ALPHA TANGO

by Geoffray Tranber

US English Stage Version

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

The idiotic beliefs voiced in this play — and there are many — are unfortunately not my invention. They circulate on social media and have a very real following.

Laughing at them is one way to fight them.

G.T.

CHARACTERS

MARCUS the Alpha male.

GARANCE *(gah-RAHNSS)***:** an eco-feminist influencer.

VADIM *(vah-DEEM)***:** a decline-obsessed podcaster.

STAN a paranoid prepper.

JUSTINE Garance's friend and confidante.

WORKING AND PRODUCTION NOTES

A NOTE ON THE US STAGE VERSION

This version has been adapted for the American stage, with particular attention to natural spoken dialogue, comic timing, and satirical impact. Idioms and cultural references have been adjusted where necessary to preserve the spirit of the original French play.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The play is designed for a single set: Marcus's living room.

The technical effects — livestream, doorbells, blackout, explosion, public-address announcement, and final collapse — may be treated realistically or stylized, depending on the production.

Sound should be treated as part of the satire: overproduced, slightly ridiculous, and aggressively masculine at first, then progressively corrupted, softened, or turned against itself. The doorbell cues, explosion, blackout, public-address announcement, and final collapse should be precisely synchronized but may be stylized rather than realistic.

MUSIC AND RIGHTS NOTE

Sound cues that evoke or directly reference existing songs are intended as dramaturgical indications of style, tone, rhythm, and cultural association.

Depending on production rights and practical constraints, they may be realized through cleared samples, licensed recordings, licensed covers, or original pastiches that preserve the intended comic and theatrical effect.

The final song cue should carry a joyful, energetic, optimistic, feminist spirit. If the suggested track is unavailable, another song or original composition may be used.

CONTENT NOTE

The play contains misogynistic and homophobic language. This language is used satirically by characters whose worldview is exposed and undermined.

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ROUND 1

A large living room in a Haussmann-style Paris apartment. The shutters of a large window near the kitchen door, stage right, are closed, although it is daytime. The atmosphere is very dark, almost bunker-like.

Upstage center, above the front door, a huge red neon sign reading "Alpha Predators" flashes.

Stage left, one section of wall is made of a large two-way mirror. It is the sliding door of a walk-in closet. In front of this mirror: workout equipment: enormous dumbbells and a sleek treadmill. Further along the upstage wall, a state-of-the-art, ultra-flat, widescreen television.

Stage right, a heavy, hyper-modern executive desk, cold and impersonal, angled three-quarters toward the audience. On it: a small laptop with a webcam clipped to its screen, a large boom arm holding an enormous microphone, and a ring light. On the upstage wall behind the desk, designer shelves hold cups and trophies.

Center stage, facing the audience, two large black armchairs sit side by side, separated only by a minibar serving as a coffee table.

PUSH-UPS

The curtain rises on the "Alpha Studio." Only the flashing red neon lights the gloom. An animation showing the rising price of cryptocurrencies loops on the flatscreen mounted on the wall. The closet door is ajar. Marcus is shirtless, doing push-ups while listening to an audiobook. The voice echoes in his earbuds.

AUDIOBOOK VOICE. *(deep, solemn, and self-important)* "Chapter Four. The Fall of Rome and the Feminization of the Legions."

MARCUS. ***(****counting his push-ups)* … Fifty-three… fifty-four… fifty-five…

AUDIOBOOK VOICE. "The Empire did not collapse in 476 because of chaotic barbarian raids. Odoacer merely delivered the fatal blow to a door whose hinges had long since rusted under the tears of feminized men!"

MARCUS. Fifty-six… fifty-seven… fifty-eight…

AUDIOBOOK VOICE. "The decline of the Roman armies began the day centurions laid down their bloodied swords to lounge in lukewarm baths, while deconstructing their masculinity over Greek philosophers, men whose testosterone levels were PATHETIC!"

MARCUS. *(shouting)* Limp-dicked losers! … Fifty-nine… sixty… sixty-one…

AUDIOBOOK VOICE. "Thus were born the first soy-boys of Antiquity! Soft men. Weak men. Morons. In a word, the original tree huggers: men who had forgotten the Frame. Discipline and the sacred virtues of suffering were forgotten the instant Rome's legions of Alpha warriors, after crushing every army in the known world, replaced the moral, martial, and vertical order handed down by the Senate with those disgusting open sharing circles about legionary vulnerability!"

MARCUS. *(shouting)* IT'S TRUE! … Sixty-two… sixty-three… sixty-four…

AUDIOBOOK VOICE. "From that moment on, the Rhine frontier did not break under the disorderly assaults of excessively hairy Visigoths! It broke when the first Roman foot soldier sat on the toilet seat instead of pissing standing up! LIKE A MAN!"

MARCUS. *(shouting)* PUSSY! … Sixty-five… sixty-six… sixty-seven…

AUDIOBOOK VOICE. "It broke when he apologized to his neighbors on the Colosseum benches for claiming too much space with his manspreading!"

MARCUS. *(shouting)* An Alpha never apologizes! … Sixty-eight… sixty-nine… seventy…

AUDIOBOOK VOICE. "Remember this, Soldier: the Empire never dies under the blows of the enemy! It collapses from within. It faints, like a weak woman, the moment the great conquering Wolf agrees, instead of drinking the blood of his enemies from the sacred skull of his ancestors, to sip *organic oat milk from the neighborhood co-op!!!*"

THE GOLDEN TESTICLES

Vadim enters, carrying a garment bag.

VADIM. Careful, okay? The second you feel your heart rate cross the threshold, you stop! We cannot have sweat liquidating your foundation before we go live.

MARCUS. *(not hearing him)* Seventy-one… seventy-two… seventy-three…

AUDIOBOOK VOICE. "Learn the hard lesson! Do not be the Fall of Rome! Push those goddamn abs harder and harder!"

MARCUS. *(shouting)* I AM pushing! … Seventy-four…

VADIM. *(yanking out his earbuds)* Hey! Marcus! Stop! I've got the jacket.

MARCUS. *(springing smoothly to his feet)* The one that's a size too small?

VADIM. Yes. We go live in twenty minutes. You done pumping yourself up?

MARCUS. Yeah! Check this out!

He strikes a bodybuilder pose and won't let it go.

VADIM. Easy! Easy! Stand down, Marcus!

Marcus releases all at once, puffing like an ox.

VADIM. Let me see the pecs.

MARCUS. They're over-inflated. I'm at least a C cup right now! Ha! Ha! Ha!

VADIM. (For reasons I choose not to examine, I hate this joke, Marcus.) Perfect, anyway. Vascularity is top-tier. Traps are holding. Your shoulders absolutely have to fill sixty percent of the screen during the livestream! That's media territorial marketing.

MARCUS. No problem. Give me the jacket. I'm gonna bust right out of it!

VADIM. No, you're not! It is a double-breasted Milanese blazer in pure vicuña!

MARCUS. Pure what?

VADIM. The fiber of the gods, Marcus! The animal lives at thirteen thousand feet. From up there, it looks down on the moral collapse of our soft democracies.

MARCUS. Oh, okay…

VADIM. When you wear this, you are not dressed. You raise your vibrational frequency above the ruins of egalitarianism and the Western race to the bottom. You rise to the level of the predatory aristocracy!

MARCUS. "The predatory aristocracy"? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah! I love that. Totally me.

Marcus carefully puts on the jacket, a double-breasted blazer.

MARCUS. Oof! Tight under the arms.

VADIM. Suffering is greatness, Marcus! Love it! And be careful! That thing costs twelve thousand euros retail! I had to put down an eight-thousand-euro deposit just to rent it for twenty-four hours from the concierge service. So don't twitch. Your left armpit is a liability.

MARCUS. Okay... Jewelry now. Vadim! Let's get it out!

VADIM. No.

MARCUS. Vadim! I said let's get it out!

VADIM. I'm really not seeing the ROI on this… This is our shot at Olympus, Marcus. If you dominate this face-off, we disrupt the market and hit 750,000 Premium subscribers!

MARCUS. I want us to smash through a million followers! I want an avalanche of views!

VADIM. You really are an Alpha Predator, Marcus… but this hardware…

MARCUS. It is a piece that will generate insane buzz! And honestly… I love provoking these females, Vadim. They're gonna choke on their own rage when they see this thing.

VADIM. Alea jacta est. After all, you may be right. Bring it out… But wait! One Alpha Predator is missing. Where's Stan?

MARCUS. He's finishing up the closet lockdown. *(calling toward the closet)* Hey, Stan! While you're in there, bring me the necklace!

STAN. *(poking his head out)* Copy! Ze necklace!

MARCUS. And the closet? Was it safe?

STAN. Yes. Close call! If I hadn't hermetically sealed the air vent, I am positive they would have hooked up a canister of gaseous Bisphenol A to the ducts!

MARCUS. Bastards!

STAN. The outside world is now a red-zone environment, Marcus! Air and soil have become infection vectors. That old cabin-in-the-woods prepper stuff is dead. The modern 2.0 combat operator establishes a secured perimeter, a high-tech autonomous shelter. Otherwise you're wide open to chemical-castration strikes! Stealth microplastics, programmed to neutralize our central nervous system directly! They can eat your muscle mass while you're talking, Marcus! Can you believe that?… Here… The necklace.

Marcus puts the jewelry around his neck: a gold chain with, as a pendant, the life-size gold cast of a pair of testicles.

MARCUS. So? This goes hard, right?

VADIM. I'm still not sure.

STAN. *(pulling out a Geiger counter and running it over the necklace)* No, this is excellent! Pure gold is a conductor. It'll create an electromagnetic shield around his rib cage and stop their radiation from undermining his cortisol levels.

MARCUS. Good thing we've got you on board, Stan. You have no idea how safe that makes me feel.

Stan crosses the stage and peeks outside through a crack in the shutters. Suddenly, his Geiger counter starts crackling.

STAN. *(screaming)* Warning! Fake clouds in sight! They're using geoengineering! They're broadcasting low frequencies calibrated to resonate with the male endocrine system and sabotage your predator chemistry!

MARCUS. Fucking psychos!

STAN. *(still screaming, pointing to the computer on the desk)* Vadim! Play the red-stag mating-call track! It'll over-activate Marcus's reptilian brain and block their attack!

VADIM. Silence! "Empires are not built on noise." That's what Seneca wrote in "Stoicism for Winners." Marcus! Fifteen minutes, and we're live with the hyena and her herd of Betas!

MARCUS. *(overexcited)* I'm gonna destroy her! I'm gonna wreck her! I'm…

VADIM. Review drill! Give me at least five indicators of interest in a woman!

MARCUS. Uh… "If her hips rotate toward me by more than thirty degrees, it means her subconscious validates my genetic heritage and accepts my dominance!"

VADIM. Yes! She's hooked! That's ONE!

MARCUS. "Any object between me, the Alpha male, and her, the woman, constitutes a psychological chastity barrier. If she moves her microphone or her glass out of the way, she opens the fortress gate and unconsciously authorizes kinesthetic escalation!"

VADIM. Good! We claim territory! TWO!

MARCUS. "She blushes! Blood flow to the cheekbones! Her parasympathetic system capitulates before a superior SMV, Sexual Market Value!"

VADIM. THREE! She knows she's prey! AGAIN!

MARCUS. "If the woman syncs her breathing to mine, her diaphragm is recognizing the Alpha male. She relinquishes autonomy and aligns her rhythm to request my protection!"

VADIM. Excellent! FOUR!

MARCUS. "Faced with the unshakable verticality of my masculine Frame, the woman's throat goes dry. If she swallows visibly or takes a sip of water, it is the physical confession of her intellectual inferiority." Am I good?

VADIM. We're not done! Five indicators of disinterest from a woman!

MARCUS. Uh… "She angles her torso away from me to exit my field of dominance. She refuses the pull of my Alpha aura in order to protect her ego."

VADIM. Yes! ONE!

MARCUS. “She looks away from me and scans the room. Her reptilian brain is looking for an emergency exit or assessing the presence of a higher-status male.”

VADIM. TWO! (That would be a disaster.) What else?

MARCUS. “She only uses sentences of fewer than three words: ‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ ‘Maybe.’ She is attempting to starve me, the Alpha, by depriving me of conversational energy in order to regain control of the Frame.”

VADIM. (Fucking tease!) THREE! Next!

MARCUS. Uh… Oh, right! “Her sigh is not a sign of fatigue. It is a sonic micro-aggression designed specifically to suction out ambient androgen charge and downgrade my status to that of an entertaining Beta male.”

VADIM. (In that case: oof, oof, oof.) GIVE ME ONE MORE!

MARCUS. …

VADIM. Come on! Faster! One last one!

MARCUS. I… I’ve got a hole in my indicators list…

VADIM. *(beside himself)* “I’ve got a hole”?!? You never say those words!!! An Alpha Predator doesn’t have a hole!!! Never!!! NEVER!!!

STAN. It’s not his fault! Scalar waves! HAARP pulsations! They’re hacking your prefrontal command center, Marcus! Oxygenate your pelvis! Belly breathing!

Marcus begins a series of loud, rapid breaths.

VADIM. Ten minutes to connection! We urgently need to rework the indicators of disinterest, Marcus! We need to strengthen your IODs!

MARCUS. Oh, I know! “She looks at a secondary screen! That is the immediate activation of hypergamy: she reconnects to the global sexual marketplace to check whether the value of her stock is higher than my current capital!”

STAN. *(applauding)* Yesssss! You repelled their attack!

VADIM. That’s my Marcus!

MARCUS. Thanks, guys. Uh… Vadim, I need fresh lines. They already know all my usual killer compliments.

VADIM. Forget the starter pack. For this face-off, I’ve forged weapons of mass destruction: five lethal fake compliments to make her stock crash live on air. You need to have them down cold.

STAN. Lock your synapses to Alpha frequency, Marcus! Burn the data straight into your spiritual modem! Otherwise their electromagnetic fog will try to delete these negs from your cranial operating system.

MARCUS. *(concentrating)* Go. I'm listening.

VADIM. First: the look. Attack her ego as a poor deconstructed woman right out of the gate. Say: "It takes real courage to wear such shapeless clothes in front of forty thousand viewers! That whole back-to-the-land thing is honestly refreshing."

MARCUS. Got it.

VADIM. Then you turn her intelligence into a physical inferiority complex. You hit her with: "All those four-syllable words… Clearly, you went all in on brains early. Had to compensate for the rest. Outstanding survival instinct."

STAN. Yeah. That's good.

VADIM. Make her panic about her health, too. That works extremely well. With a fake-concerned tone, you say: "Wow, your complexion looks seriously waxy. That vegan diet isn't giving you enough iron. That twitch over your left eye gives it away. Take care of yourself, okay?"

MARCUS. Love it.

VADIM. And above all, ABOVE ALL, infantilize her! Remember the Chinese proverb: "When a woman speaks to you, smile and don't listen." Never answer her arguments!

MARCUS. What do I do instead?

VADIM. Just make a sweet face and throw something like: "When you get worked up about patriarchy, you make exactly the same face as my three-year-old niece. It's kind of adorable."

STAN. Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. I like that one too.

VADIM. And finally, you lower her value as much as possible by attacking her circle. Say: "I understand why you always keep your friend nearby. Having a dysfunctional girlfriend around is the best way to shine by contrast. Very strategic."

MARCUS. Perfect! Now I crush her! She's dead! And right in front of all her idiot fans!

VADIM. Connection in thirty seconds!

The three men huddle and join their fists.

VADIM. *(very loud)* So… WHO CRUSHES EVERY COMPETITOR???

ALL THREE. THE ALPHA PREDATORS!!!

They pound their pecs, making two guttural grunts: "Aoooh! Aoooh!".

Then each goes to his battle station: Marcus sits at the desk facing the webcam; Stan adjusts a lock of Marcus's hair; Vadim turns on the microphone and the ring light.

VADIM. Ready?

STAN AND MARCUS. Ready!

Stan presses a key on the computer, and Garance's face instantly appears on the giant flatscreen.

IGUANA FUR

Garance is taking a sip of water.

JUSTINE. (*behind her, sotto voce)* Three… two… one… and we're live.

GARANCE. *(setting down her glass)* Hello, my Brave Little Otters! Welcome to my channel, "The Brave Little Otters Speak Out!" Today, we're starting with an exceptional guest. None other than Marcus himself, the current undisputed idol of masculinists everywhere! Marcus, can you hear us?

MARCUS. My ears are bleeding already, but yeah, I hear you! Ha! Ha! Ha! How are you, my poor Garance? What's up, all you Trembling Little Otters out there? Ready to find out where you sit on the food chain?

VADIM AND STAN. *(sotto voce, fist-pumping)* Yes!

GARANCE. Ah. Looks like round one is off to a flying start. What do you think, Justine?

JUSTINE. He's behaving disgracefully right out of the gate! Look at that gratuitous aggression from an arrogant male, when we are peacefully welcoming him onto this channel to exchange within our open sharing circle!

MARCUS. Rome fell because its Alpha legions got soft, dumped the Senate's order, and started doing disgusting sharing circles about legionary vulnerability!

VADIM AND STAN. *(sotto voce, fist-pumping again)* Yesssss!

GARANCE. We expected nothing less from Marcus, my Brave Little Otters. You'll notice, by the way, that his shirt seems to have gone missing at the dry cleaner's. And while we're reviewing the outfit, what is that… that sort of pouch you're so proudly wearing as a pendant? We can't really make it out on the screen.

MARCUS. Those are… very personal objects that no woman in her wildest dreams will ever possess.

JUSTINE. It's crazy how they manage to reproduce microscopic things in large format these days!

MARCUS. I see my look fascinates you. I get it. Especially when you had the courage to wear those… potato-sack clothes in front of forty thousand people! That whole back-to-the-dirt thing is really refreshing. Farm-wise!

GARANCE. So, external appearance is the only criterion of beauty among Alpha males?

JUSTINE. *(carried away)* The beauty of our "potato-sack clothes," as you call them, is that they're one hundred percent natural… woven from hemp fiber in the Creuse, with a near-zero carbon footprint! Unlike your jacket made from the fur of factory-farmed rabbits, discarded and skinned alive! Your jacket probably sailed around the world three times before landing in that thrift store on your gentrified block!

MARCUS. Let me educate you, ignorant woman: this is not rabbit fur. It's… iguana fur. A very rare iguana from the Andes.

GARANCE. Iguana… really?

JUSTINE. Oh, so iguanas have fur now?

MARCUS. Uh… Absolutely. Like all creatures, females have… hairy legs. That's nature. You should know, since you probably never shave yours.

GARANCE. Utter nonsense.

JUSTINE. He's completely lost it.

GARANCE. Well, stay with us, my Brave Little Otters, you're still watching "The Brave Little Otters Speak Out!" Today we're joined by Marcus, who is giving us a fascinating lecture on lizard anatomy. We'll be back in one minute, right after this message from our sponsor, "Solidarity Penguin Wool." See you in a moment with the one and only Marcus!

Vadim checks the timing on his watch and cuts the transmission.

VADIM. *(exploding)* For fuck's sake! Vicuña! Not iguana! It's a camelid! It doesn't spend all day dozing on seaside rocks!

MARCUS. Ah, fuck… I wasn't good there.

STAN. This has the Alumni written all over it! I can feel their vibrational waves around us, generated by…

VADIM. ***(s****tressed)* Shut the fuck up Stan! No time! We're back in thirty seconds!

MARCUS. Okay. So what's the move?

VADIM. You dominated her in the opening, you took options on her territory, but by the end, they were shorting your stock!

STAN. *(handing him a dented thermos)* Here! Drink this! Fresh beef bone marrow broth. It'll boost your pineal gland!

MARCUS. *(overcoming his revulsion and taking a sip)* Ugh… that's… disgusting…

VADIM. We're back! Reverse the trend immediately! Take back control of the Frame and drive the sword where it hurts, Marcus!

He restarts the transmission.

GARANCE. Welcome back, my Brave Little Otters! Write your questions for today's guest, the one and only Marcus, in the chat. Marcus, shall we get to the heart of the debate? Ultimately, on which political, structural, and ideological grounds do feminism and its struggles strike you as a direct assault on your heightened masculinity?

MARCUS. Wow. All those four-syllable words… Clearly, you went all in on brains early, Garance. Had to compensate for the whole… rest-of-you situation. Nice survival instincts.

VADIM AND STAN. ***(s****otto voce, fist-pumping)* Yesss!

VADIM. *(still sotto voce)* He's back!

GARANCE. Isn't this a way to avoid answering the question?

MARCUS. Hey, Garance, your complexion looks super waxed! Your vegan diet is low on metal. That's why your left eye is glitching. You should get that checked before it gets worse.

JUSTINE. Garance, when was the last time you had your complexion waxed? You did use natural organic beeswax, at least?

GARANCE. I'm sure Marcus meant to say I looked "waxy," of course. His big, rasping Alpha-male tongue must have slipped. So much for dominating our poor weaker sex.

MARCUS. When you do that whole patriarchy-meltdown thing, Garance, you put on the exact same face as my three-and-a-half-year-old niece. It's low-key adorable. Too bad you don't know how to iron a shirt. I might have hit on you otherwise.

VADIM AND STAN. *(sotto voce, fist-pumping)* Oh yesssss!

STAN. He is destroying her!

JUSTINE. Ah, well… speaking of which, Stephanie from the chat (hi, Stephanie) wants to know if Marcus really thinks he could seduce Garance if he met her in real life…

MARCUS. ***(****burping up beef bone marrow broth)* Burp!

GARANCE. … Marcus? Are you still with us?

MARCUS. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Could I seduce Garance? She's already crazy about me! She'll just never admit it in front of you, her hysterical, fanatical feminist groupies!

JUSTINE. And how exactly did you arrive at that spectacularly delusional conclusion, Marcus?

MARCUS. Easy! Earlier, she drank! Her throat was dry! That's a sign of her desire for Man. Then she moved her glass of water outside the frame! So she opened the door: she's already laid down her weapons! And don't even get me started on her breathing, which keeps matching mine! Three indicators of interest at the same time. That's Science: she's cooked. Game over!

JUSTINE. Ah… Another Brave Little Otter in the chat says that showing off behind a screen is easy, but that in real life she's sure Marcus would deflate like a balloon in front of a personality as brilliant as Garance.

MARCUS. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Me??? Deflate??? In front of a woman??? Then let Garance show herself! Let her submit her application! I'm ready and waiting for her! The door to my man cave is wide open! But she better not come crying in nine months, when she's got a bun in the oven and I've already liquidated her position at term to invest in a new asset! Ha! Ha! Ha!

GARANCE. Mmm… I accept the challenge.

MARCUS. *(another beef bone marrow burp)* Burp! … ??? … What???

GARANCE. Let's see what happens if I venture into the famous lair of the big bad wolf, the great Marcus.

MARCUS. Wait, wait, wait!!!

GARANCE. Could the king of the masculinists be quaking before a weak woman?

MARCUS. But… a woman??? You??? No!!!… You're... an intellectual!!!

GARANCE. Ah. A woman and an intellectual… You'll note, my Brave Little Otters, that to the great Marcus, this is like cancer and Huntington's disease: Nature, in her infinite wisdom, does not usually pile both disasters onto the same poor creature!

MARCUS. What??? No!!! I mean, yes!!! I mean…

Vadim makes big gestures at Marcus to accept the challenge.

MARCUS. … Whatever!!! Let's set a date!!! You asked for it, Garance!!! Your whole world is gonna get rocked!!!

JUSTINE. For a second there, I really thought one pair of balls between his legs and another around his neck still wouldn't be enough to make him grow a pair!!! Ha! Ha! Ha!... Are you sure you want to take this challenge on, Garance?

GARANCE. Why not?

MARCUS. Fine! Then you contact my staff, and we'll set up the meeting! They're the ones managing the schedule for the masses of chicks I handle every day!… And every night!!!

GARANCE. Well then, my Brave Little Otters, the challenge has been set! A flesh-and-blood meeting with the mighty Marcus will soon take place right inside his dark inner sanctum! This promises to be fascinating.

JUSTINE. …and instructive!

GARANCE. Stay tuned to our channel, "The Brave Little Otters Speak Out!" We'll be back with another segment right after the break!

JUSTINE. Yes! You'll discover how to alternate cross-stitch and split stitch to create a finer, more textured seam in your needlework! It's going to be absolutely riveting! See you in a minute!

THE INVERTED-NEUTRINO QUANTUM TRANSPONDER

Vadim cuts the transmission. The looping cryptocurrency-price video reappears.

VADIM. Session over… Good! Debrief. We consolidate the gains.

MARCUS. I sucked.

VADIM. Your assessment is materially inaccurate, Marcus! You held your Frame like a gladiator! You didn't give up one inch of territory. In fact, I'm renting the same jacket again for the next fight, just to show we don't budge on anything!

Stan suddenly hurries toward the apartment door.

MARCUS. Where are you going?

STAN. *(very alarmed)* I just spotted a breach in our isolation perimeter! Hold position! I'll be back!

He rushes out.

MARCUS. So what's the move now, Vadim?

VADIM. *(buried in his iPhone)* Up twenty thousand views! Exponential growth! Seven thousand eight hundred and twenty-five viewers converted through our affiliate link! At one Premium subscription per thousand clicks, you just generated sixty-two thousand four hundred euros in net cash flow in twenty minutes, Marcus! This is the triumph of financial Darwinism!

MARCUS. Really?

VADIM. Market's hot. We go all in! I'm calling that hemp-wrapped accountant from the Creuse, what's-her-name, Seraphine…

MARCUS. Justine.

VADIM. Same difference. Anyway! I seal the deal with her, and we set up the ultimate showdown. We're gonna stage the internet event of the century! I want the Colosseum broadcast worldwide! Streamed live across every platform!

MARCUS. Yes!… It's gonna hurt… Good… That's what fighting is... And this time I'm gonna make that dumb bitch pay!

VADIM. For that, we need a monster ad campaign! We're going to make cage MMA look obsolete! And to finance the war, I levy taxes: I contact new sponsors.

MARCUS. But where are you going to find them? You know they've all been infiltrated by the forces of the Matrix!

VADIM. I'll hunt them down in the resistance, Marcus! Among those who understand that savage capitalism is the last bastion of healthy natural selection! I want Premium sponsors! Elitism! We're going into FinTech! Cryptocurrencies! I'm going to call the creator of Emporium Bitcoins! Crypto is the modern equivalent of the Roman testudo, Marcus: the matriarchal Nanny State can do nothing against it!

Stan reappears, carrying a chaotic mass of huge electrical cables connected to what looks like an oversized car battery, covered in wide strips of metallic tape.

STAN. Negative, Vadim! Virtual cash won't be worth a damn after the great collapse, because the collapse will be financial, too! Our only reliable tactical ally is autonomous technology! Local neural networks, embedded life-support systems, and tactical surveillance drones! It's coming! Look! Nature itself has become hostile now! At this stage, the only real survival strategy for an Alpha Predator is armor. In every form! Total bunkerization with integrated digital assistance! It's our only chance!!!… (Where can I set this thing down?)

Throughout the following exchange, Stan desperately tries to set his heavy device down, but is constantly blocked by Marcus and Vadim, who pace and pose across the room, completely oblivious to his struggle.

MARCUS. *(to Vadim)* Do you really think Emporium would come on board?

VADIM. Of course! This is going to be our climax! The triumphal march beneath the arch of

Bitcoin fortune! The Beta slaves and lobotomized Beta bitches are going to fantasize about you now in their wettest dreams! Your natural domination over them will be total!

MARCUS. *(striking a dominating pose exactly where Stan was about to put the device down)* We're gonna fuck them all!

VADIM. *(grabbing his iPhone, pacing)* I'm calling the salad-muncher right now to make the appointment and finalize the deal. We'll toss them a pinch of cash, they'll sign with tears of gratitude.

MARCUS. Ha! Ha! Ha! Women and business!

VADIM. They've never seen that much money in their lives, the poor things. We throw the enemy a few crumbs, but it's a necessary sacrifice to level up!

MARCUS. *(gesturing grandly and blocking Stan again)* This time, I'm gonna crush Garance!!!

VADIM. I'm counting on it. *(pacing again, forcing Stan to retreat)* Now, the staging: the lighting has to come from above, Marcus. I want the shadows sculpting your delts! The audience must see your genetic capital the second you open the door to her. Territorial marketing. Always. We flood the market with pure masculine charge!

MARCUS. Totally. If they see me under bathroom lighting, my mega-SMV is going to suffer. I need to look top-tier massive!

STAN. *(finally dumping his device onto the desk)* Forget all that! Red alert! We have to shut everything down! Our position is compromised!

VADIM. Stan, get that junk off the desk. You're gonna ruin the veneer. It's an Italian design. It cost me nearly as much as Costa Rica's GDP!

STAN. *(gravely)* Your cameras will only be filming a zombie, Vadim! I can now confirm that they've hacked the building's smart meter! They've launched an OPTICAL OFFENSIVE!

MARCUS. No?! Are you sure?

STAN. That green meter box in the hallway… To you, the lighting in this apartment is just simple, neutral, apolitical light, right?

MARCUS. Well… yeah? I mean… isn't it?

STAN. Naive! It's matriarchal Li-Fi!

MARCUS. Li…

STAN. Data transmission through ambient light! You've never heard? They're going to use our own ceiling bulbs to machine-gun your optic nerve with subliminal micro-frequencies! Fifty flashes per second! Invisible to the naked eye!

VADIM. Stan, leave the voltage alone! I have a strategic need for a power supply that marches in lockstep for the 4K stream!

STAN. *(angry)* Vadim! You! Master of the market! King of the transaction! You're going to let the enemy launch a hostile takeover of his mental firewall? Those vibrational attacks carry deconstruction mantras! Guilt algorithms! While she's talking to him, the light will whisper: "Cry, Marcus, cry," "Apologize for your privilege as a Man!" It'll seep straight through his pupils into his parietal lobe!

VADIM. *(horrified)* Wait… The light is going to tell him to apologize?

STAN. It's gonna reprogram him without him knowing!… His brain is gonna get hacked by castrating photons!… Without him even realizing it, his female hormone levels will shoot through the roof!… His Frame is gonna collapse!

MARCUS. No?!

STAN. Live, in front of two hundred thousand subscribers, you'll start crossing your legs, Marcus! *You'll cross your legs!*

MARCUS. Never!… "An Alpha only crosses swords!"… So that's straight-up mental penetration!

STAN. Just the total violation of your predator instinct, Marcus.

MARCUS. *(very alarmed)* Vadim! Absolutely not! I refuse to let a sixty-watt bulb deconstruct me from behind the parietal! We shut it all down!

VADIM. *(beginning to grasp the "commercial" threat)* Wait, wait… Stan! Are you telling us… they've got the tech to manipulate his body language remotely? They can torpedo his stock mid-face-off?

STAN. They're gonna LI-QUE-FY him!… Unless… I bypass the main circuit breaker with THIS! *(He pats his battery.)* My Inverted-Neutrino Quantum Transponder!!!

VADIM. And what is this barbaric system supposed to do?

STAN. I filter the power grid! I straighten the voltage curve! I force every electron in the apartment to flow in a straight line! Only raw, virile, unhackable energy! The light will be so Alpha it'll purify all the air in the room!

VADIM. Are you sure about this? If the power goes down and we lose the signal, we can kiss the Emporium Bitcoin sponsorship goodbye for sure!

STAN. Positive! And I'm hooking the cameras up to it too! My neutrino inverter will boost the feed! The image will have such a high vibrational frequency that the Betas at their screens will start sweating, I'm telling you! I'm locking down the perimeter, Vadim! This is the electromagnetic Iron Dome! The absolute shield!

MARCUS. Do it, Stan! Crank those neutrinos to the max! I want you to double-lock the back door to my parietal lobe!

VADIM. *(checking his watch)* All right. Bypass authorized. The integrity of venture capital comes first… But do it right, Stan! I want an absolutely impenetrable luminous Frame!

STAN. Don't worry, Vadim. Once I connect the red wire to the blue terminal there, nothing non-Alpha will ever happen within these walls.

VADIM. Okay… *(He dials a number on his iPhone.)* Hello? The association "The Brave Little Otters Speak Out!"? Get me Marceline.

MARCUS. Justine!

VADIM. Same thing. Get me Justine!

Blackout.

KRAV MAGA

Vadim is alone in the room. He paces.

VADIM. What the hell is that little nympho doing?! I've been waiting for fifteen minutes!

The doorbell rings with a brief, ridiculous soul sting: "Ding Dong! This is a Man's World!" Vadim goes to open the door. Justine enters.

VADIM. Come in.

JUSTINE. Hello to you too, Vadim! Fantastic douchebag doorbell, by the way.

VADIM. *(indicating an armchair)* Sit.

JUSTINE. I'm very well, thank you for asking! Wait, did I hear correctly? Did you just say, "Would you like to have a seat?"

VADIM. … If you want. Let's start the negotiations on solid ground. Did you look at the number of views after the first fight between Marcus and Garance?

JUSTINE. A fight? Oh, I assume you mean that extremely embarrassing livestream where a boor verbally assaulted a cultured, brilliant woman? A woman who was asking him very simple questions, just to keep things within his intellectual reach? Are we talking about the same show?

VADIM. … Yes!… And a second encounter, live, right here, could be a total win-win for both of us in terms of online clout! I'd even go so far as to call it a potential "media triumph"!

JUSTINE. Perfect. Fifty percent of all ad revenue generated by the event. We pool our sponsors and we split the proceeds.

VADIM. What?! But between your budget from "Participatory Penguin Wool"…

JUSTINE. "Solidarity."

VADIM. (Same crap. It sucks.) Between your bullshit eco-sponsor and our Australian buffalo bumpers, "Wapiti-Killer," I'm sure there's already a one-to-ten ratio!

JUSTINE. Take it or leave it.

VADIM. Pfff… I… What other sponsors do you have?

JUSTINE. We have "The Simple Good Life," the organic quinoa producer…

VADIM. Argh!

JUSTINE. …plus "Natural Nature," the magazine for small-scale organic gardening. And you?

VADIM. We have Emporium Bitcoins, a virtual currency untraceable by the "system," "Hot Beef Jerky," the dietary supplements made from dried bull-meat powder, and also… another one.

JUSTINE. What other one? No secrets between us on this deal.

VADIM. *(ashamed)* We also have… "Titan-Step"… a brand specializing in…

JUSTINE. In what?

VADIM. Shoe inserts.

JUSTINE. Shoe inserts?

VADIM. Yes. You don't know them? "Titan-Step: two extra inches of height, completely out of sight!"

JUSTINE. Ha! Ha! Ha! So it's for the silverback Alpha supermen who want to look down on women but max out at five foot three, is that it?

VADIM. That's right. In the war between the sexes, not everyone has high heels as a weapon!

Justine gets up and inspects the room.

JUSTINE. So… this is where it's going to happen... Two armchairs side by side? Not enough money for a couch?

VADIM. Too softening. No indulging the sprawl impulse.

JUSTINE. Wow. This is even worse than I thought. Where will you put the cameras?

VADIM. I'm thinking two of them, one on each side of the armchairs, filming from a low angle. That's where the action will be. And… one on the desk over there, wide angle, to cover the whole room if they get up to yell at each other or fight.

JUSTINE. *(peeking into the walk-in closet)* Well, well, well. A two-way mirror.

VADIM. Uh… I was going to tell you about that, obviously.

JUSTINE. Obviously.

VADIM. Let's say that… you and I… could monitor everything from inside the closet. So we'd be there if anything were to happen. And Stan would be there too, of course.

JUSTINE. "If anything were to happen"…

VADIM. But it's all going to go very smoothly. No reason it shouldn't.

JUSTINE. Mmm-hmm. Fine. Let's go with that. So we agree on fifty percent?

VADIM. *(holding out his hand)* Agreed. You have my word. Let's shake on it.

JUSTINE. *(taking a pen and a document out of her bag)* Whoa, whoa, whoa. You think I was born yesterday, mastermind? You sign right here. The fifty percent commitment is clearly outlined. All you have to do is put your sad self-taught scribble there.

Vadim, defeated, signs.

JUSTINE. *(tearing off the carbon copy and leaving him the sheet)* There you go! See? It wasn't so painful. All right, I'm off. My Krav Maga class starts in fifteen minutes. Ciao!

She rushes out.

Blackout.