

"XERO OPTION"

by

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FADE IN:

INT. METRO WEST POLICE DEPT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

As UNIFORMED COPS and CIVILIANS mill around, a bored-looking DESK SERGEANT / FARRELL yawns behind the monitor on his desk.

He sips from a Styrofoam cup, and picks at the last crumbs from an empty box of donuts. A soggy tea bag sits in a lonely corner of the cardboard carton.

He looks up, as a man approaches the desk: JOHN PSMITH (pronounced "Smith"), late thirties. Unremarkable looking. But. There's something about him. Something...

JOHN PSMITH
I'd like to report a murder.

DESK SERGEANT FARRELL
Oh, yeah? Who'd you kill?

A pause. Then, an intense look, from Psmith.

JOHN PSMITH
You. And every other person in this building.

That gets the sergeant's attention. He sits up.
One hand steals toward a sidearm, below the desktop.

DESK SERGEANT FARRELL
What did you say your name was, again?

JOHN PSMITH
I didn't. It's Psmith. John Psmith. With a "P."

The sergeant scribbles on a steno pad beside the computer, with his free hand. Half an eye on Psmith. Still fingering the weapon below his line of sight.

DESK SERGEANT FARRELL
John... P... Smi--

JOHN PSMITH
No.

Psmith smiles, shakes his head. He's tranquil, exuding a Zen-like patience.
 He leans forward, both palms spread flat on the desktop. Friendly. Cooperative. Totally harmless.

JOHN PSMITH
 It's Psmith. With a "P."
 P-S-M-I-T-H.
 Pronounced "Smi--"

INT. JOHN SMYTH'S OFFICE - DAY (SAME TIME)

Polished bookshelves, neatly stacked. Plush furniture, like you'd find in an old English gentlemen's club. Everything spotless, and positioned as if by design.

Except.

Behind the desk, an upturned swivel chair. Sprawled in it, the body of JOHN SMYTH, fifties. Well-groomed, and polished as his office. Save for the bloody hole, in his forehead.

On the wall above Smyth, a circular depression, at the center of a splatter of blood, bone, and brain tissue.

GIANNI VITALE, early thirties, and LENNOX GARBER, forties, stand at the desk. Both men wear surgical gloves. They prod occasionally at the knick-knacks on the table top. Which also look to have been placed there by careful deliberation.

VITALE
 Shouldn't it be "Smythe?" I mean, that's how it's spelt.

GARBER
 Class thing, maybe? Fellow of his standing, station in life, he'd want to be a cut above. Set himself apart from all the other John Smith's, out there. Guys with solid names, like us - Vitale, Garber - we don't have that problem.

VITALE
 Hmph. Why the hell doesn't he spell it right. Did. Didn't he.

Behind the two detectives, Forensic investigator MATTHEW CLAPTON,

thirties, a little geeky, but solid-looking, fusses around the body. Plotting trajectories, doing scrapings. He's meticulous. Thorough. Slow.

VITALE

Hey, Matty. What do you say? D'you think he's dead?

CLAPTON

It's Matthew.

He doesn't even look up. Ignoring Vitale, as he carries on with his work.

Vitale turns back, to a frowning Garber.

VITALE

So, Lenny--

Garber's frown deepens.

VITALE

Len. So, what's it look like, to you?

GARBER

I'm not sure...

Garber nudges a drinking bird paperweight, on the desk. Nestled neatly behind it is a sleek little cell phone.

Garber picks up the cell, and hits last number redial. Holds the phone to his ear.

Clearly audible, a whiny, nasal voice, on the other end.

ARNOLD GLEISSNER (O.S.)

Arnold Gleissner, paparazzo. Hello? Hello?

Garber cuts the connection. Mouthing the word, "Paparazzo?", he turns toward the Forensics man.

Clapton holds out a clear plastic evidence bag, with a scrap of paper in it.

CLAPTON

Pried this out of the victim's hand. I had to smooth it out, a little. Well, a lot, actually. See the edges, there--?

Garber, not listening, holds the bag up to the light. And grins.

GARBER

Paparazzo.

He hands the bag over to Vitale, who studies the paper. It's a fragment from a glossy photograph, showing--

VITALE

Hey! Isn't that--?

CLAPTON

You guys can go ahead. I've dusted for prints, already.

A harsh laugh, from Vitale, as he gestures toward the corpse.

VITALE

Yeah. That's what this guy was, looks like. Dusted. For prints.

GARBER

Mm-hmm.
Let's go pay a visit on an Arnold Gleissner, photographer. See if he can put us in the picture.

EXT. METRO WEST P.D. ENTRANCE PLAZA - DAY (LATER)

In the parking area fronting the building, BOMB DISPOSAL OFFICERS with sniffer dogs can be seen, checking vehicles.

COPS and CIVILIANS at the entrance doors watch them, curious. There's an atmosphere of quiet alarm. But no panic, as yet.

Vitale and Garber check out the action for a moment, then enter the building.

INT. METRO WEST POLICE DEPT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

A BOMB DISPOSAL OFFICER heads for the exit, throwing out

BOMB DISPOSAL OFFICER #1

All clear.

Great. Another one.

A pointed look, from Psmith.

GARBER

Says here you've confessed to the murders of Sergeant Farrell, at the desk downstairs. And of every other person in this building.

JOHN PSMITH

I've also killed every man, woman, and child, on the face of the Earth.

Silence, for a moment, as the detectives take this in. Then

VITALE

Hmm. I don't know.

He flexes his fingers. Stretches out an arm.

VITALE

I still seem to be, you know, alive, right now. And you're looking pretty chipper, too, lieutenant. How's it hanging there, Len? You alive?

GARBER

It would seem so. Yes.

VITALE

So, um, Mr. Psmith. When did you, uh, you know, kill us? Exactly?

JOHN PSMITH

Today's Tuesday, isn't it?

VITALE

Yeah.

JOHN PSMITH

Thursday.

VITALE

Thursday. As in, two days from now, Thursday.

JOHN PSMITH

Mm-hmm.

VITALE

Woo-oooooh. End 'o' the world, uh?

He catches Garber's eye. Twirls a finger, above the table top. "This one's a Looney Tune."

Psmith smiles.

JOHN PSMITH

The end of humanity, when it comes, will happen one death at a time.

GARBER

That's very philosophical. And it helps us, how?

JOHN PSMITH

1523 Highland Terrace.

Vitale and Garber share a look.

GARBER

Nice neighborhood.

JOHN PSMITH

Door's open, I think.

Garber's eyes narrow, as he makes a judgment call.

GARBER

Gianni?

Vitale rises. As he opens the door

VITALE

I'll get 'em to send someone. Check it out.

EXT. 1523 HIGHLAND TERRACE - DAY

A quiet residential suburb.

1523 is a neat two-story. Just like all the other houses on the street.

A police cruiser is parked outside. A PATROLMAN / CHAVEZ approaches the door.

It's open.
Not gaping, but clearly unlocked. And slightly ajar.

PATROLMAN CHAVEZ
Hello! Metro PD. There's been a report of--
We've had a-- Hell. Is anyone in there? Is anyone
hurt? Shit.

Chavez unholsters his gun. Nudges open the door. And enters the house.

PATROLMAN CHAVEZ
Oh, mierda.

INT. 1523 HIGHLAND TERRACE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

In the front room, the remains of a typical suburban family: Mom, Dad, couple of kids.

They bled a lot, when they died.

And they died quite horribly.

PATROLMAN CHAVEZ
Oh, shit!

He turns. Stumbles forward. Then bolts, retching, for the front door.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Garber, Vitale, and Psmith, seated round the table, as before.

Psmith is handcuffed to his chair, now.

Vitale is speaking.

VITALE
Found this rookie, Chavez, at the scene. Still
puking his guts out.

Vitale looks a little green around the gills, himself. With a shaky hand, he checks his notebook.

VITALE
Matty Clapton's doing the Forensic work-up.

The victims...
 Jerome Fisher, accountant, age 37, wife Rachel,
 PR consultant, 35. Daughter Chloe, age 7, son
 Michael, 4.
 Bound. Gagged. Slice 'n' diced.
 Neighbors...

Garber looks up, at this.

VITALE

Neighbors didn't hear anything. Neighbors didn't
 see anything.

He slaps the book on the table. Glares at Psmith.

VITALE

How could you--
 Why'd you kill 'em, Psmith?

JOHN PSMITH

Can't make an omelet without--?

Psmith shrugs. Smiles.

JOHN PSMITH

Who knows?
 Why did I kill them?
 Why did I kill any of the others?

GARBER

Others.

He puts the clipboard down. Spreads his palms.

GARBER

You have the floor.

Psmith ignores him, eyes on the table.

VITALE

Answer the man, asshole.

GARBER

Gianni--

Psmith snaps his fingers. Grins. Then points his free hand in
 Vitale's direction.

JOHN PSMITH

Gianni Vitale. Of course! I wear your shirts, all the time.

Vitale's ready to go for him. He looks to Garber, who frowns. Vitale checks himself.

VITALE

Hmph. Like, I haven't heard that one, before.

Psmith turns toward Garber.

JOHN PSMITH

And Lennox Garber. This must be a refreshing change, for you. After the oxymoron of military intelligence.

If Garber's surprised at this, he doesn't show it.

GARBER

Not really, Mr. Psmith. I'm pretty much mired in the cesspool, all the time.

JOHN PSMITH

Mmm. The world is a sewer, I'll grant you that.

VITALE

And who are you? The Tid-E-Bowl Man? Other people are shit, and it's your job to flush 'em all away?

A knock, at the door.

Matthew Clapton peers in, through the glass panel.

GARBER

Come.

Clapton enters. Nods, to Garber and Vitale.

CLAPTON

Lieutenant. Detective.

He gives Psmith a neutral glance. Psmith smiles, serene.

Clapton lays some typed sheets on the table, between Garber and Vitale.

The two detectives pick up and study the paper.

CLAPTON

My preliminary report, on the multiple homicides at 1523 Highland Terrace.

I made copies, for both of you.

Based on my assessment, patterns of arterial spray, coagulation, death occurred sometime last night, early hours of this morning.

Groove patterns in the carpeting, furniture damage in the bedroom, indicate that the victims were dragged into the lounge before--

He pauses. Looks at Psmith again. Not so neutral, this time.

CLAPTON

Two assailants were involved.

I'll let you know more, when I have it.

Clapton nods to the detectives again. Shoots a final look at Psmith. Then exits.

Silence, for a moment.

GARBER

So. Mr. Psmith.

Care to tell us about your friend?

Psmith is staring, trance-like, at the wall clock.

GARBER

Mr. Psmith.

JOHN PSMITH

Can't...

GARBER

Try.

JOHN PSMITH

Express...

Express.

He turns away from the clock, and stares intently at Garber.

JOHN PSMITH

A train accident.
On the main commuter line between Metro West and
Lakeview.
Only the fortunate will survive.

INT. METRO WEST SUBWAY PLATFORM - DAY (SAME TIME)

The platform is packed with COMMUTERS and TOURISTS, awaiting the next train.

Heads whip round toward the approach tunnel, as a whining SCREEECH! is heard.

A commuter train BLOWS THROUGH THE STATION at very high speed.

Several unfortunate commuters are plucked off the platform edge, onto the live rails below, in the wake of its passing.

As the horror of this sinks in, a massive THUMP and BOOOM!, from the receding tunnel.

A WALL OF FLAME surges from the tunnel, engulfing yet more unfortunates on the platform.

Hunks of FLAMING DEBRIS whicker past, maiming others.

The survivors on the platform scream in panic.

A stampede begins, as the fortunate scramble for the exits.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

John Psmith sits at the table alone, staring serenely at its surface. A broad smile spreads across his face.

JOHN PSMITH
Phwoooooossh.....!

It could be the sound of a runaway train.
Or of a toilet, flushing.