organised, shall we.

YES-MAN: Yes, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE: Good. Shamus Octavini, "The Wet Sand". Sounds like he's been playing with his wet hand. Forget it.

DEIRDRE throws the script in the bin. YES-MAN retrieves it.

YES-MAN: His last play, "Completely Forgettable", was thoroughly enjoyable.

DEIRDRE: Of course Yessie, you are only as good as your last production and that was his last production. Did you read this, 'Wet Hand'?

YES-MAN: The Wet Sand. Yes, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE: Yessie darling, I have been the artistic director of this theatre for over thirty-years. Have some faith in me when I say I know what I want, a format I can understand.

YES-MAN: But, it has such dynamics and plot intrigue, at least pencil it in for our development workshops. I'm sure you will find it to be something our demographic will relate to.

DEIRDRE: Yessie, darling, our audience changes season by season. That was something my father, Barnaby James taught me from day one. What do you think kept this place going for so long?

SHEREEN: Government subsidies.

DEIRDRE: Haven't you gone yet!

SHEREEN: No.

YES-MAN: We're trying to work. We have to finalise next year's season before the Arts Minister arrives.

DEIRDRE: I have to finalise next year's season.

SHEREEN: Have you thought about that Cavanaugh play, the one about the nursery rhymes?

DEIRDRE: Yes, yes. Of course I have...

YES-MAN: How do you know about the Cavanaugh play, that's a secret?

SHEREEN: I know everything that goes on around here...

DEIRDRE: Of course she does. She's the cleaner.

YES-MAN: I just don't think that she...

DEIRDRE: No darling, you don't, and that's why you are where you are. Remember darling, balloons.

SHEREEN: Why aren't you listening to any of my recommendations?

DEIRDRE: Shereen! Shhhhh...!

YES-MAN: Who does the truck driver's wife thinks she is, the dramaturge?

DEIRDRE: Of course not – she's just the cleaner.

SHEREEN: I'll give you bloody cleaner.

***SHEREEN** exits to the auditorium.*

DEIRDRE: And, what's next on the pile?

YES-MAN: This is a promising little piece by Oliver Guwolski, "Mirror Mirror".

DEIRDRE: Let me have a look.

YES-MAN passes the script to DEIRDRE.

DEIRDRE: Oh yes. Oliver. No.

DEIRDRE throws the script in the bin. YES-MAN retrieves it.

YES-MAN: This is a brilliant piece.

DEIRDRE: He's not marketable darling. Have you seen his haircut? Not us. Not anyone. Not even the big theatres will touch him.

YES-MAN: If you think so.

DEIRDRE: Not that hair cut. I will not allow the integrity of this theatre to be undermined by such bad hairdressing.

YES-MAN: If you think that's best for next year's season.

DEIRDRE: Who's next?

YES-MAN: I can't cull scripts based on haircuts or playwright's looks.

DEIRDRE: I know Yessie. That's why I can. Next.

YES-MAN: Here, this is a new script by Brian...

DEIRDRE: And what's next on the pile?

YES-MAN: This is the next...

DEIRDRE: And the one after that one?

YES-MAN: What about Brian?

DEIRDRE: What about him?

YES-MAN: You don't like his script?

DEIRDRE: You do know who this Brian is, don't you darling?

YES-MAN: Yes. A very talented playwright.

DEIRDRE: Yessie, you think everyone is a talented playwright. Please try and be a little more objective.

YES-MAN: But you haven't even read it...

DEIRDRE: Yes I have. Now show me the next one.

YES-MAN: Have you even read it?

DEIRDRE: How dare you! Don't you dare question my ability to decide who is talented and who is not even worthy of my time. What part of this process do you not understand? I have been completely indulged in this process. I have put in the long haul and the long hours to know at a glance whose worthy of my consideration for the final piece of the puzzle. I have to juggle the day to day running and maintenance of this theatre; the daily work a drudge-load I endure to make ends meet that keeps this place breathing, has little consideration for the fake sincerity I must manufacture for the minions in this world who dare call themselves artists and playwrights. The constant downward spiral of rejection that I dispense plagues my conscience on a daily basis. Those poor rejected kids that I must suffer are not even merely considered in your unforgiving attack on my integrity. When I say no to a script, it is not because of a flippant fleeting thought of bad taste or unknown exploration on my behalf. No, it is because I can see the major theme of a season comes down to pure, unadulterated talent in the playwright's energy, breeding and haircut. I know what is good. I know what is bad. I know what is brilliant art. And that my Yessie, is not brilliant art. It's all in the narrative.

DEIRDRE throws BRIAN'S script and the other three scripts in the bin. She lights a cigarette and throws the lit match in the bin. PAUSE.

YES-MAN: None of that matters now...

The bin emits smoke and flame as the scripts begin to smoulder.

DEIRDRE: None of it matters? I beg your pardon.

YES-MAN: No, I, um, ah...

DEIRDRE: None, of it, matters? OK, I that's, a, good, no, great.

YES-MAN: No, I, um, ah...

DEIRDRE: Now the truth comes out. You have me all flustered and worked up.

YES-MAN: No, I, um, ah, I didn't mean to personally attack you. Your automatic response to the...

DEIRDRE: Automatic? Automatic? Haven't you listen to one word I've said? Automatic? I'm not one of your pathetic little students Yessie.

YES-MAN: Yes, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE: I need champagne.

YES-MAN: I don't think it's a good idea. We only have enough for tonight's launch.

DEIRDRE: Be a darling? Fresh glasses are in the bar.

YES-MAN: I don't think there is enough as it is. You know how much the reviewer from the Herald Sun drinks. We can't risk another season of bad reviews.

DEIRDRE: Not him again. I don't know how he got the job in the first place; he used to be a sports writer. He's only jealous because I wouldn't show him my tits.

YES-MAN: Yes, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE: I'll get the champagne.

DEIRDRE exits to the kitchen. PAUSE. YES-MAN pours his cup of tea into the smouldering bin.

YES-MAN: Integrity? Talent? You? I can't wait for the day you find yourself up against the threat of funding cuts and the reshuffle of power. Wait till they discover the season I'm programming. This idealistic business you call a theatre is nothing more than your sycophantic, pustulant, dredge-hole of incestuous histrionic shit. Everyone knows how you got where you are; you'd be nothing without Max. My time will come, think of it as a rebirth. Darling.

DEIRDRE: (off) What was that Yessie?

YES-MAN: I said I feel like I'm about to give birth. Can you bring me a glass of champagne, too? Where are you Brian? When I have you in front of that over dramatic carpet stain with your new piece of drivel, she will accept it regardless of your haircut, breeding, or the size of your dick. As for you, you dried up piece of wart puss, wait 'till I have the reigns of artistic power, then I'll whip your whinny little saggy arse.

DEIRDRE: (off) Do you think that she could have put some cheese in the fridge like I asked her too?

YES-MAN: You could always scrap the cheese out from under your armpits.

DEIRDRE: (off) For crying out loud, why can't I find good help?

YES-MAN: Only a double-ended dildo would bring you the kind of help you need. Like the one in your desk drawer...

BRIAN enters from the auditorium, carrying a bag.

BRIAN: Double-ended dildo?

YES-MAN: Brian. When did you get here?

BRIAN: On the double-ended dildo.

YES-MAN: It's not mine.

BRIAN: Which end?

YES-MAN: Don't you start.

BRIAN: Is she here?

YES-MAN: Shhh. Deirdre's in the kitchen.

Loud noises and DEIRDRE's excitable laugh are heard coming from the kitchen.

BRIAN: Sounds like a sitcom.

YES-MAN: You're late.

BRIAN: I ran into a couple of friends of mine. Said they saw a show here last night. Said it was...

Deirdre's mobile phone rings from the kitchen. It is answered within three rings.

YES-MAN: Yes. I know. I didn't want to program it, but he was an ex-lover of Deirdre's. Some guy who spent the last twenty years recovering from a nervous breakdown. How are you feeling?

BRIAN: A little nervous. I need a drink. Is she in a good mood?

YES-MAN: Not yet.

BRIAN: Fine.

YES-MAN: Can I get you anything?

BRIAN opens his bag and pulls out a hip flask.

BRIAN: A glass.

YES-MAN: No. Deirdre will insist that you have champagne.

BRIAN: What do you want me to do? Does she like it? I mean, will she like me?

YES-MAN: Just follow my lead. Leave it up to me. She'll be eating out of our hands in no time. You just need to be your usual charming self. You won't have any problems with her, I promise. She's a push over. A kitten. I'm running this place, unbeknownst to her. Without me, there

wouldn't be a Fresnel in here that would work. One day I will be able to turn this historic artistic playhouse into the shining palace it should always have... don't worry about a thing. She'll love it.

BRIAN: What did she think of it?

YES-MAN: Let's talk strategy.

BRIAN: Strategy?

YES-MAN: How are you going to approach the subject of your script?

BRIAN: I thought you were going to approach her. That's why I worked my arse off getting it over to you before the deadline.

YES-MAN: Do you trust me, Brian?

BRIAN: What choice do I have?

YES-MAN: You panic too much.

BRIAN: That's how I've survive.

YES-MAN: Don't worry about a thing. I'm sure that your talent will shine through the pitch that you have prepared.

BRIAN: You said you've prepared it?

YES-MAN: Did I?

BRIAN: I have a little something.

YES-MAN: Wonderful.

BRIAN: Just in case you forgot.

YES-MAN: I didn't forget... I just... forgot.

BRIAN: And the difference would be...?

YES-MAN: A vowel. You're a very talented young man. I'm sure Deirdre will love what ever you have prepared.

BRIAN: My pocket's not a urinal. I'm shitting myself about this and you haven't done anything since we met two weeks ago.

YES-MAN: Yes. I have. I've set up this meeting, haven't I? I managed to get your script in front of her.

BRIAN: Does she even know about the meeting?

YES-MAN: Will you stop panicking?

BRIAN: I'll take that as a no.

YES-MAN: You need to relax. I'll see what's holding her up.

BRIAN: What should I do?

YES-MAN: Hide here.

BRIAN hides under DEIRDRE's desk. YES-MAN exits to the kitchen. PAUSE.

DEIRDRE: (off) Hold on a moment, Fernando. He's, what?

YES-MAN: (off) He's in there now.

BRIAN: Shit.

DEIRDRE: (off) Well, tell him to go away.

BRIAN finds his tea stained, burnt and blackened script in the bin, with burnt rubbish melded to it.

BRIAN: What's this doing in...? She doesn't like it.

DEIRDRE enters with a glass of champagne, talking on her mobile phone.

DEIRDRE: Yes, of course. We have plenty of room in the new season, Fernando. It's not a season without you, darling. I'll slot you into week three. Do you know what you might be doing yet? No? Well I'm sure whatever it is, it'll be fabulous. That's fine, darling. Lovely. Until then, kisses.

DEIRDRE disconnects the call.

DEIRDE: Good afternoon. How are you? That's nice. I'm Deirdre James, the artistic director for this wonderful little theatre, and I understand you're here to submit a script for consideration for next year's season. Well, I'm sorry to say that all scripts being considered where accepted by the deadline. I'm sorry darling, but you're too late.

BRIAN: No. I'm not. I just retrieved it, from the bin.

DEIRDRE: Oh, which one?

BRIAN: The smouldering one.

DEIRDRE removes a piece of rubbish melded to the retrieved script.

DEIRDRE: Oh my, how did that fall in there? I wonder. Yessie, why didn't you tell me that this wonderful young man's script was in for consideration? It's so hard to find good help these days.

The sound of a glass breaking is heard coming from the kitchen.

BRIAN: Really?

DEIRDRE: Yessie, darling, bring, what's your name?

BRIAN: Brian.

DEIRDRE: Bring this young man a glass of champagne.

BRIAN: Thank you.

DEIRDRE: So, darling, tell me all about yourself? I just had a lovely lunch with Bert and Moira. He wants me on the couch. I asked if Pattie would mind, huh. What a laugh, he has a wonderful sense of humour. He's in a new play at the moment. What a wonderful actor. Have you met him? I mustn't forget to pick up my book. Yessie, have you blown those balloons, yet? Now, where did I put my... it was so nice of you to drop by. I'm sorry I didn't have much time. The Arts Minister is coming for tonight's launch. Yessie, you have remembered to invite the media, haven't you? Well, there's just so much to do right, now, lovely to meet you, Barry. We must do this again some time. Perhaps I can give you a call...

***** Truncated *****

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