

Will Calamari be a Battered Squid?

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Grandian rests a tentacle on the one of the pillars of his battlements. His eyes bulge as he peers into the distance. But it's impossible to see through the inky waters. His squad of special service squid has made the area impenetrable to the naked eye. Grandian exhales loudly, blowing impatient bubbles which cause a coughing fit.

'They're out there somewhere.' He speaks out loud. Then picking up his conch shell, he blows loudly, summoning the leader of his warriors, General Calamari.

The General gives his customary double tentacled salute. 'Yes, Sir?' he inquires crisply.

'I think it's time to send a few of our slippery fish out to scout for the enemy, Calamari.' Grandian rests his shortest tentacle beneath his chin, and looks quizzically at the general. Secretly, he admires this man who has served him so well throughout his reign so far. Calamari has risked life and limbs, all of them, time and time again in the wars against the sea slugs. He was nearly battered to death in the last skirmish.

'Right you are Sir,' Calamari replies. 'The slugs are slow, but I hear on the current that they've enlisted the help of the giant southern seahorses. They could be here sooner than we think.'

Grandian realises that there is no time to waste. He must protect his kingdom from the slime of the sea. Those sinister creatures cannot be trusted. 'Send out sixteen of our slipperiest fish. Have the Special Sea Service posted along all the borders. And, Calamari,' he pauses, and seems to deliberate, 'tell the SSS to use the secret weapon if necessary.'

'Do you really think that's necessary, Sir?'

'You heard me Calamari. If the slugs are sighted in our territory, the Special Sea Service is to squirt the poisoned ink.'

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Meanwhile, in the blue black waters, the slugs are slipping slowly towards their target. The officers, who ride side saddle on the seahorses, arrive first. While they wait for their large marine corps to assemble, they ready themselves for the battle.

Sergeant Sid Slimy's in charge of this mission. 'It's every slug for himself,' he tells his squadron of sea slugs.

'Can you go over the battle plan again for us sir?' a young newly commissioned officer asks timidly. He's so nervous, that even in the cooler depth of the sea floor, he's sweating shiny slime from his pores.

'It's simple, you silly slug,' Sgt Slimy replies crossly. He's outlined the plan three times already. 'We surround Calamari's Headquarters and hold him hostage till he hands over the treasure. It's called a siege.'

'What if the General won't b-b-udge?' a small stuttering slug suggests.

'We'll wait for the right moment and then storm in. If they won't hand the pearls over, we'll take them ourselves. Those shifty squid have no right to take the treasure from the oyster owners. It's exploitation.' Sgt Slimy didn't add that the slugs had been pilfering the pearls for years too.

'Right. So easy,' the rest of the squadron sing out in unison.

The battles over the oyster beds have been raging for years. The oysters live in Limboland, a small strait between the settlement owned by the sea slugs and the silvery waters where the squid have set up their seascape. It's one thing to plunder the poor oysters for their pearls, but now the squid have cut a deal with the maddening molluscs.

Of course they're both filter feeders but that's all they have in common. The oysters like to stay at home and mind their own business, while the squid have their tentacles into everything. Or that is how the sea slugs see it. Now the squid are providing food in exchange for the pearls which they're selling to mermaids on the Black Sea market.

Everyone's happy except the slugs. The seahorses don't care so long as they are paid transportation costs. They'll work for either side.

Finally the slug squadron has surrounded the squid settlement. There's no sign of Calamari or his Special Sea Service. But little does Sergeant Slimy know that he's being observed by several slippery fish.

'Slime alert,' one of the fish communicates on the current to Calamari.

'How many?' Calamari asks crisply.

'About sixty,' the fish replies. 'They've surrounded you.'

'Oh, well. Then we have no choice but to attack with our strongest weapons.' Calamari calls the SSS together and outlines the plan.

He's almost too late.

'Unleash the special slime,' Sgt Slimy screams as his troops storm into Squid Central.

'Unleash the poisonous squid ink,' Calamari instructs his SSS.

The sea battle is on. Slugs slip along in their own slime. They're untouchable. No squid tentacle can reach them. But as they come into contact with the evil ink, they cough and splutter and are forced to retreat.

Calamari confronts Slime. He strikes at the slug's stomach. But his tentacle slides off its surface. A moment before the squid ink settles over Sgt Slimy, he reaches forward and bites Calamari. Calamari shrieks. One of his precious tentacles breaks off and drifts away into the blue darkness. Then Slimy coughs. At last the poisonous potion is doing its work. The slugs are forced to slink off, leaving only their slime behind.

'Well done,' Grandian slaps Calamari on the back. 'You've saved my kingdom again.'

'All in a day's work,' Calamari replied. But his voice has lost its crispness, and his fighting career is over. He raises his single remaining tentacle to Grandian in a silent salute.

As he turns to leave, Grandian reflects that Calamari may be a battered squid, but he is not a bitter one. And as usual, he's run rings around the enemy in this fishy business under the sea.