

OFF ... ON.

by Sam Butler

6/4/2024

stories@sambutler.us

EXT. HIGHWAY OVERPASS - EVENING RUSH HOUR

RISING OVER ...

Gridlocked traffic across an overpass, stretching over the highway below, forming a lop-sided X of red taillights.

In the background of the X, a glass tower looms over the highway - 12 stories tall, wide as a football field, and lights on in every office. Like the center of a panopticon.

Down on the overpass, in the foreground of the office tower, is a single green tent on the sidewalk, beside the roadway.

PUSH IN ON THE GRIDLOCK

Moving closer to the cars, windows reveal drivers and passengers with their eyes glued to phone screens in traffic.

PUSH IN ON A CAR IN TRAFFIC

Through the right passenger window of a sedan, onto the DRIVER inside.

A white guy in an office shirt with a routine dark hair cut. Not a manager yet, but one day soon, probably.

The driver stares at his phone at the base of the steering wheel, scrolling through short videos in a feed.

The occasional honk of evening rush hour adds some color to the white noise of the air conditioning, with all of the idling engines and road vibrations in the background.

PUSH IN ON THE PHONE

A viral video on the phone screen, as the driver clicks a HEART icon below the video.

PUSH IN ON THE PHONE SCREEN

Moving closer to the glass, and going THROUGH IT ...

Black.

A moment later, the black screen fills with SOFTWARE CODE, as a function handling the "heart" event fills down the screen.

As the executing code reaches the bottom of the screen, a ... loading indicator blinks -

CUT TO

A different SCREEN OF CODE, more backend and harder-to-read code, filled with functions and an illegible digital language, which eventually includes blocks of text we can understand – personal information:

```
NAME: "JOHN REYNOLDS",
EMAIL: "johnr1994@gmail.com",
PHONE: "+1 514 233-1463",
AGE: 29,
LOCATION: {85.967, -43.2984},
TIME_GMT: 22:54:01:56,
TIME_LOCAL: 18:54:01:56,
IP_ADDRESS: 192.168.4.10.,
DEVICE_ID: f7823bc2-382c-4e64-b0db-1972c5a98a42,
WATCH_TIME: 00:00:08,
SESSION_TIME: 00:24:15
```

After that, a GIGANTIC WALL OF CODE starts executing on the server, going through rows and rows of stuff like this – how the feed on the phone screen is made:

```
RECOMMENDED_VIDEOS: [ ... ],
RECENTLY_WATCHED: [ ... ],
RECENT_REACTIONS: [ ... ],
RECENT_SEARCHES: [ ... ],
RECENT_CREATORS: [ ... ],
FAVORITE_CREATORS: [ ... ],
FAVORITE_TOPICS: [ ... ],
FAVORITE_COMMENTS: [ ... ],
RECOMMENDED_ADS: [... ]
```

As the disconcerting wall of software governing our lives, media, and cultures goes on executing ...

PULL BACK FROM THE CODE

Rising from the black screen, to a small black object on a brown and gold background –

A COMPUTER CHIP, sitting on ...

A computer board, where the chip stands like a rectangular building, amongst a parking lot and roadways of gold pins and sensors and contacts ...

Encased in ...

A thin metal box around the computer board, just as wide as a box of chocolates ...

With green LED lights *blinking* rapidly with activity on the box ...

Alongside dozens of other servers, all of their green lights blinking in dissonance alongside each other ...

In the middle of a wall of servers, reaching down to the floor and 8 feet into the air, all of the lights *blinking* ...

In a room full of walls of servers, rows of them stretching across the industrial blue-gray steel climate-controlled room, as wide as a football field ... all of the lights across all of the walls blinking with the world's activity — the likes, the content, the pictures, the porn, the directions, the advertisements, the ChatGPT, the delivery orders, the emails, the DMS, the Google Docs ...

PULL UP AND OUT

Towards the ceiling over this cavernous room, and passing through the ceiling ...

Into the crawlspace between the walls, filled with electrical wiring and water pipes, buzzing with static and rushing with the sound of water running through pipe ...

And PULL OUT TO ...

To the outside air at NIGHT, tinged by a flourescent white glow ...

On the flat roof, amidst the HVAC units and vents on the building's exterior ...

And out to an aerial view of the DATA CENTER.

A four-story box on a parking lot, with a grid of private roads and parking places and rows and rows of fluorescent streetlights, looking like the computer chip on the board.

Beyond the edge of the data center parking lot, a low stream trickles through a riverbed, dark in the night.

Beside it, power transmission lines lead out from the data center complex, into the nature beyond.

TRAVEL ALONG THE POWER LINES — FAST

Leaving the light pollution of the data center behind, and going into the darkness once more.

We zoom along agricultural land, passing through sections of dark forest that the power lines intersect, across the yard of the occasional farmhouse.

We pass through the natural world at night, the countryside, the dark peace and beauty and quiet of it.

Eventually, we near fluorescent white glow again – following the power lines to a POWER PLANT lit up in the night, surrounded by a chainlink fence. Inside the fence, the giant curved towers and stacks of the power plant chug white-ish clouds of CO2 and pollution into the night sky.

Transmission lines connect the power plant to a GENERATOR STATION, with all of the round and spherical things that put the power into the power lines.

We push in on another power line, and FLASH ALONG it at the speed of light, for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of miles ...

Coming out to a floppy old power line hanging in the night, in a half-run-down commercial area. Like where the naked Terminator first appears in the ball of electricity.

We travel along the old power line over the road and traffic below, as we pass the second-story of a GYM – bright lights shining into the night, illuminating a row of 20+ TREADMILLS and WALKING MACHINES, filled with people getting their nightly exercise while watching videos and listening to music on the devices in their hands.

Continuing along the power line, we pass over a homeless encampment on a worn-out and desolate strip of the street, with barely even a sidewalk.

Continuing along the old power line, we approach a gas station.

The lights of the interior store shine bright into the night, as a row of cars line up at the gas pumps, and one electric plugged into a charging station. To the side-back of the building, an 18-wheel FUEL TRUCK makes a delivery.

From the power line, we drift down towards the pumps, and towards the electric car plugged into the charging station, with sound coming out of its speakers.

We GO IN through the passenger window, over a plastic bottle of water and a receipt on the passenger seat, as we hear voices in the car and on the loudspeakers.

In the driver's seat, a MAN scrolls through a video feed on his phone on mute, as a voice speaks on the car speakers.

WOMAN'S VOICE ON SPEAKERS (V.O)
Where are you now?

BLACK.

The *bum-bum-bum-bum-bum-bum* of MR. SANDMAN by the Chordettes starts playing, softly.

INT. LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT - DAWN HOUR NEWS

With MR. SANDMAN playing in the background, the early hour news broadcast plays on a television in a quaint apartment.

On the News:

ANCHOR

— in case you missed it, here's that interaction between the President's energy official and a protestor, here it is —

The news program cuts to smartphone footage of an event with rows of seats pointed towards a podium, where an OFFICIAL (early 60s) is speaking.

The camera turns to a young-ish PROTESTOR (26), as they rise from the crowd in a suit, and start accosting the official with full-throated furious anger.

PROTESTOR

You are expanding natural gas pipelines, to lock us into decades of more fossil fuels, when we're already dying! How do you even have relationships with people, how do you look anyone in the eye, knowing what you're doing and what it's causing!

PAN OFF the television, as a voice continue shouting from the news ("You ever tried keeping a house warm with solar panels?!"), and onto a woman (mid-30s) in her pajamas, as she walks from the living room into the kitchen of her 1-bedroom apartment, as MR. SANDMAN continues playing.

This is ANITA.

Anita walks into her kitchen area, up to a stovetop next to a refrigerator.

She lifts a pan off a wall rack and sets it on the stovetop.

She *clicks* on the burner, and a small flame alights beneath the pan.

She opens the refridgerator, and pulls out an assortment of yesterday's leftovers – a half-onion, a can of beans with an open lid, a third of a tomato, a tupperware of chopped broccoli – placing them on a cutting board beside the stove.

MR. SANDMAN sings us into –

INT. SHOWER – MINUTES LATER

CLOSE on Anita's face, breathing and relaxing in the steam of the shower.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE – MINUTES LATER

In a bathrobe and wrapped hair, Anita sits alone at the table with a bowl of sautéed vegetables and a smoothie. As she eats breakfast, she scrolss through news and a feed on her phone.

EXT. GROCERY STORE – DAWN

In the dark blue quiet of dawn, Anita walks from a parking lot into a big box GROCERY STORE. She is the first customer of the day, as usual.

Outside the sliding entrance doors, a homeless WOMAN (late-60s/early-70s) sits with a CARDBOARD SIGN next to an upside-down purple COWBOY HAT with sequins.

GIVE A LITTLE,
GET A LITTLE
GOD BLESS

As she passes, Anita bends down and puts a few bills in the cowboy hat, smiling and nodding at the homeless woman.

ANITA
Love your hat. Morning.

She grabs a cart from the full line of grocery carts, and pushes it into the store.

INT. OFFICE DESK – MORNING

In a standard corporate office, Anita wears a face mask / respirator, as she types at her computer.

Somewhere else on the office floor, someone hacks up a cough – really hacking up a lung.

Anita shakes her head, and focuses on the pamphlet and marketing designs on her screen.

INT. OFFICE BOARDROOM — 11AM

Anita sits across the sturdy oak table, from an older white MANAGER (mid-50s) with balding hair and a check-the-boxes suit and tie.

Anita's eyes flash with indignation, over the face mask on her nose bridge, as the Manager explains to her —

MANAGER

... more flexibility, more autonomy,
the ability to manage yourself and
really own the work.

Beat.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

(expectantly)
... Do you have anything you want
to say?

Anita tones herself down, and gathers her thoughts.

ANITA

It sounds like you want AI to do
the first draft, so you can move me
on a contract without benefits, and
just get me to finish the job for
cheap.

MANAGER

Management and shareholders have
signaled for ... a shifting
strategy. This is an engagement
structure we'll be moving almost
everyone to, rest assured — even
the software and research people.

ANITA

And what about the managers?

On that, a look of worried epiphany crosses the Manager's face.

He looks back at Anita to say something — and then looks away, avoiding eye contact.

INT. ANITA'S DESK — LATER

Anita stares at a contract of legalese on her desk.

She flips through the pages, coming to the last page – and the line for her to sign on.

Beat.

ANITA (CONT'D)

Fuck this ...

Looking up from the papers, she opens a window on her computer and loads up a job search website.

She types “designer, marketing” and hits SEARCH. The page flashes, and a listing of jobs appears.

INT. CAR - EVENING

On the drive home from work, Anita listens to a podcast in her car.

PODCASTER (V.O.)

- even self-driving cars. They call it “self driving”, but there's actually 1.5 people staffed for every single car, at all times its on the road. It's a total gift, it's just bullshit, and yet it's what they're trying to shove down our throats, cause profits I guess.

ANITA

Unbelievable ... they're all assholes.

INT. ANITA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sitting on the couch, Anita scrolls through a feed on her phone.

She puts the phone down and picks up a remote control, turning on her TV.

As the TV turns on, a meteorologist speaks on the weather

METEOROLOGIST

- flares from increasing solar
activi -

Anita opens a video streaming platform, and starts scrolling through the selection of TV and movies.

INT. ANITA'S BEDROOM - TWILIGHT BEFORE DAWN

In the dark silence of early morning, Anita twitches in her sleep – then takes a breath.

Coming awake at the start of a new day, she takes her breath and rubs her face.

In the dark, she rolls out of bed.

Walking through her bedroom in the dark, passing around object she can't see, she picks up something.

As the backlight turns on, it's her phone – it creates a glow on her face in the dark room. 5:24 AM.

She turns off airplane mode and unlocks the phone, as she shakes her arms out and wakes up for the day.

As airplane mode turns off, Anita looks in confusion at the phone screen.

No new notifications.

At the top bar of her phone, the battery reads 55%, and the WiFi signal is blinking as it searches for a network.

Rolling her eyes, she turns off the WiFi and goes with data instead, and opens a social media application.

She swipes down on the feed to load it –

No connection available

ANITA
(groggy, confused)
What ... ?

Anita reaches for a light switch on the wall – we hear as the plastic switch flicks.

The room stays dark.

ANITA (CONT'D)
What the fuck? ...

Using the backlight of her phone, Anita looks at the wall.

She flips the lightswitch several more times, holding the phone light to the ceiling lamps. The room stays dark.

ANITA (CONT'D)
Damn it ...

She instinctively opens a browser on her phone to search something –

The browser loads with:

NO CONNECTION AVAILABLE

INT. ANITA'S LIVING ROOM – MOMENTS LATER

The room is pitch black. The outside, through the windows, is pitch black. Not even the ambient lighting from the LEDs on devices and from digital clocks on appliances – it's all DARK.

Using her phone backlight to chart a path, Anita walks through the living room into the kitchen.

She holds her phone up to the oven and microwave. The clock interfaces are out and dark.

She uses her phone light to go back into the living room, and inspects a power strip plugged into a wall.

A translucent orange switch, the power switch, is dark.

She flicks the switch – it stays dark.

She flicks it the other way – it stays dark.

She flicks it on and off several times – the switch stays dark.

Tracing the power strip to the wall outlet, she unplugs it from the wall and plugs it back in.

Still dark.

She tries flicking the switch again.

Still dark.

Shaking her head, she rises and walks towards the windows beside her living room.

Outside, the street below and the apartment buildings across the way are all dark and silent.

The only lights are pinpoints of flashes from smartphones and a flashlight. Every other light is out.

Anita looks down at the block three stories below. No street lamps. No store lights. No traffic lights.

It's all out. Everything fading into the shadow of twilight.

EXT. STREET — MINUTES LATER

Standing on the street in the darkness, Anita glances at her phone — 5:45 AM. The top bar on the screen shows the cell and data and WiFi connections are still searching.

She walks down the street, looking up at a sky darker than she can ever remember — even at dawn. The metal streetlights poles blend into the surroundings, rising into headlamps you can barely make out.

Anita holds out her phone light into the street, showing the white paint of a crosswalk. At the intersection, the traffic lights and walk signals are all out -- empty dark bulbs.

She turns back down the block -- all of the shop windows and interiors, all completely dark.

INT. ANITA'S CAR — MINUTES LATER

Sitting in the driver's seat, Anita looks through the windows. Everything is pitch black.

By muscle memory, Anita inserts her key in the ignition — and *twists*.

The engine starts and the interior lights come on, along with the front headlamps -- illuminating a few cars opposite Anita, in the concrete and pavement of a PARKING GARAGE.

Anita exhales gratefully, for the light.

She plugs her phone into the car's charger, as the charging bolt appears next to the phone's current battery level: 42%.

She switches the car's audio system from Bluetooth to FM Radio — and STATIC blasts over the speakers.

Flinching, she turns down the volume, to a lower static garble.

She hits the >> button the dashboard, going to the next station.

Static.

She continues hitting >>, scanning through radio stations, all of them STATIC over the air -- as Anita fills with the fright that something is very wrong.

She hits >> faster. STATIC — STATIC — STATIC — as she shakes her head and bites her lip, holding back tears.

RADIO VOICE (V.O)

- We did man~~~

Anita's finger stops, as the garbly voice continues talking on a weak signal.

RADIO VOICE (CONT'D)

- ~-ge to get a backup sy~~s--em on
that we inst~~~~alled last year,
it a~~pp-rs there's a ~g~~r-rid
outage on tran~~s~~m~~sion lines,
cau~~se- unknown so far.

Hearing some explanation, Anita actually breathes a sigh of relief. As she looks down at her phone, looking for cell and data and WiFi signals, and it makes more sense.

She switches the gear into DRIVE, and slowly pulls out of her parking spot in the dark, with only the headlamps to guide her, driving carefully through rows of cars in the pitch black parking garage.

INT. ANITA'S CAR / EXT. STREET — 5:52 AM

Anita drives slowly down the road, only by the light of her headlamps, as she approaches an intersection -- where the traffic lights hang like zombies over the street. Looming and dead.

As she slows into the intersection, she sees a MOTHER (early 30s) carrying a BABY (6 months) just in the view of her headlamps on the sidewalk.

Anita gently flashes her brights, waving the mother on.

Anita watches through the car's headlamps as the mother passes through the crosswalk. She gives a wave and a grateful nod to Anita.

As the woman reaches the opposite sidewalk, Anita leans towards her window and opens her mouth, starting to roll the window down --

By the time she does, the mother has already disappeared in the darkness. Anita looks out after her in the cool pre-dawn air.

She shakes her head and rolls up her window, leaning up to her front windshield and looking both ways, carefully going through the intersection without the traffic lights.

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT — EARLY DAWN

Above the big box grocery store, the night sky is just turning to the blue hues of dawn. Still dark.

Anita's car is one of the only cars in the sprawling parking lot surrounding the store.

Inside the store, everything is completely dark.

INT. ANITA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Anita stares through her windshield at the big box store, all dark. An entire building that is OFF.

The voice on the radio in the car continues crackling.

RADIO VOICE
E~~MERGEN~~CY BROADC~~ST COMING
NOW, BE~~~AR W~~TH US ~~~~~

Anita waits for the news, looking at the fuel meter in her car. Just below half-full. She glances at her phone, as she has every other minute since getting in the car. The charge is at 74%.

A new voice, deep-throated and more buttoned-up, sounds over the garbly radio transmission.

OFFICIAL VOICE
~~~WIDESPREAD O~~TAGE OF  
~~ENERA~~ORS AND TRAN~~~MISS~~ION  
SY~~TEMS ~~~

Anita's phone BUZZES.

She jumps and reaches for it, looking at the screen desperately:

EMERGENCY ALERT

GRID DISRUPTION. ELECTRICITY MAY BE UNACCESSIBLE. STAY HOME AND KEEP DEVICES POWERED. TUNE TO RADIO AND EMERGENCY BROADCASTS FOR UPDATES.

ANITA  
What the fuck ...

Anita sets down her phone, and hits the brake, and jerks the car back into REVERSE.

As she grips the wheel and moves her foot to the pedal -- she pauses, looking at the big box store in front of her.

Beat.

She moves the car back into DRIVE, and drives slowly through the parking lot towards the store.

EXT. FRONT OF GROCERY STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Parked parallel to the sliding doors of the store, right up where people enter, Anita steps out of her car.

She walks around the front towards the entrance.

The old homeless woman is sitting outside in her usual place in the early morning air, with her sign and upside-down cowboy hat.

HOMELESS WOMAN

Folks are late today. Lights have been off all night, almost.

ANITA

Did you see anything? Did anything happen?

The woman shrugs and shakes her head.

HOMELESS WOMAN

It just went dark. Made it easier for me to sleep. They should do that every night.

Anita and the woman turn towards the dark interior of the store, through the windows and sliding doors.

EXT. GROCERY STORE ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Anita reaches into her glove compartment through the passenger window and pulls out a small tool, that almost looks like a screwdriver, with a hexagonal flat end.

She shuts the glove compartment and shows the tool to the homeless woman in passing.

ANITA

It's for .. emergencies ...

Anita turns from the homeless woman to the sliding glass doors of the grocery store, sealed tight.

She turns on the flashlight on her phone and hands it to the homeless woman.



ANITA (CONT'D)

Here, help me with this, just shine  
what I'm doing.

The homeless woman follows Anita with the phone light, as Anita presses the tool against the glass pane on the sliding door.

The homeless woman holds the light on the glass, centering the tool.

ANITA (CONT'D)

Watch your feet.

Anita starts *pushing* the tool into the glass, leaning with her body and applying pressure gently -- as the glass pane starts to *splinter*.

The homeless woman takes a step back, still holding the phone light on Anita's tool on the door, as Anita presses more in -- pieces of glass start to crack and splinter and fall. Anita tries to press in a way that keeps her out of the falling glass -- and with urgency, starts pushing harder.

More and more of the glass door *splinters*, more glass pieces fall to the ground around Anita's feet, bouncing off the pavement and her shoes, everywhere underneath her --

CRACK.

Anita makes a big CRACK through the whole pane -- as the splintered glass looks very fragile. One move from all falling down.

HOMELESS WOMAN

Move back and turn around.

Anita looks at the homeless woman, seeing something in her hand opposite the phone light. On her instruction, Anita backs away from the door, turning her body perpendicular to it, and holding a hand over her eyes as she watches the door.

— Something CRASHES through the top glass on the door, as it all shatters and falls apart, and Anita turns her head away.

— Another CRASH through the bottom-half of the glass on the door — Anita flinches at the sound.

As Anita still covers her head and looks away, the homeless woman walks up to her and hands her the phone back.

HOMELESS WOMAN (CONT'D)

Give me some light.

Anita takes the phone, turning to the mess of glass around the empty door frame, as the homeless woman drags a floor mat from the store entrance towards the glass, and tosses it out across the door frame.

The homeless woman pulls two grocery carts out of a line, and walks them both towards Anita, pulling one out for herself.

HOMELESS WOMAN (CONT'D)

Let's go.

Holding out the phone for light, Anita follows the homeless woman over the floor mat into the store, along the bed of broken glass, as they start listing things ...

HOMELESS WOMAN (CONT'D)

Water, nuts, sanitizer ...

ANITA

Beans, protein powder, fresh stuff  
before it goes to waste ...

EXT. GROCERY STORE ENTRANCE - DAWN

As the sun starts to rise over the big box store, the parking lot is still empty. The main roadway has the occasional passing car -- nothing like a normal day.

Anita and the homeless woman stand with two loaded grocery carts behind the trunk of Anita's car, already three-quarters full with:

Power generators. Cases of water. Shrinkwrapped cases of bean cans. Bulk plastic bags of protein powder. Cardboard boxes of bananas, oranges, apples, tomatoes, onions. Bulk packages of toilet paper. Smaller packages -- batteries, a handheld radio, a power drill, playing cards, dice, dominos, notebooks and pens.

Anita and the homeless woman glance out at the roadway, filling with more cars, as they quickly unpack more goods and supplies from the cart.

As they cram everything from the grocery carts into the trunk, overflowing with supplies, Anita reaches up and SLAMS the trunk closed -- and then PUSHES down on the trunk, to make it all fit.

They give the grocery carts a rolling PUSH back towards the cart area, and Anita and the homeless woman hurry towards the driver's and passenger seats.

INT. ANITA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

In the front seats, Anita starts putting the key in the ignition, as the homeless woman makes herself at home with the purple cowboy hat sitting on her lap.

Behind them, the rear seats are filled from floor to headrest with more boxes of food, flours, hygenic products, supplies.

After Anita turns the car on, she reaches into her door pocket, and pulls out two face masks. She hands one to the homeless woman as she starts putting hers on.

HOMELESS WOMAN

We already did it, and I don't think the cameras are on.

ANITA

It's so we stay healthy.

The homeless woman gives Anita a look -- a little indignance, a little insult, a little hurt.

ANITA (CONT'D)

I do it at work too. All sorts of shit is going around, we gotta protect ourselves ...

(trailing)

... especially now ...

As Anita starts driving, she rolls the windows down part way, and the homeless woman shrugs.

HOMELESS WOMAN

If that's what we're doing

As she puts on the mask, and fiddles with it to make it comfortable.

Anita's car accelerates out of the empty lot towards the main roadway. Car headlights start appearing more frequently in passing, and the sirens of ambulances and police vehicles ring in the distance.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM - 6:23 AM

At a long oval boardroom table, seated with mostly 50s+ men, and the occasional hawkish woman in early 50s or 70s, all eyes are turned towards one MAN in a blue suit in his mid-60s. At the end of the table, 4 pizza boxes stand in a haphazard stack like the Tower of Piza.

MAN

What the fuck is going on?

By the pins on the suit lapels and the hard airs around the table, we can tell this is somewhere deep in Washington.

MAN (CONT'D)

And what caused it?

As the man looks expectantly at the officials surrounding him, and they all sit in accountability to him, it appears this man is the president of the United States.

One of the officials, feeling an obligation, speaks up.

OFFICIAL

We aren't exactly sure -- but from our intel, this outage has also struck near peers and adversaries, so it's unlikely it was an aggression -- from them at least.

Another official speaks up.

OFFICIAL 2

Unless it was a fucking suicide attack.

The President holds up a hand.

PRESIDENT

Are we at risk?

OFFICIAL

Of what?

PRESIDENT

Missiles! Bombs! Fucking nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles targeted over our heads!

OFFICIAL

It doesn't appear to be an urgent threat, though the national guard is setting up anti-air systems on backup generators.

YOUNGER AIDE

Uh -

The boardroom turns to the AIDE (about 30), who opened his mouth far out of rank -- he doesn't even have a space at the table, sitting behind another official -- as he immediately shuts his mouth, and all eyes fall on him.

PRESIDENT

What?

The Aide shakes his head, recognizing his mistake.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)  
Get it out kid!

The Aide swallows, and gathers his thoughts, and starts talking.

Beat.

AIDE  
(incredulous)  
We are under threat from  
everything, and none of it has to  
do with missiles ...

OFFICIAL 2  
Do you have intelligence on  
something?

PRESIDENT  
Get it out kid!

AIDE  
The whole fucking grid is out!

After letting it out, the Aide realizes he he just yelled at a room full of Cabinet officials and the President of the imperial world. And then, shrugging *fuck it* considering the circumstances, continues on.

AIDE (CONT'D)  
Across the whole continent! Across  
the whole fucking world! The power  
is out! Do you know what that  
means?

The older officials, at first taken aback by the aide, start listening to him more closely.

AIDE (CONT'D)  
Nuclear meltdowns – because the  
plants can't offload their  
electricity! People freezing to  
death, because they don't have  
heat! There is no fucking economy!  
The water treatment stations aren't  
working! We are full of fucking  
threats!

At that, the Aide rests back in his seat, steeling himself to the eyes of all the officials looking at him around the table.

PRESIDENT

Can we divert some of our solar or  
wind capacity, towards emergency  
installations?

The Aide, on a roll, speaks up again – his one shot to be  
rude to the president, and embracing it.

AIDE

(slowly, almost mocking)  
*We don't have a grid.*

PRESIDENT

Well .. gas generators? What can  
we get?

AIDE

(chuckles)  
Not to power a fucking nuclear  
plant. Anti-missile systems  
though, that's good.

The President HITS the table with his palm.

PRESIDENT

When can we get things back online?

Everyone is silent. Faces eventually turn to one of the  
officials, who we recognize – the person speaking at the  
podium from the protest video that was on the news.

ENERGY OFFICIAL

Reports from some generator  
stations indicate a mix of hardware  
and software issues. In certain  
areas, we may be able to get it  
back faster -- but, we should plan  
on a timeframe of weeks ...

The Aide chuckles to himself at the Fucked Up Beyond All  
Recognition of it.

The President shoots him a glance.

PRESIDENT

And what the fuck would you do,  
smarty pants?

Still wearing a smirk, emboldened by the end of the world,  
the Aide glances from the President to the Energy Official --  
who really doesn't have any plan for energy, now that the  
infrastructure is down.

## EXT. OFFROAD BRUSH — SUNRISE

As the orange sun starts to rise over a bramble of bushes and woods, Anita and the homeless woman (wearing her purple cowboy hat) sit on the hood of Anita's car, looking out to a clearing that shows an overpass over a highway — that lopsided X, with the giant tower rising through the middle, and the small green tent still on the sidewalk along the road.

The roadways are filled with gridlock traffic, distant sounds of honking and people yelling bloody murder at each other, along with ambulance and police sirens all around.

Anita turns from the gridlock mayhem towards the windshield behind her, looking through it to all of the supplies piled up in the back seats.

She turns to the homeless woman, who is looking up at the clouds and breathing the fresh air and enjoying the morning.

ANITA

Where should we go?

## INT. BLACK SUV — MORNING

In a bumping and speeding SUV, a guy in a wrinkled t-shirt and flannel pajama pants rides in the middle row — sleep still in his eyes, as he tries to hold on for the ride, and sirens BLARE outside.

We recognize the GUY (late 20s) somewhat, although not quite sure from where.

GUY

I didn't do anything! What the fuck!

The DRIVER, head shaved to a glint and in a fresh-pressed suit, doesn't say a word.

## EXT. STREET — CONTINUOUS

Along a street of gridlocked traffic along the National Mall in Washington DC, the Black SUV SPEEDS and BUMPS along on the sidewalk and grass, heading west between the Herbert Hoover building and the National Museum of African American History.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM — MINUTES LATER

The driver from the black SUV escorts the GUY into the briefing room. The driver nods to the officials, and steps out of the room, pulling the door SHUT after him.

Leaving the guy in his pajamas, with sleep in his eyes, standing before the national security apparatus of the United States -- as we recognize he is the PROTESTOR from the conference disruption on the news.

PROTESTOR

I didn't do anything! I had tick -

The younger Aide lifts a hand, trying to help the guy.

AIDE

(helpful, short)

Shut up -

PROTESTOR

- ckets to be there!

AIDE (CONT'D)

(holding up a hand)  
Shut up.

On the Aide's instruction, the protestor goes quiet, looking at the officials around the room with wide eyes -- meeting the hard stare of the ENERGY OFFICIAL, who the protestor disrupted two days before.

PROTESTOR (CONT'D)

Am - am I in trouble?

The President responds to his question sardonically.

PRESIDENT

The power grid of the whole United States is out.

In a shock from what he just heard, from the President of the United States, as he stands in a bunker under the White House  
...

PROTESTOR

... What?

ENERGY OFFICIAL

You wanted to turn off the gas, kid! It's off! What do you want to do now?!

The protestor's mouth slowly widens agape -

PROTESTOR

Oh ... oh ...



Oh shit.

ENERGY OFFICIAL  
(sarcastic)  
There's pizza, at least ...

INT. BRIEFING ROOM — HALF HOUR LATER

The protestor now sits at the board table, wiping some tomato sauce from his mouth with his wrist. He sits beside all the other officials and Cabinet members, along with the young Aide — the only other person in his generation there.

PRESIDENT  
Where do we start?

The officials look expectantly at the protestor, sitting with them at the table in his t-shirt and pajama bottoms.

PROTESTOR  
I mean .. is there anything urgent?  
Are people dying?

AIDE  
Our nuclear plants are within 1 week of problems, our water treatment plants are out, and our emergency services doesn't have power.

PROTESTOR  
... And ... and you called me?

OFFICIAL  
The fucking phone lines are down!  
You're here.

PROTESTOR  
Oh, okay ...

PRESIDENT  
(to the point)  
You and your people yelled about ending fossil fuels for years. Now what? What do we do, huh?

PROTESTOR  
(rubbing his head)  
... The phones are down?

OFFICIAL  
We can *move* anybody here. We can't *reach* anyone, over the phone.

PROTESTOR  
 (nodding, everything fine)  
 Oh, okay ...

The protestor tries to keep an appearance of cool, as he realizes the end of the world is upon them.

Beat.

PROTESTOR (CONT'D)  
 Can we go somewhere?

OFFICIAL  
 Where?

PROTESTOR  
 Do you have a helicopter?

EXT. FARM — CENTRAL VIRGINIA — MORNING

The gust and *whir* of helicopter blades kicks up dirt and blades of grass, as the bottom racks of a helicopter lower towards the ground.

As the helicopter lands in the dirt, it's surrounded by crop fields on one side, and an old wide farmhouse on the other side — with some dark panels on the roof, and a standalone barn with dark panels on the roof as well.

The door to the barn shelter opens, and a person walks out in a WELDING HELMET, holding a SOLDERING IRON in their hand — the tip crackles with the blue light of electricity.

EXT. BARN SHELTER — MINUTES LATER

The FARMER (early-50s), who we see now without the welding helmet, has unruly hair and a beard. He holds the hand of a young BOY, about 4, as he talks with the Protestor and the Aide and the Energy Official and another suit with them.

FARMER  
 I've been trying to get a conversation with you all for years.

ENERGY OFFICIAL  
 (courteous)  
 Sorry about the delay. We're grateful for your presence now.  
 (to the point, towards the barn)  
 And you still have power?

FARMER

When the sun is shining. Come on,  
I'll show you.

The farmer leads his little boy and the group of suits into the barnhouse doors – dark panels are on the roof of the structure.

INT. BARNHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Inside the barnhouse, all sorts of mechanical equipment and motors and screwdrivers and welding machines – everything on CORDS, plugged into the wall.

The Energy Official picks up a power drill, clicks off the safety, and presses the trigger gently – it *whirs* with power.

He shakes his head, the first electricity he's touched all day.

FARMER

So this here's our direct drive microgrid. All of it runs on DC power, connected directly to the solar panels up top – so when the sun is shining, we use electricity.

OFFICIAL

And when it doesn't?

FARMER

We don't.

AIDE

You don't have any storage?

FARMER

We have a few little nickel iron battery kits, for the lights and phones and such, that's about it – you all familiar with nickel iron?

The Aide and Energy Official exchange glances and shake their head. The Protestor has a little smile, seeing all of this take place, after orchestrating it.

The farmer over to a wall, to a little steel box on the ground. He lifts a lid off the box, showing a series of nickel iron battery cells inside – each of them a block with some wires, about the length and width of a hoagie.

FARMER (CONT'D)

That's it. Around since Edison.  
Last forever, cheap, don't need any  
of the damn cobalt or lithium you  
all are digging up the world for.

(catches himself)

Excuse me, that some people are  
digging the world for.

ENERGY OFFICIAL

But all of these tools, all of that  
...

FARMER

Direct drive, right off the solar  
panels. Power a whole workshop  
with two old panels on the roof.

EXT. WIDE FARMHOUSE — LATER

The Farmer leads the suits and his boy on a tour along the  
wide, two-story shelter — with panels all along the roof.

FARMER

See, those are solar thermal — with  
water — not electric. That's how  
we do the heating, which is most of  
the energy cost. Sun heats up the  
water in the pipes, that sends hot  
water into the envelope, and we  
actually blow it underneath the  
floor, so it heats things up from  
the ground. For cooling in the hot  
days, we got lots of insulation and  
cross-drafts and thick walls, so  
things are pretty manageable even  
on the worst days.

ENERGY OFFICIAL

No gas, no batteries, no nothing?

The Farmer shakes his head.

FARMER

A little bit of biogas from the  
grass clippings and waste now and  
then in the winter, that's it.

## EXT. PICNIC TABLE — LITTLE LATER

The Farmer sits at a wooden picnic table that he made with his own hands, along with his four-year-old, sitting across with the Protestor, the Aide, and the Energy Official.

FARMER

I just thought the cell service was out. We had everything on out here.

AIDE

It's all out — I mean the grid, everywhere. Even overseas.

FARMER

Jesus ... what the hell did that?

The Energy Official shakes his head. They don't know.

FARMER (CONT'D)

What's y'all's plan?

The Energy Official and the Aide exchange glances, and then at the Protestor who brought them here, and then back at the farmer.

AIDE

That's ... what we're here for.

FARMER

To what? Power the whole country?

The Farmer chuckles — then stops, as the Aide nods back at him.

The Farmer looks at the suits across the table from him. Dead serious.

The Farmer glances over his shoulder, at the panels on his barn roof and his farmhouse, and turns back to the suits, putting a hand on his boy's shoulder.

END PART ONE