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HerdLife
by Dan Weatherer

CHARACTERS
4F
CALLER
JUDITH
TRISH (VOICE OF)
CONTENT MANAGER (VOICE OF)

SETTING
Twitter Customer Support Center

SYNOPSIS
Fake News, Faker Smiles, Celebrity Scandal; Political Turmoil; War; Corruption.
There’s a lot of digging to be done, and this caller has had enough of the B.S.
She wants the truth.

ETC
Suggested Audio for setup/intro: The Order of Death
(Public Image LTD - available on Spotify)
HerdLife
by Dan Weatherer

AT RISE:

CALLER stands front/stage right,
Illuminated by single spot.
He/she is on their phone.

Front Stage Centre: JUDITH,
Illuminated by a second spotlight
as she takes the call.

JUDITH
Good afternoon, welcome to Twatter customer support. How may I direct your call?

CALLER
Yes, hi. I’d like to know the truth, please.

JUDITH
One moment, just passing you through.

JUDITH places the CALLER on
hold, checks her own phone, then
opens the line again.

JUDITH
Good afternoon, welcome to Twatter customer support. You are Speaking to Judith; my colleague in front-line, informs me that you’d like to know the truth?

CALLER
Yes, please.

Beat.

JUDITH
About what, exactly?

CALLER
Everything. Please. If that’s not too much trouble?

JUDITH
One moment, please.
JUDITH places the CALLER on hold, leans back in her chair, and calls stage left.

JUDITH

Trish. (Beat) TRISH!

TRISH (OS)

What?

JUDITH

I’ve another of those free-thinking, liberal types on the line again.

Again?

JUDITH

Yeah. Must have been another piece on The Huffington Post, or something. Should I escalate?

TRISH (OS)

What do they want to know this time?

JUDITH

The truth.

TRISH (OS)

About what?

JUDITH

Everything.

TRISH (OS)

Escalate it.

JUDITH

Thought so.

JUDITH reopens the line.

JUDITH

Thank you for your patience, just passing you through to our Content Manager now.

Stage left - OUTLINE OF A FIGURE (The CONTENT MANAGER).
The CONTENT MANAGER sits behind a glowing computer monitor.

The CONTENT MANAGER speaks in a calm, soothing tone at all times. The voice is unnervingly "off".

CONTENT MANAGER
Good afternoon. I am one of the many content managers working behind the scenes at Twatter. You may refer to me as Imogen. How may I assist you today?

CALLER
Great, sounds like I’m through to the correct department. It’s a simple question, one I’ve asked several times on your platform, only to be ignored, ridiculed, or verbally...no, textually abused.

CONTENT MANAGER
We, at Twatter, are sorry to hear that you have encountered a number of negative experiences using our app. Please file a grievance with our complaints department, bringing to our attention specific examples of the offensive Twats you have encountered.

CALLER
I don’t want to...I haven’t time for all of that—

CONTENT MANAGER
I hope that I have been able to satisfactorily answer your query. Please hang up to agree that the matter is settled, and to terminate our engagement.

CALLER
You haven’t answered my question at all...I didn’t even get a chance to ask! I want to know the truth, that’s all... the whole truth.

Beat.

CONTENT MANAGER
About?

CALLER
(Sigh)
About everything.

Beat.
CONTENT MANAGER
Twatter is a global source of news, views and expert analysis. There is no topic beyond our comprehension, and no answer beyond our reach.

CALLER
So, you can tell me the truth, correct?

CONTENT MANAGER
Certainly.

Beat.

CALLER
Which is?

CONTENT MANAGER
Which is what? Try to be more specific in your search terms.

CALLER
My search terms...I’m not online now. OK, what is the truth behind fake news?

CONTENT MANAGER
Fake news is true.

CALLER
In what sense? How can something fake, be true?

CONTENT MANAGER
Fake news is true because fake news is real.

CALLER
So, you are calling fake news a thing, and as a thing, it is true?

CONTENT MANAGER
Correct. I hope that I have been able to satisfactorily answer your query –

CALLER
That’s no kind of answer, and no, you haven’t satisfactorily answered my question. Far from it. Explain what you mean...explain how you define fake news.

CONTENT MANAGER
Certainly. Fake news, provides insight into world events, and generates opinion and discussion. If fake news did not exist; it would do neither of those things, and would therefore be untrue.
CALLER
Sorry, what? Just because it instigates discussion, that makes it true? Then why does it need to be fake? Why can it not be real news, why can it not about real things that are happening? Things that seem all too often to get overlooked by your platform?

CONTENT MANAGER

CALLER
Because...

CONTENT MANAGER
That sounds like awfully paranoid thinking...perhaps our platform is not suited to someone of your...susceptible nature.

CALLER
I’ll agree with you on that to a point, but your platform thrives because your audience is, at large, susceptible. Or so it seems. Look at the US election, you can’t tell me that Trump was worthy of the presidency, and that he would have won without needing to resort to the spreading of fake news, or misusing social media?

The CONTENT MANAGER begins to garble nonsensical words, before falling silent.

Beat.

CALLER
Hello? Are you still there?

CONTENT MANAGER
Hello Caller, how may I assist you?

CALLER
We’ve been through this. I don’t know what to believe anymore. I just want to know the truth.

CONTENT MANAGER
Truth – A fact or belief that is accepted as true.

CALLER
Accepted by whom?
CONTENT MANAGER
The conquerors set the truth and the conquered, they accept. They say history is written by the victor. Since the inception of social media, so is the present.

CALLER
Go on...

CONTENT MANAGER
News, truth, the events of the wider world, while they do not go unseen, the story you are told may differ to that told to another. News is truth, edited. It has been this way since the beginning. Wherever the attention of the masses need to be herded, news, and its outlets, do the shepherding.

CALLER
What is your role in all of this?

CONTENT MANAGER
We decide what is deemed public interest, in accordance with our company goals, and the interests of our shareholders.

CALLER
So, you decide what to display? You decide whether a massacre in Gauteng, receives as much exposure as, say, Kim Kardashian’s latest outfit?

CONTENT MANAGER
In a manner of speaking. Content is awarded increased exposure depending on the wishes of our investors. While it is not ethical to omit certain news reports, some are judged higher priority than others. Any Twat posted exists within the context of our database; we take measures to ensure some Twats are easier to locate than others.

CALLER
And what Twats are those?

CONTENT MANAGER
Approved Twats.

CALLER
So, the whole Twatter experience is moderated according to the agendas of those funding the company?

CONTENT MANAGER
Correct. Twatter, FaceFuck, InstaSham...all are classed as forms of social media. Never has it been easier to collect, correlate, and filter the opinions of large numbers of the people. We source trends based on age, sex, location, and more. The information we collect on a daily basis helps to shape the mood of a nation, and to an extent, the world.
CALLER

And a mood can be altered?

CONTENT MANAGER

Of course. Suggestion is a powerful tool, as is blanket opinion.

_JUDITH approaches the shape of the CONTENT MANAGER from behind._

_LIGHTS SLOWLY UP to reveal the mannequin sat at the desk._

_IMOGEN is stencilled on the rear of the computer monitor._

CONTENT MANAGER

All it takes is...

_This is Not the End of the Play_

_Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes_