

Python

by Jamie Hornsby

SCRIPT SAMPLE

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Python is a play about a few things. It's a workplace drama. It's about the games industry. It's about art. It's about the toxicity of online discourse. It's about harassment, abuse and lies. But mostly, it's a play about the new, constantly connected world we live in. The world where the distinction between online and off becomes a little murky. The world where the internet is so irrevocably entwined with our lives and our identities, that we perhaps lose sight of ourselves. And the radical new vectors for harassment and abuse that it enables.

The play is written with a particular feature in mind: the intrusion of the 'online' world into the real world. This should at times feel oppressive and discombobulating, but at others feel like a seamless integration into everyday life. Into just an extension of ourselves.

Python is based on extensive research. While the play is fictional, there are some key figures in online discourse that elements are based on, particularly Zöe Quinn, Phil Fish, Sean Murray and Anita Sarkeesian and the whole #GamerGate movement. Some sections (particularly the Swatting) are entirely verbatim. Almost everything that occurs in the play has really happened to some degree.

NOTES ON TEXT

- []: Lines encompassed in square brackets should be treated as direct address.
- VFX: This denotes an "online" element intruding on the world of the play. This could be depicted physically, through lighting, sound, projection, or with the use of augmented reality glasses, allowing the online world to physically intrude and obstruct our view of the offline.
- SHIFT: Denotes an abrupt shift in time and/or space.

CAST

ZOE

MICHAEL

FEMALE CHORUS

(SADIE/INTERVIEWER/KAREN/DISPATCH/OFFICER 1/BODYBARBIE)

MALE CHORUS

(DETECTIVE/SHUSHY-FUCK/CALLER/GURU/PHIL/HARRY/OFFICER 2/CAMERAMAN/
KRANKY KEV/ALARIC THE VISIGOTH/SKULLBOI/MESSAGE/MACHINE)

The play should be able to be performed with four actors, though a larger group of actors playing the chorus roles would work too. At various points the play features prerecorded voices and images, which could be members of the cast, or sourced from the wider community.

Darkness. The clickety clack of a keyboard. Electronic sounds.

ZOE: [Boot up.]

Spotlight on ZOE, scruffy and brilliant. She's sitting in a computer chair, with a laptop. She looks around. Opens the computer.

The world gets a little bit brighter.

She puts on some headphones. Classical music begins playing. Probably Schubert.

She types.

VFX: As ZOE types, a wall of computer code appears, growing until it surrounds her like a cocoon.

She hits a problem in the code, furrows her brow.

Then smiles as she finds a solution. And still, the code grows.

She's at peace.

Until the code starts to splinter, fracture, fall away from her.

She peers into the darkness, warily, until...

Bright light. The world whirs to life, like a computer.

PYTHON

We're in an office. Open plan, with a kitchenette. White-ish walls. Fake plants. An air conditioner with the words "DO NOT TOUCH" taped across it. Further upstage is the door to a private office, with a meme taped to the door.

VFX: The words "LAUNCH DAY" are written large.

*Another woman, SADIE, sits at her desk,
drawing on a tablet.*

*A man, MICHAEL, bursts in. He's wearing a nice
blazer. Funky socks. Possibly a party hat.*

MICHAEL: Stop right there!

SADIE: Huh?

MICHAEL: Put that stylus down, Sadie! Put that down right now!

SADIE: It's down, it's down!

MICHAEL: There's no work allowed today!

SADIE: Yes, Michael.

MICHAEL: You know why?

SADIE: ...Why, Michael?

MICHAEL: Well, I'll tell you why.

An overdramatic, suspenseful pause.

SADIE: ...Please do.

MICHAEL: It's Launch Day!

He blows a party horn.

SADIE: Woo!

MICHAEL: I can't hear you!

SADIE: ...Woo!!

MICHAEL: That's better!

*He dances on the spot. It's very daggy. But
somehow endearing.*

Dance with me, Sadie, come on.

SADIE: No, I just -

MICHAEL: Come on.

SADIE: I just want to finish this -

He throws an imaginary lasso.

SADIE, smiles, rolls her eyes. Allows herself to be pulled from her chair by the imaginary lasso.

MICHAEL: There she is!

SADIE busts an impressive move.

MICHAEL busts a slightly-less impressive one. He might keep dancing through much of the following dialogue.

SADIE: You're in good mood.

MICHAEL: Of course I'm in a good mood! It's Launch Day!

SADIE: That it is.

MICHAEL: I'm here with two of the smartest women I know, in a company I built, in a city I love, in an office I can finally afford, launching a product I've been dreaming about for eight years. I'm fucking chuffed.

SADIE: It's gonna be a good day.

MICHAEL: Zoe around?

SADIE: I, uh... I think she's in the bathroom. Why?

MICHAEL: Just wanted to tell her the good news.

SADIE: Sales?

MICHAEL: They're good. Reeeeeeeal good.

SADIE: That's great! Congratulations!

MICHAEL: Thank you!

(distractedly) Thank you...

A pause.

...Did she seem OK?

SADIE: She seemed... like herself.

MICHAEL: Do you think I should -

SADIE: I'd probably just leave her be.

MICHAEL: Yeah. Cool.

MICHAEL: Oh, she's coming -

ZOE enters. She looks tired.

MICHAEL: Zo! Hey!

ZOE: Morning.

MICHAEL: It's Launch Day! Woo!

SADIE: Woo!

ZOE: Woo.

SADIE: Hey, how come she doesn't have to do the dance?

MICHAEL: You try making Zoe dance.

ZOE: Don't try.

SADIE: I wouldn't dream of it.

MICHAEL: It's Launch Day!

ZOE: I know. I heard you from in there.

MICHAEL: I'm excited! Aren't you excited?

ZOE: I'm excited. This is my excited face.

SADIE: Thought it might be your "my hamster died by chewing on my power cables and I've just come from its funeral" face.

MICHAEL pulls ZOE aside.

MICHAEL: You good?

ZOE: Yeah.

MICHAEL: You sure?

ZOE: Yes.

MICHAEL: What's wrong?

ZOE: Nothing. Just thinking about the patch.

MICHAEL: It's Launch Day, Zo. Pens down. No work allowed.

ZOE: I just -

MICHAEL: The patch can wait. You've done enough. I mean, Jesus, we've been working on this for how long now?

ZOE: A long time.

MICHAEL: We deserve to celebrate, don't we?

ZOE: Sure. Sure, of course we do.

MICHAEL: So, come on. Let your hair down. Relax.

ZOE: Have you ever seen me with my hair up?

MICHAEL: It's a metaphor.

ZOE: It's a cliché.

MICHAEL: Point taken.

A slight pause.

Come on, Zo. What's going on in that head of yours? What is it?

Silence.

ZOE: I'm just thinking about how we got here.

SHIFT.

VFX: The words "EIGHTEEN MONTHS OUT" are written large.

ZOE is alone in the office. She's dressed the same, but she looks a little less tired.

She speaks directly to us.

ZOE: [Devlog. January. Eighteen months out.]

[Nine AM. Chugging along. Making a dent in it. Starting to see the forest for the trees.]

MICHAEL enters, this time dressed in business pants and a slightly-too-large hoodie. He enters the office at the back. ZOE watches him cross.

ZOE: [That's Michael. Michael Winters. But you know that. Everyone knows that. At least in our business.]

MICHAEL comes back out into the main office space. Surveys his kingdom.

ZOE: [He's the man behind *Provocateur*. You know. Platinum selling. Award winning. One of the greatest indie games of all time. He

made that, solo, when he was just nineteen. From his bedroom. Bastard.]

MICHAEL goes over to SADIE.

MICHAEL: All right, Sadie?

ZOE: [And this is his company. Winters' Tale. We're hard at work on the sequel. *Provocateur II*. Eight years in the making. Most anticipated game in years.]

MICHAEL is at the office fridge.

MICHAEL: Did no one remember to replace the milk?

ZOE: [I've worked here for what, three months now? Best goddamn months of my life.]

MICHAEL: How we going on the engine, Zoe?

ZOE: Halfway there.

MICHAEL: Well, go on, shake the lamb's tail, get on with it.

ZOE: Yes, Boss-Man.

MICHAEL heads back to his office.

ZOE: [Absolute legend.]

SADIE: Is the WiFi down for anyone else?

ZOE: [That's Sadie. Art department. Part-time.]

[She's uh... she's fine. You know. You don't have to like everyone you work with.]

SADIE: Never mind, I had it turned off on my end.

ZOE: [I'm Zoe, by the way. Lead programmer.]

[We're the new wave of the industry. We're the revolution, and the revolution is us. We're changing the world. And I can't fuckin' wait.]

VFX: ERROR message.

[...]

[But first I gotta fix this bug.]

SHIFT.

VFX: An email pops up.

[10 AM. Email from Laleh. She's sixteen. Kurdish. Wants to be a coder. I guess I'm... mentoring her, or whatever. I just answer her questions when she sends them through. We met on Twitter.]

"What programming language do you use?"

VFX: A string of computer code.

[I write in C++. Computer code is all ones and zeros, of course, we all know that. If we had to input those ones and zeros directly, we'd never get anything done. So we use programming languages.]

VFX: Zoom in on a snippet of C++ that ZOE's working on.

[It's a vocabulary that tells the computer what you want it to do. Like a set of instructions. There's a bunch of different languages out there, you've got C, C#, C++, TypeScript, Go, SQL. Then there's the kiddie ones, like Ruby. Or Python.]

[C++ is king. Yes, it's got a learning curve, but with this you can actually create something.]

[This is complex. This is real. This is art.]

VFX: ZOE writes more. The code grows.

VFX: ERROR message.

[...It's a little finicky, though.]

MICHAEL comes back into the bullpen.

MICHAEL: Has anyone seen my dongle?

ZOE chucks it across the room to him.

MICHAEL: Thanks.

He exits.

VFX: ERROR message.

ZOE: [Fucksake.]

SHIFT.

SADIE: *(on the phone)* Yeah, hi, Escape Rooms? I'd like to make a booking.

ZOE: [Midday. Hunch at my desk, chowing down the rest of last night's stir

fry.]

A notification

VFX: A sort-of-funny meme.

ZOE: [Dad. He's only just learned about memes. Keeps emailing through whatever he stumbles across online.]

VFX: ZOE types a response.

"Hilarious. Miss you. Love you."

She deletes it.

"ROFLMAO."

She deletes it.

"Ha. Very good. x"

She sends it.

[I should call him more often.]

[Two PM. I've got the tiniest little migraine. Energy drink'll fix that. Crack my neck. Rub my eyes. I went to the optometrist once, she said I'd be blind by fifty if I kept staring at screens all day. Pretty sure she was just trying to scare me. But if it's true, that's not the worst tradeoff. We'll probably have cybernetic eyes by then anyway.]

[Three PM. I'm tearing my hair out, dealing with some conditional programming, when -]

A chill runs down ZOE's spine.

VFX: A shadowy figure appears behind her. It glitches, flickers, simultaneously electronic and tangibly real.

[He's here.]

[No, he's not. Don't be stupid. Of course he's not. You'd know if he was. Someone would have told you. The cops, or your family, or his family, someone, or, or - something. The universe would have collapsed in on itself.]

[And yet it sort of feels like it has.]

[Don't look behind you. You don't need to. If you look, you're giving in. If you look, he wins.]

[...]

[...]

ZOE tries to resist, but can't. She looks behind her. The figure disappears.

[No one there.]

*With a sigh, she puts her headphones on.
Blasts some classical music.*

[Four PM. Second wind. In the zone. Characters fit together, perfectly, seamlessly, inevitably. Don't even have to think. Like it's writing itself.]

*VFX: ZOE's code grows and grows, until it fills our field of view. ZOE's cocooned inside of it.
Safe and warm.*

[And I lose track of time. And the world becomes... just this.]

[It's beautiful.]

[Perfect.]

SHIFT. Later.

Spotlight on ZOE, working.

MICHAEL approaches her.

MICHAEL: Oh, man. It's been a long day. A loooooong day.

ZOE: I'm wired in.

MICHAEL: I am *beat*, let me tell you.

He's lingering at her desk.

ZOE: Working.

MICHAEL: Absolutely exhausted.

ZOE: Uh huh.

MICHAEL: Gotta find some way to unwind, I think. Take a load off.

Zo?

ZOE takes her headphones off.

ZOE: What do you want?

MICHAEL: What do you think?

ZOE looks around.

ZOE: Is it six o'clock already?

MICHAEL grins.

Hold on, let me just compile this.

Music.

The cursor blinks.

SHIFT.

MICHAEL, alone. He's rehearsing some sort of speech.

MICHAEL: [The thing people don't realise about business is...]

[Uh.]

He looks at his cue cards.

[I'll write that bit later.]

[But uh.]

[Hello.]

[I'm Michael Winters.]

[This is Winters' Tale.]

SHIFT.

[Come in at seven thirty. The lights are already on. Zoe's at her desk. I don't even remember giving her a key. Go up to her -]

ZOE: Motherfucking shitballs cockfuck -

MICHAEL: [That means she's working. Head to my office instead.]

He opens his computer.

VFX: Emails fill our view. All unread.

[It's gonna be a long day.]