

## **CATFISH**

A young employee working at an international cyber scam call centre dreams of a different life.

FADE IN:

INT. CALL CENTRE OFFICE - DAY

OFFICE WORKERS are lined up in narrow cubicles, each wearing a headset and tapping away at a computer. The office is dated and weather-stained, like might be found in a sweltering developing country. But there is noise and energy - this a dynamic and vibrant workplace.

INT. CALL CENTRE OFFICE CUBICLE - DAY

Smiling African man, 30s, speaking into his HEADSET.

OFFICE WORKER #1

(African accent)

-once the money is transferred I can release the general's diamonds and you will receive your thirty per cent commission...23 million American dollars, that's right sir...I can assure you this transaction is one hundred per cent safe-

INT. SECOND CALL CENTRE OFFICE CUBICLE - DAY

Indian woman, early 20s, speaking into her HEADSET.

OFFICE WORKER #2

(Indian accent)

Thank you, sir. All seems to be in order so far. As a final test of your computer's security I will now ask you to enter your banking credentials on our secure website to ensure these details have not been compromised-

INT. THIRD CALL CENTRE OFFICE CUBICLE - DAY

Asian man, late 40s, reclined, speaking into his HEADSET.

OFFICE WORKER #3

(Boston accent)

I tell you, Joe, these stocks are going through the roof...Take a look yourself, jump online. But get in quick. My company is offering early buy-in for preferred customers and I don't know how long-

INT. FOURTH CALL CENTRE OFFICE CUBICLE - DAY

A skinny Filipino man, mid-twenties, youthful and bookish, sitting in his cubicle with his headset around his neck. This is JOSELITO. His computer screen shows an unfinished game of solitaire, mostly obscuring a woman's online dating profile.

Joselito is gazing out an open window. CAR ENGINES, BICYCLE BELLS and STREET HAWKERS blend in with the office noise. A HORSE WHINNIES faintly in the distance.

MAN  
(sharply)

Joselito!

Joselito startles, knocking over a mug with a picture of a horse on it. Joselito bends to pick it up and sees shiny snakeskin business shoes. Joselito follows the line of a smartly-dressed leg to reveal a middle-aged Filipino man with distinguished grey streaks in his coifed hair and an unlit cigar in his hand. This is DANILO, the manager of the office.

DANILO  
(gruffly, but without malice)  
Come with me to my office, please Joselito.

Danilo strides past the long line of cubicles towards his office at the end of the floor. He slaps the arse of a female colleague as he passes. Joselito follows behind meekly.

They pause when a handsome man rings a BRASS BELL dangling from a side wall - he has made a sale. The whole office applauds, Danilo smiles proudly. The man slides a cut-out of his own cheesy smiling face along a WALL CHART showing how much each has earned for the company. He is well ahead of the other employees. Joselito's face is still at the zero mark.

Danilo gives Joselito a telling glance.

INT - DANILO'S PERSONAL OFFICE - DAY

Danilo reclines in a large leather chair, still holding his unlit cigar. Behind him are motivational posters of eagles and mountaintops, plus framed credentials: a university degree, training certificates, a completed Coffee Club rewards card.

Joselito sits on the other side of the desk on an undersized wooden chair.

DANILO  
How long have you been working for us  
now, Joselito?

JOSELITO

Two years, sir.

DANILO

Uh huh. Uh huh. And how are you finding your work here?

JOSELITO

(glancing around anxiously)

It's ok.

DANILO

You are in our Catfish Department, am I right?

JOSELITO

Yes sir.

DANILO

And how many clients have you fed a baloney scamwich in the last few months?

JOSELITO

(sheepishly)

One sir.

DANILO

And how much money has she sent you over the last, say, week or so?

JOSELITO

The last week?

Joselito considers the question.

JOSELITO (CONT'D)

Approximately or exactly, sir?

DANILO

Let's go with exactly.

JOSELITO

Then that would be none, sir.

DANILO

And over the past month? How much in that time?

JOSELITO

Approximately or exactly, sir?

DANILO

Let's assume I always mean exactly.

JOSELITO

Ok.

Joselito considers the question.

JOSELITO (CONT'D)

I think that'd be none also, sir.

DANILO

And how would you say you are fitting in at the office socially? Getting along with your colleagues?

JOSELITO

Yes sir.

DANILO

Could you name someone who works in your Department?

Joselito pauses once again to consider the question.

JOSELITO

Maria?

DANILO

Maria left a year ago. Anyone else?

A beat.

JOSELITO

Joselito?

Daniilo's face is stone.

DANILO

What is our motto here at Enterprise Incorporated International, Joselito?

JOSELITO

Ring 'em up-

JOSELITO

-wring 'em dry.

DANILO

(over Joselito)

Ring 'em up, wring 'em dry.

DANILO (CONT'D)

I'm particularly proud of that one. Took me fifteen hours in a soundproof box to come up with that.

You haven't exactly been wringing 'em dry recently, have you Joselito?

Danilo sighs, comes around and sits on the corner of the desk near Joselito, like a concerned schoolteacher.

DANILO (CONT'D)

Your father and I built this company from the ground up, Joselito. Thirty years ago we were just teenagers pretending that tourists had hit us with their cars, and now look at us. This company employs forty people, has a turnover of ten million dollars, defrauds thousands of greedy Westerners every year. Your father would have wanted you to share in that success, Joselito.

Danilo returns to his leather chair.

DANILO (CONT'D)

You know what you need, Joselito? A mentor. You know who you should take after?

JOSELITO

Benjie, sir?

DANILO

Benjie, exactly. See, you do know someone's name.

Danilo presses a button on his intercom.

DANILO (CONT'D)

Can you send Benjie in here, please, plump buns?

The handsome man who rang the brass bell pops his head into the office. This is BENJIE. He is suave, confident and boorish – everything Joselito is not.

BENJIE

You wanted to see your star player, sir?

Danilo greets him with a fraternity brother handshake.

DANILO

Benjie, did I just see you close your twelfth sale this week?

BENJIE

Yes sir. A record for our Fake Charities Department, if you don't me yanking my own shaft.

DANILO

I don't think anyone minds a handsome man like yourself yanking whatever you want in the office – as long as you keep tugging that bell cord! I've got an idea. Why don't you give Joselito here a demonstration of how you closed that sale?

(to Joselito)

You'll love this. Pretend you've just answered your phone.

BENJIE

Good morning sir. Do you like dead kids?

JOSELITO

I'm sorry?

BENJIE

Don't be sorry, it's not your fault you're a horrible person. But you can change.

(low, heart-breaking voice)

Hundreds of disadvantaged children die needlessly in Africa each day because they do not have access to clean water, nutritious food, sanitation. In some remote areas the streaming services are so far behind they still don't know if Ross and Rachel ever got back together.

(normal voice)

How's your day been sir?

JOSELITO

It's been–

BENJIE

Lots of African kids aren't having a good day.

(low, heart-breaking voice)

Take little N'gab'ngulu'daf'l'butu. He's so hungry he didn't have the energy to attend his AK-47 lessons this morning. Tomorrow, he'll probably have to fight a lion just to fill his distended belly.

(MORE)

BENJIE (CONT'D)

But with a donation of one hundred dollars you can go on buying child labour Air Jordans safe in the knowledge you are making a real difference. You are saving children's lives.

Joselito, staring at Benjie in hypnotised awe, begins to stand and remove his wallet from his pocket. Danilo claps loudly, pats Benjie on the back, hands him a cigar. Benjie bows, takes Joselito's wallet and removes some cash, then leaves.

DANILO

(walking back around his desk)  
Impressive, no? You could do that.

JOSELITO

(sitting back down)  
I don't think I can be as good him.

DANILO

Of course you can! You can learn these things. Did you notice the way he thrust his groin at you as he spoke? Classic signalling technique. It can all be learned, Joselito.

Danilo stares at the poster of the eagle, contemplates.

DANILO (CONT'D)

You want to know the scam I am most proud of? Let me show you something.

Danilo presses a button on his intercom.

DANILO (CONT'D)

Can you send Carola in here, please, saddlebags?

CAROLA, 40s and busty, appears in the open doorway. Danilo picks up a stack of paper from his desk and hands it to her.

DANILO (CONT'D)

Your report needs work. I want a more disruptive, customer-centric approach that leverages best-in-field agile paradigms.

Have you considered a vertically integrated solution that value-adds across the throughput cycle? Give me a revised draft by 10pm tonight.



CAROLA

But tonight is my child's-

DANILO

10pm tonight. Thanks, double scoops.  
You're dismissed.

Danilo waves Carola away, slaps her on the arse as she leaves.  
He resumes his seat.

DANILO

Management. That's the biggest scam. And  
the most important part of being a  
manager?

JOSELITO

Leadership?

DANILO

Gravitas.

JOSELITO

What's that?

DANILO

No-one knows. But I can teach you a few  
tricks. What I just said to Carola?  
Complete nonsense. The key is to phrase  
everything as a question so you can't be  
held accountable for their failures. And  
that report? I sat on it for three weeks  
just so she doesn't forget how busy and  
important I am. I'm not even going to be  
here past four o'clock.

Danilo smiles, inspects the unlit cigar he is holding.

DANILO (CONT'D)

See this cigar, Joselito? It says I'm  
manly, self-assured. I saw a character  
in a Spiderman comic holding one once. I  
don't even smoke. Disgusting habit.

(puffing on the unlit cigar)

I own three houses, Joselito. There's a  
girl with big tits in each of my Jags.  
This could be you, Joselito. Your father  
would have wanted that. What did you  
picture yourself growing up to be when  
you were young, Joselito?

JOSELITO  
(brightly)

A horse tamer!

DANILO  
(rolling his eyes)

There's no such thing as a horse tamer, Joselito. How many times do I have to tell you? It's something poor people made up to feel better about their horribly irrelevant lives. It's time to stop fantasising and buckle down in a real job.

JOSELITO  
But it must be a real thing! How come horses are so well-behaved? Who taught Mr Ed to speak, or racehorses to lie down so peacefully behind those curtains on the race track? Somebody has to do it! I could be that somebody!

Danilo comes around his desk and stands behind Joselito, massaging his shoulders like a father might his son.

DANILO  
Joselito, I'm at a loss. I like to think of you as the son I'm glad I never had. But I worry this might not be the place for you. Your numbers are low, you are always late with your tips for the office cock-fighting competition, and how many of your female colleagues have you sexually harassed this week? Four, five? So far today I've accidentally walked into the woman's bathroom three times. Three times! That takes effort and commitment, Joselito. How will our female co-workers feel valued around here if we don't constantly remind them how attractive they are?

JOSELITO  
I've tried, sir. Really I've tried.

DANILO  
(resignedly, returning to his seat)  
I know, Joselito. Look, why don't you take lunch and think on what I've said.

(MORE)

DANILO (CONT'D)

Make it a long lunch – I don't want to see your skinny backside around here for a good twenty minutes. Think about what your dad would have wanted if he hadn't tragically passed away in that freak strip club accident. He loved you, you know. He loved all of his families and mistresses.

Joselito leaves, dejected.

EXT - A BUSY PARK - DAY

Joselito wanders, hands-in-pockets, through a busy street-side park. He sees–

- a businessman in an expensive suit speaking nonsense corporate jargon into an old brick-sized mobile phone
- a bald, older businessman getting into an expensive convertible with a masculine, muscle-bound, much younger woman in a tight red cocktail dress
- a group of four businessmen walking through the park laughing loudly, each holding a ridiculously oversized unlit cigar. One slaps the arse of a woman jogging past.

Joselito looks depressed. But then he sees–

- an immaculately attired policeman atop a strong, shiny horse
- an obedience class being held in the park, each participant giving voice commands to grazing ponies
- a BOY throwing a stick for a horse, who returns it in joyous bounds.

BOY

(hugging horse)

I love you, Seabiscuit.

Joselito looks down at the ground. He has stepped in a large dollop of steaming horse poo. His face spreads into a wide smile. But it slowly fades.

EXT - STAIRS OUTSIDE AN OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Joselito is returning to his office, head down, when he hears a woman's voice.

WOMAN

Joselito!

Joselito turns to see a rotund middle-aged white woman in a floral dress and wide-brimmed hat – every inch of her a rich tourist.

JOSELITO

Yes?

The woman embraces Joselito warmly. Joselito stiffens.

WOMAN

(rich southern American accent)  
Joselito, it's me! Don't you recognise me? Penelope Hoffman! Pen Pen! We've been talking online.

INTERCUT - JOSLIETO'S COMPUTER SCREEN

The online dating profile previously seen on Joselito's cubicle computer screen belongs to HOFFMAN.

RETURN TO SCENE

JOSELITO

I'm sorry, Mrs Hoffman. There is no Brad Chasely. It is all just a scam. I just used a picture of Tom Cruise to make you think I was an attractive man.

HOFFMAN

I know that, silly. But I wasn't talking to Brad Chasely, I was talking to you. It is you this old dame fell in love with. That's why I hired a private investigator to track you down. And now here I am, just a girl, standing in front of a boy, asking him to love her.

JOSELITO

(smiling sadly)

I am sorry, Mrs Hoffman. I was just doing my job. And not very well, I have been told.

Hoffman pulls a lace handkerchief from her expensive purse, dabs at her nose.

HOFFMAN

Why should I have expected anything else? It has been so hard since my husband died. I have all the money in the world and no-one to spend it on. It can get so cold and lonely out on the ranch by myself.

JOSELITO

(piqued)

A ranch, you say? With horses and all that?

HOFFMAN

Horses, cattle, alpacas, giraffes. Of course! I'm a woman who likes to get in the saddle. I'm not fussy when it comes to what I ride.

A smile spreads across Joselito's face. He looks more like Benjie now. He slaps Hoffman on the arse, making her giggle coyly. He tries to sweep her off her feet, fails because of her weight, takes her by the hand instead.

JOSELITO

(husky, manly voice)

You had me at hello, Pen Pen.

The camera zooms in on Joselito's smiling face. A horse can be heard whinnying in the distance.

EXT - TEXAN SCRUBLAND - SUNSET

The camera pulls back again to reveal Joselito dressed in cowboy leathers, riding a stallion toward the setting sun. Hoffman is revealed to be alongside him, astride a giraffe.

FADE OUT

THE END