

The Ringleader

Prologue

7th June 2009: The Yorkshire Dales

Quinten Amoroso was a kind man. Kind enough to adopt eight children who had been orphaned or disowned at birth. He never planned to be a father but it happened on his last mission for MI6. When breaking down that lab door, he never expected to see eight cradles. The lab was abandoned - the culprits probably received a tip and fled. But when Quinten picked up the eldest bundle of joy, he gasped. He was met with soft gurgles and eyes the colour of daffodils. Five years later, Quinten laid on the leather pleated sofa in his study. The fireplace was crackling as the sun set over the valley. He placed his bourbon on the side table and began to read over their notes for the umpteenth time.

- 1) The eldest: Molly. Enhanced ocular activity and harm inducing gaze. Usually coincides with negative feelings.
- 2) Vincent: Hemokinesis. Almost has complete control over the manipulation but continues to struggle with shaping blood.
- 3) Barney: Superstrength. Stable most of the time. Only fluctuates when he's showing off.
- 4) Francesca: Acidic Touch. Unstable. Acid always seeps out of her pores. Seems to worsen when she's anxious.

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- 5) Koffi: Knife manipulation. Can make knives from his veins. Painful to do and the blade is incomplete.
- 6) Sobek: Hair manipulation. Their hair can shift into the classical elements. Cannot control the length of it.
- 7) Esme: Sentient Shadow. Shadow is independent from Esme's form. Is mischievous and has a mind of its own.
- 8) Bambi: Deer Antlers. Shedding occurs every month and causes immense distress.

Quinten sighed as he placed the notes down. He had to break the news to them. It's not that he didn't want to, but explaining to the children that they now had to work was not ideal. Especially when this job was meant to occur in private, not on live television.

Eight pairs of brogue shoes echoed on the stairs. The oak groaned beneath the children as they sprinted to his office. They could not be late. No, that would anger him. As they reached the top of the stairs, their little huffs filled the manor house. Molly examined them, it was her duty to make sure they were all dressed adequately. She tucked Barney's shirt in, made sure Francesca's Teflon gloves were tightly on and wiped the dirt off Vincent's face with her thumb. In her peripherals, she saw Bambi peel away at the loose velvet dangling from her antlers. The shedding dropped to the floor and fresh blood stained Bambi's fingertips. Sobek put their arm around the crying girl, although it was quite the struggle, considering Sobek's Rapunzelesque locks. Molly sighed as she strode towards the two. Bambi's tapioca pearl eyes glistened with tears yet her sniffles were muted by fear.

'She's hurting, Molly,' Sobek pleaded.

'I know, but he'll be mad if she does not look presentable. Bambi, look at me.'

Bambi raised her head and snot dribbled down to her lips. Her mucus coated mouth trembled, and her shoulders began to shake.

‘Bambi, I will ask him for balm but please stop crying. It will only make things worse.’

Unable to speak, Bambi nodded and Molly pulled a packet of tissues and dabbed at the droplets. The remaining two, Koffi and Esme, kept their gaze on the dark brown walls, although Esme’s shadow seemed to go up to the door and extend its middle finger. Koffi stifled a laugh.

‘Esme, please control your shadow,’ Molly begged.

‘You know I can’t!’

Esme’s retaliation was cut off by the booming bell in the grandfather clock. It was twelve. The door creaked. Esme’s shadow darted back into place. Eight pairs of shoulders tensed. Eight little hearts boomed in anticipation.

‘Come in.’

Molly slowly turned the golden handle to their father and his salt and pepper beard. His spectacles are cleaner than the windows behind him. Various books on human anatomy and the supernatural covered the walls. Sat at his desk, he observed the children like a hawk. Notes were scribbled down in his leather-bound book. With a firm snap, the book was shut.

‘Molly, Vincent, Barney, Francesca, Koffi, Sobek, Esme and Bambi. I have called you here to tell you the most wondrous news! The Ministry of Justice has finally passed our E.S. Regulations. I can now confirm that your training will be commenced. Isn’t that exciting?’

Silence.

Eight heads turned in confusion. What did this mean? Even Esme’s shadow shrugged in bafflement. He chuckled as he got up and leaned leisurely on the desk.

‘Children, it means we can now hone your abilities and use them for justice. To persecute

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those who have violated the law, to be moral arbiters of the United Kingdom.’

Molly raised her hand; he permitted her to speak.

‘How are we going to persecute criminals? We’re only five years old.’

Quinten chuckled. He crouched in front of Molly and stroked her cheek. Molly felt uncomfortable but she could not seem to turn away. His pristine smile was one that never seemed to meet his eyes.

‘Molly, you will persecute them with your powers. And I have no doubt that you will be perfect at it.’

Chapter 1

7th June 2026: London

The weather was lovely, which was rare for England. A picturesque sunset loomed over the stadium. Hyperactive kids squeezed their overpriced E.S. plushies as their slightly tipsy parents ushered them home. Teens and young adults alike took hundreds of photos outside the stadium. These crowds seemed to never end as they swarmed towards the underground, eager to get home. Yet what the news failed to pick up was the small hoard of protestors, their cardboard signs wiggling in the wind. But the scribbled red words were clear for all to see:

*EXECUTION IS NOT THE SOLUTION**THOU SHALL NOT KILL**KILLING FOR SPORT, WE SHALL NEVER SUPPORT*

Yet the bystanders looked away, some annoyed at the protestors' audacity. The government had passed capital punishment, so why were people making a fuss? It was legal.

Amelie took a deep breath. Although her heart ached to interview the protestors, Ocean News would be less than pleased. They were a sports channel, only keen on engaging the fans and making a profit off their bloodlust. She shook off the uneasiness that pooled in her stomach. She would be back on air. So, she turned her back and faced the camera with a forged smile.



‘Honestly I would,’ Barney commented at the TV, a coy smirk plastered on his face. After eyeing the television one last time, he sailed over to the fridge. He grabbed a beer, chugged it and then smashed the can with his bare hands.

‘Overcompensating much?’ Bambi muttered from the chaise lounge. Her nails announced themselves as she tapped on her phone. Multiple E.S. employees were covering Bambi’s elegant antlers in warm towels.

‘I’m not having that from Rudolph the mummified reindeer.’

This sarcastic back and forth between Bambi and Barney was always a beloved feature of The E.S. After Show. After killing convicted rapists, paedophiles and murderers live on TV, the

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British public appreciated the sneak peek into The Experimental Spectacle's lives. It made them more relatable. It made them more human.

The cameras filmed the famed eight in their extremely high-end lounge. A complementary food and drink bar was being demolished by Esme, although her shadow seemed more interested in the drinks side of things. Vincent was reading on his Kindle and the volume from his headphones could only be described as concerning. But the cameras were focused on an agitated Francesca. She began pawing at the electromagnetic collar that entrapped her neck.

'Dude, you got to stop that. The Ringleader will be pissed if he sees one mark on that thing.'

Sobek leaned over to Francesca, their hair slapping her hands away from her neck. The collar kept their powers in check, even subdued them, which was the case for Francesca. The collar had mini prongs embedded within and was ready to send 1,500 volts to render Francesca a seizing mess.

'Believe me I would, but being filmed isn't exactly helping.'

Sobek smirked.

'Sobek?'

Sobek winked as their long locks turned into vines. The foliage crawled up the wall and strangled the camera until a loud crack was heard. The lens was now smashed. But Sobek didn't care. In fact, they relished in moments like these, any chance to piss off the production crew was always worth it. Property damage and all.

'Oops.'

The other acts ignored their dramatic display. Sobek was a performative creature, and the fangirls lapped that shit up like dehydrated dogs.

Molly was staring at the television, her leg restlessly bouncing. She was studying the post-game interviews as if it were the night before her A-Levels. Her yellow irises bounced all over the screen like a poison dart frog. Every detail mattered, every comment mattered. It showed her what she could improve on. It showed her she could be better.

‘Koffi mate, make us a blade so I can crack this cold one open.’

Koffi sighed. He then blew his nose into a napkin and chucked it onto the floor. Doing this time and time again, Koffi rubbed the vein on his forearm. Once the vein was prominent Koffi grimaced when he pressed down on his wrist. Instantly, an indigo blade unsheathed itself from Koffi’s skin. Barney was now adjacent to Koffi, his hand awaiting the blade. Annoyed, Koffi slammed the blade into Barney’s grasp. His skin was sliced. Blood began to drip and Barney began to fume.

‘Oi! Vincent! Heal this now!’

Vincent did hear but cared very little. He was in his loungewear, he was comfortable and he was in heaven. No man having a temper tantrum was going to take that away from him. Although this did not stop Barney from being an annoying pest.

‘Earth to Vincent! Stop being a prat and heal me!’

‘Barney please stop whining; there are plasters in the med kit. Don’t make Vincent waste his energy.’

The telly was turned off as Molly scolded Barney. She stared at the himbo in front of her. It was as if she was wearing all red and Barney was a bull. He was puffing his chest out like an agitated peacock. Molly was concerned that she was in the splash zone of his saliva.

‘Just because you’re the eldest, doesn’t mean you get to act all high and mighty!’

‘Just because you have super strength doesn’t mean you get to act entitled.’

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The cameras zoomed in.

Molly headed towards Barney, her gaze unwavering. She felt his foul breath on her nose. She despised how warm it felt. Barney smirked.

‘C’mon Blondie, you can’t do jack!’

Molly smiled.

‘You sure you want to test that theory, big boy?’

Before Barney could utter anything else offensive, an intense howl ripped through his lungs. His huge stature doubled over as acute agony shot through his entire body. His nerves stung like nettles as cold sweats washed over him. Everyone whipped their heads to see Molly staring Barney down. Her eyes glowing the most revolting yellow. Before Molly could go further the lights went green, signalling this episode of The E.S After Show was wrapped. The lights returned to normal as the E.S crew placed collars on the remaining seven. Molly looked down at nurses taking Barney’s vitals. Spittle stained his shirt as he tried to regain composure.

‘You are dead when we get back to the manor.’

Molly felt the familiar click and headed towards the exit. Before Molly left, she paused and the guards next to her stiffened, slowly raising their stun guns.

‘Sure, I am Barney. Sure I am.’



The manor was nothing short of intimidating. The ornate stone exterior towered over the sheep as they happily grazed in their designated zone. The holographic gates kept them safe. That could not be said for the foxes that attempted to have a midnight snack. The hooting of a barn owl could be heard as the fireplace warmed the living room. Barney was sulking and Esme

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joined Bambi on the leather lounge chair. Her shadow gently massaged Bambi's antlers. The cool touch was more than welcome as Bambi relaxed into Esme's hold. Upstairs, Koffi and Francesca were playing Uno. Francesca's nose twitched as she tried to keep her powers at bay. But she felt the corrosive fluid ooze out of her fingertips. Pokerface was always difficult for her; some would call her an open encyclopedia. The paper cards crackled away, a prominent hole was now in the table.

'Damn it!' Francesca cursed.

Safe to say, her gloves were placed back on.

Sobek and Vincent were in the bathroom. Sobek's hair was brushing itself whilst Vincent was redyeing his hair red, not by choice but by a contractual obligation. Meanwhile, Molly was in her room, awaiting The Ringleader's return. Quinten had asked to speak to her in his study, nerves riddled her as she paced around her room. The sheep that usually calmed her, were annoying her with their constant bleating. The signs stained her mind. Molly saw them. She hated them. Hated how they made her question things. Overwhelmed, Molly felt the familiar burn behind her corneas. Flopping onto her bed, she hugged her pillow tight. A tired tear dropped as she curled up into a ball. Molly wanted sleep to drag her down into a neverending night. There, she could rest.