

Slick, Slimy, Grimy, and Dead

A Ten-Minute Play About Eels

By

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CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

Scientist - A marine biologist that just wants everybody to not be confused.

Pattie - A Protanguilla of the Protanguillioidei suborder. As the oldest order of eels, they are the leaders. Pattie has been elected supreme leader of the Eels. She is bashful and mild and wants everyone to get along.

Craig - A European Conger, elected to represent the Congroidei suborder. A real big dude. Military type. Take from that what you will.

Ash - An American Eel, representing the Anguilloidei suborder. He used to be a pretty easygoing guy, ready to crack open a beer. But the death of a close relative is bringing him a mortality crisis- for himself, personally, and for his entire species.

Maurice - A Green Moray, representing the suborder Muraenoidei. He knows he's fine, his death is a long, long way away. He's kind of a rockstar, anyway. He's the representative of a very large suborder. The power got to his head.

Chrissy - A bicolored false moray, representing the suborder Chlopsygoidei. She really feels the title "false moray" and is often confined to Maurice's shadow. She often finds herself exhibiting, and subsequently trying to exterminate behaviors resembling Maurice's.

Gert - An umbrellamouth gulper, representing the suborder Saccopharyngoidei. He's super duper creepy. He opens his mouth very widely when he speaks. He's just happy to be included.

The Angel of Death - A Giant Phantom Jelly that's been mysticized by the Eels.

TIME

The August of 2025, or a similar year. After the extinction of the European Eel.

SETTING

Underwater, in Pattie's headquarters in the Caves of Palau.

The SCIENTIST stands centerstage with a pointer in hand. She has a little bit of stage fright. She is armed with either wall projections or a board full of pictures- something.

SCIENTIST



Hi, all! I'm Professor Stanley from the Columbia College Department of biology, and I'm here to tell you some things about eels. Think of me as the exposition to the exposition. So, this play concerns the upcoming extinction of the European Eel (*she shows us a picture of the European Eel, preferably all its life cycle stages*). It's been a cultural and scientific phenomenon for thousands of years. It was written about by Aristotle, its reproductive system studied by Sigmund Freud. It is very mysterious. It migrates from the Sargasso Sea, off the coast of Southern North America, to bodies of freshwater in Europe. At the beginning of its life, it is transparent, and known as a glass eel. It is a delicacy in Basque culture. It lives in rivers and streams for an indefinite period of time, maybe only a year or two, maybe a few decades, and then it goes back to the ocean. When it does this, it develops reproductive organs and dissolves its stomach. It can live four years without food. It travels in the deep ocean, trying not to get eaten by sharks. And it goes home, to the Sargasso Sea. It dies there. The species is millions of years old. Humanity pretty much wiped it out in fifty.

PATTIE, ASH, CRAIG, CHRISSY, and GERT sit in a circle, waiting for MAURICE. They all have name tags. It's awkward. There's a banner somewhere that says "Welcome Eels!" CHRISSY starts to whistle. GERT copies her in a very unsettling way. She stops. He stops. It's more awkward.

PATTIE

So we're really just waiting on Maurice.

CRAIG

You are the one who sent the invitations. You are the one who received the RSVPs. How would anyone but you have that information.

PATTIE

Okay, Craig. Jesus. And I don't know, maybe someone, you know, asked around, and brought a friend? Nine suborders-

GERT

Eight.

PATTIE

Okay. *(beat)* Eight suborders, and only six bother to show. I only asked for eight of you. 1% of our species diversity represented here tonight, and that was still too much. I'm sorry. I'm all emotional.

ASH

You know, those stupid little electric assholes wanted to come. Just because a few stupid little dumbass stupid humans call you an eel because you're long doesn't mean you're really an eel. So I told them it was in Delaware this September.

GERT

It's August. We are in Palau.

ASH

Exactly, Gert, that's the point. Christ. It's like pulling teeth with you, man.

GERT smiles.

CHRISSY

Why do we have to have these name tags, Pattie, we all know each other.

MAURICE enters, burps loudly, picks up his nametag, throws it away, and locates his seat.

MAURICE

We don't need nametags, Pattie, that's fucking stupid.

CHRISSY

That's what I was saying!

MAURICE

Of course you were, Chrissy. Why are you dressed like me? *(CHIRSSY whispers "dammit" under her breath)* You little wannabe fake-ass false moray. *(with ridiculous intensity)* You will never be as cool as I am. I am a real moray.

MAURICE holds his gaze with CHRISSY for a really, really long time. He burps again but doesn't break his stare.

ASH

It's the fucking end of days and *this* is the turnout?

PATTIE

It's not the end of days. Have you been telling people it's the end of days?

CRAIG

There are 800 species of eels. We'll power through. *(beat)* Are you high right now, Maurice?

MAURICE

Yes, Craig. I am extremely high. I met some dolphins on the way here and I got fuuuucked uuuuuup. Did you know, if you lick a pufferfish, everyone around you will have seaweed for teeth and opposable thumbs? Tetrodotoxin is a bitch. *(beat)* I think I might die. *(He laughs and burps)*

CHRISSY

Jesus Christ, Maurice.

GERT

(after careful evaluation) Your behavior is inappropriate for funeral preparations, Maurice. *(beat)* I haven't been this close to the sun in years. Everything is bright.

PATTIE

Okay! Let's take attendance!

CRAIG

There are six of us here. We all know each other.

PATTIE

I, Pattie, elected Supreme Leader of the Council of Eels, call this meeting into session. Our duty today is to plan an event for the larger marine community to mourn the loss of the European Eel of the Anguilloidei suborder. Let all members in attendance state their name and suborder for the record. Let's start with the Anguilloideis. Condolences.

ASH

Ash, American Eel, representing the Anguilloidei suborder, or the freshwater eels. Now that Ernest is dead. *(beat)* This is so fucked up, man. Ernest is dead. Jerry is dead. Jerry and Linda were gonna have kids! Their kids should almost be making their journey to the European continent, to swim up rivers and get eaten by Swedes and Spaniards. But they're fucking dead. This is so fucked up. I AM NEXT. How are you all not-

PATTIE

(She begins speaking over ASH and continues to do so for as long as needed) Alright. And who else is in attendance? *(gross mispronunciation)* The, um, Saccopharyngoidei suborder?

GERT

I am Gert. I am an Umbrella Mouth Gulper Eel. I am here representing the Saccopharyngoidei suborder. *(He opens his mouth very wide and closes it)* We are gulper and bobtail snipe eels. I do not like being this close to the surface and I would like to make this brief.

PATTIE

Thank you, Gert.

CRAIG

Craig, European Conger, Congroidei suborder, Conger and Garden eels.

PATTIE

Thank you. I would appreciate that kind of efficient response from everyone, please.

CHRISSEY

Uh, I'm Chrissy, bicolored, uh false moray *(MAURICE laughs)*. I'm here representing the Chlopsoidei suborder, the uh. The false morays.

MAURICE

I'm Maurice and I'm a real-ass moray eel, and I am fucking hardcore.

PATTIE

Well, that's the best we're going to get out of you, isn't it, Maurice? I am Pattie, elected to represent the Suborder Protanguilloidei, and as the oldest suborder, I reign over all true eels, otherwise known as the order Anguillaformes.

CRAIG

We know.

PATTIE

Okay! Now let's cut the official business. I don't see why you all can't let me have some fun with roll call.

MAURICE

You are the most depressing person I've ever met in my life.

PATTIE

I'm sorry you feel that way. Now, I'm thinking we do the Sargasso Sea. This September. And I'd like a big guest list. Pretty much anyone not inclined to eat us. I have Ernest's remains prepared. We will bury him symbolically, as he was the last elected representative of the species.

ASH begins sobbing with progressive intensity. PATTIE continues talking until everyone else is paying attention only to him.

PATTIE

Now, what I really need help with is the seashell arrangements. Should we really rely on seashells, or also maybe some kelp? What I'd really like to have is some coral, but it's so hard to come by these days. And I know I was the one who set the guest list, but I think we might need to narrow it down. Maybe we all think of like, ten species each to add to the guest list? I just think catering will be too hard if we leave it open ended. *(finally acknowledging ASH)* Oh my stars what is it.

ASH

ERNEST IS DEAD! Jerry, Bill, Gustavo, Armando, Leo, Mica, Rachel. Dead. Baby Nick and Little Katrina. Dead. And I'm next! In five, ten years, fuck, twenty if I'm lucky, the five of you will be sitting around planning my funeral, and the funeral for my *entire species*. And none of you will give a fuck! I'm gonna be dead. My kids are gonna be dead. And after me, the Japanese Eels will go. And then everyone else.

MAURICE

(he laughs) My teeth don't fit in my mouth.

CRAIG

Calm down, Ash. I know it's difficult to come to terms with the fact that a bunch of hairless chimpanzees wiped out a tens-of-millions year old species in five decades because it wanted a snack. But that's life, man. So you've got to get out there, get swole, and bite as many of those fuckers as you can.

MAURICE

Have you seen the Angel of Death yet?

ASH

No. That's just an urban legend, anyway.

GERT

We are in the ocean. Nothing is urban.

CHRISSEY

The Angel of Death is ten feet long, emerging from the depths like a poison cloud-

MAURICE

Shut the fuck up Chrissy. *(beat)* The Angel of Death must visit you, the elected leader of your kind, before you and your people will face definite extinction, written into the cold tides by the warm-blooded. The Angel of Death will caress you with its tentacles. It is made of smooth gelatin and the cries of our newborns fried in the saucepans of the Spanish.

PATTIE

What the hell, Maurice. What.

ASH

Oh god. Oh god. I'm going to die.

MAURICE

I was trying to be reassuring. *(He reacts to something that isn't there. He laughs.)* I love drugs.

CRAIG

How did you get elected.

MAURICE

It was either me or this bitch with big nostrils or this asshole with really long, glass teeth.

GERT

I do not understand how *I* am more unsettling than the freaks of nature this uncaring nimwit has the dishonor of representing.

MAURICE

Woah there, cowboy. Those are fighting words.

He gets up and takes a swing in GERT's general direction, sways, and sits back down.

CHRISSY

How am I considered a knockoff version of *this*?

CRAIG

It's because you're not as popular in the media. Humans like bright colors and big teeth.

MAURICE

Fuck yeah. Woo!

PATTIE

I think we need to get back on track here. So, Maurice, I'm going to put you in charge of the guest list, because people like you. Who knows why.

CHRISSY

Because god is dead.

PATTIE

Chrissy, you will supervise Maurice to make sure he actually does what he's supposed to do.

CHRISSY

What? What. No. Pattie. Pattie. Please. God. No.

MAURICE

I don't need a babysitter I'm a fucking real-ass fucking moray eel. *(he laughs, stops abruptly)*

PATTIE

Craig, I'm putting you in charge of the decorative arrangements.

CRAIG

Why would you do that. What about me has led you to believe I would be good at that.

PATTIE

Well, you seem reasonable, and I was going to give the job to Chrissy, but I wanted to empower my fellow women in the workplace, not restrict them to stereotypical jobs such as picking out decorations.

CHRISSEY

You made me a babysitter. A fucking babysitter. How is that better?

PATTIE

You are a supervisor. It will sound very official on your resume. And Ash, I would like you to write some words to say at the funeral. A eulogy. Yes? You seem as though you need a creative outlet. And I will do everything else.

ASH cries more. Everyone starts to talk, maybe start shifting to leave. GERT stands up, fighting through his misgivings, ready to take control.

GERT

Don't I have a job?

PATTIE

Well, I mean-

GERT

(he's pissed and that's scary) Pattie. You forced me from my paradisaical residence in the darkest depths of the ocean, from where I swallow hapless fish in a single breath, and you brought me here. I am so close to the fucking sun. My skin is burning. I was not designed to be under such a small amount of water pressure- the layers of my brain are disconnecting, expanding, and muddling as we speak. But I came all this way. I have suffered all of your insufferable company. And you. Will not. Give me. A task. *(he screams, shrilly, in a way that is confusing, comedic, and wildly unsettling)* I WOULD LIKE A TASK.

MAURICE

Jesus fucking Christ, mate. Whew.

PATTIE

Okay. Okay. Ummmm. Oh! Well, when dead whales die they go to the bottom of the ocean.

GERT

Yes. Indeed.

PATTIE

Well, whale fall cuisine is super, um, exotic and kind of, you know, trendy. So maybe you can find us an additional caterer?

GERT remains standing, quietly, for quite some time. Then he sits down again. This is a collective moment of relief for the other eels.

GERT

Yes. I will complete this task. Thank you, Pattie.

PATTIE

Okay! That's everything I have here. And I'm 40-60% more efficient than all of you put together, so if another unforeseen issue enters the horizon I will deal with it. Meeting adjourned!

The eels arise, chatting. Relatively happy. MAURICE whoops or something. Only ASH remains seated.

ASH

(whispered) What the fuck. *(shouting)* WHAT THE FUCK.

Everyone pauses, willing to give him the attention he's asked for.

PATTIE

... What is it, Ash?

ASH

Do you know how insane you're all acting? *(CRAIG and MAURICE scoff)* No. NO. Shut the fuck up. We have lost one of our own. A cousin to all of us, a fucking integral part of our evolution tree and other science shit, whatever, yeah, sure, but we lost *friends*. My buddy Ross got caught by some Swedish asshole- he had a hook so far down his throat that his guts were getting torn up- my other buddy Darius heard him screaming before they smashed his brain with a rock. Josh got lost, god bless his soul, because he was so directionally challenged anyway, but now the ocean is taller or whatever and all the currents are jacked up and he was in Thailand or some shit getting high out of his mind with no clue he wasn't in America. He's dead now. His nieces and nephews are dead too. Only like, twelve of them even saw fresh water, and they got stuck at

some stupid fucking- what are they called? Dams. And froze to death, banging themselves against something that would never give, something that wasn't designed to let them live. Everyone here has lost a friend. I don't see how you can act like it's fucking nothing.

CRAIG

What choice do we have, Ash. We are just long fish. None of the stupid dumbass bald apes that make choices for us give a shit about what happens to us. They can't even watch out for themselves. We are on a planet run by parasites, my friend, and they are running us into the fucking ground. Having an existential crisis won't change that. There is nothing anyone or anything on this big fucking rock can do to change that. We keep going. That's all we can do.

ASH

So. If I'm hearing you correctly. All of you understand your deaths are on the horizon. But it's just not close enough to home yet. The creatures we gave life to, when they discovered new continents and were freezing and foodless, who we fed with the bodies of our brothers, the creatures we helped get strong in the early days of colonization are killing us. You don't want to think about it. You're just gonna wait until it's impossible to ignore, until the Angel of Death, or whatever, is knocking on your door- JESUS FUCKING CHRIST

The ANGEL OF DEATH enters. He acts like a normal, kind of silly guy who has been thrown into the role of a Supernatural Entity. He tries to move his tentacles in a spooky way to maintain his air of mysticism, forgets, then remembers throughout the scene. The EELS, except GERT, are fucking terrified. MAURICE karate chops the air in the ANGEL's vague direction. CHRISSY hides behind MAURICE. ASH breaks down sobbing, all the way on the ground. CRAIG looks for weapons. PATTIE just says "oh dear" over and over.

MAURICE

(genuine terror) It's the fucking end of days! *(he breaks out laughing)*

ANGEL OF DEATH

Oh, hey Gert.

GERT

Hello Dave.

The EELS pause and look at GERT, who is not used to so much attention.

PATTIE

...Dave?

GERT

We are deep-sea dwellers. It is a small community.

ASH

You mean you've talked to the fucking *Angel of Death*? And you never even told us. You're going to die, Gert. We are ALL GOING TO DIE.

ANGEL OF DEATH

They really are off their rockers, aren't they, Gert?

He moves his tentacles in a spooky way. The EELS gasp in fear, but then look at GERT.

GERT

... I never said that.

ANGEL OF DEATH

You're right. You said they were out of their minds, completely batsh-

GERT

Okay. Thank you for reminding me, Dave.

PATTIE

Why are you here, Specter?

MAURICE

Fuck kinda word is specter?

CRAIG

(holding a chair in a menacing way) Prepare to meet your doom. Conger Eels will live forever, you ghosty sonuvabitch.

ANGEL OF DEATH

Woah there, cowboy. I just dropped by to offer my condolences, and because I wanted to see what all of this Angel of Death business is. I am not the Angel of Death. The Angel of Death is on land, above the surface, watching hours of their lives circle down the drain, stuck in boring places, boring jobs, slaving away to build lives that amount to nothing, but take everything, sentencing the Earth to death by a thousand papercuts. I am not the Angel of Death. The Angel of Death is an outsider. Your fear and violence is misdirected, as everyone's is. Your fate is sealed. Make peace with it. *(he makes a ghost noise and moves his tentacles spookily)* I'm sorry all your friends are dead and I'm sorry that you're dying.

THE ANGEL OF DEATH exits. The EELS are shaken and silent.

PATTIE

You know, my kind watched the dinosaurs go. We'd been living on this Earth long before and we've stayed long after. We've watched all of you grow and change. Life is not meant for permanence. But loss is crushing, because it has to be. Nothing was meant to exist on its own.

MAURICE

I'm sorry, Ash. For being a bitch. I'm sad your friends are dead, dude. I mean that. *(he puts his hand on ASH's chest and makes really intense eye contact, and then reacts suddenly to something that, again, is not there.)* Jesus.

CRAIG

I'm also sorry. *(he stays very still and silent)*

ASH

Thanks, Maurice. Thank you Ash.

CHRISSY

This whole situation is a pretty big bummer, I'm gonna be honest. Let me know if you ever need to talk, man.

GERT

I am sorry for telling Dave the Jellyfish how irrational you all are.

ASH

Thanks, guys. But please do better when you're planning my funeral.

PATTIE

Okay. We will. I promise. *(beat)* Are we good?

ASH

... Yeah. I guess so.

PATTIE

Okay then. Meeting adjourned.

All the EELS leave, chatting and mingling, except PATTIE, who begins to take down the banner reading "Welcome, Eels!"

PATTIE

That was weird.