

**DO
WE
HAVE
YOUR**

ATTENTION

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Green Edit(ion)

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I am truly sorry
it has come to this

CAPTION over BLACK reads:

2021
(location undisclosed)

INT. ROOM ONE - NIGHT

A smallish room, black blankets covering the walls. A concrete floor.

It's dark, except for a makeshift spotlight hovering just above MR. JENNS.

Mr. Jenns, 57, white, impeccably dressed, is tied tight to a metal chair, a black bag over his head.

Mr. Jenns breathes.

A HELPER of some sort, shot from the neck down, comes in and removes the black bag from his head.

Temporarily blinded by the change of light, Mr. Jenns looks back but can't make out what the Helper looks like as they exit the room.

Mr. Jenns looks around, observes his restraints, then settles his focus on the open laptop sitting upon a small table four feet in front of him.

Mr. Jenns waits quietly.

The visual of an AUDIO SIGNAL appears. As we will learn later, this is the voice of MR. MAXWELL, masked by a digital, monotone effect.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

I'm going to say a few words, and then you and I
are going to have a conversation.
Do we have your attention?

MR. JENNS

I think that's evident.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Good. Then I will proceed.

There was a period after September 11th, 2001,
in which advocates for the strategic use of
torture and violence offered the American public
a thought experiment. This scenario was referred
to as the Ticking Time Bomb.

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

Proponents of this thought experiment asked, "If you knew there was a bomb that was going to go off, perhaps in a market full of shoppers or a school full of children, and you had access to the person who could prevent this from happening, would you use any means at your disposal, including violence, to persuade that person to help you stop the bomb from going off?"

This hypothetical was supposed to represent the logic and indeed the morality of a temporary resort to violence, if the circumstances demanded it. It was put forth by politicians and thought leaders throughout the country. And, sure enough, a considerable segment of the population agreed that violence, even extreme violence, was acceptable if it meant saving the lives of the innocent.

We believe that this particular thought experiment was flawed and useful only as political propaganda. Not because of the philosophical challenge it posed, but because the scenario assumed things that cannot be assumed.

We accept that our experiment here today may also be flawed. Yet we are willing to gamble on certain assumptions, because we know. The scenario we are facing is not hypothetical.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which has always been quite conservative in its estimates, has now stated we have less than a decade to initiate a plan to avoid total calamity.

Some damage may already be irreversible. But if we are to avoid the worst, to steer away from the starvation, the wars, the macro displacement, the mass extinction of plant, fish, and wildlife species, this plan must be embraced by both government and industry. It must be implemented immediately, and it must be strictly enforced.

You are here because you possess the level of power and influence to help make that happen.

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

We know this because, so far, you have used your power and influence to either explicitly derail these efforts or to water down the efficacy of said plans.

Like us, you too know the bomb is real, the bomb is going to go off, and that Climate Change has already caused suffering and death. To look at the suffering and death ahead and do nothing, to in fact hasten it merely for the sake of convenience, is to contribute directly to it. It is to commit violence. Mass violence.

It's tempting to ask. What should be done to you? Should we hurt you? Should we kill you? Should we sentence you to live the rest of your life – in this room? What is it that you deserve for the harm you have *already* caused?

As much as we may wish to arrive at an answer to these questions, we do not have that luxury. Because even if we erased you from existence, the time bomb you helped create would still exist. And we only have so much time before the ticking stops.

We do not wish to be like you. We want to do what is right *for everyone*. But we have to defuse this bomb. And we have come to a place where we must equate the two. Whatever it takes to defuse this bomb will ultimately be what is right for everyone.

And yet, as storms increase in their frequency and severity, as droughts increase in their frequency and severity, as the violence you've nurtured continues and the warming moves more and more of the planet toward being uninhabitable, you and your friends in government and industry have implored us to be nonviolent.

So tell us. What do we have to do? Nothing we have done thus far has moved you. Outside of violence, what do we have to do to change your minds? What is the nonviolence you demand?

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

If you cannot answer this, you are telling us that only violence will work. And the violence that follows will not be under our sanction. It will be under yours.

You must believe us when we say we do not want that. But you *have* to tell us.
This is your chance to tell us.

A lot rests on what you have to say right now. I urge you to be candid and forthcoming.

Do you understand what I'm telling you?

MR. JENNS

I understand how misguided you are.
All this self-righteous babble, after abducting a man.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

We acquired an audience with you. Under normal measures, that wouldn't have been possible.

MR. JENNS

You don't acquire an audience with someone against their will.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

What would you have suggested?

MR. JENNS

Isn't that why you have freedom of speech? Isn't that what your protests are for?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You ask that as if you would pay attention to a protest, from us. What good is speech if a million of our voices are not as loud as the whispers of your friends?

MR. JENNS

If I'm missing, it means there's a skilled team of people trying to find me. And they will find me.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

No.

No one is going to find you. No one is going to bust down the door and save you. You're alone here. I can assure you that.

MR. JENNS

Then what is it that you want? If it's money, you can just say so.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Your money is not the solution. It's the problem. It's the reason why you and your friends are the ones standing in the way. You have that power. I'm recognizing that power for the duration of this conversation. Everything that happens after this conversation will be a matter of your own conscience.

MR. JENNS

It sounds like I'm on trial.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

In a way.

But here you get to be defendant and judge. Potentially prosecutor.

MR. JENNS

I'm not following you.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

It's up to you, right now, whether the means to our end will be violent or nonviolent.

MR. JENNS

You know what happens if you try violence.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Then tell us what we have to do. What nonviolence would be acceptable to you and your peers?
There are obviously options we haven't exhausted.

MR. JENNS

Like what?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Trucks. Equipment.
Machinery. Pipelines.

MR. JENNS

I thought we were discussing peaceful protest.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You think property is worth more than people's
lives?

MR. JENNS

Depends on whose property it is.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

I can't tell whether you're serious or joking.
With this many lives at stake, you can't possibly--

MR. JENNS

It's still violence.
The misfortune of one doesn't negate the rights
of another.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

What about the right to self-defense? Do you
not recognize that right? If we ensured no
physical harm would come to any individual and
targeting would only be in the context of how
something is used and what it contributes to?
I can't imagine you would think it violent to
shoot a missile out of the air.

MR. JENNS

And I can't imagine you believe winning a
philosophical debate with me will stop you from
being seen as terrorists.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

We have no interest in explosions or grand
spectacles. We just need to be able to throw a
certain number of pebbles into the machine.
With a proper rifle, you can disable almost
anything from a safe distance.

MR. JENNS

There's no such thing as a safe distance.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Still, let's suppose there were to emerge a committed and sustained campaign of random sabotage and mechanical impairment. At some point, the cost of doing business would simply be too high.

MR. JENNS

That's if you could find people who were willing to go to prison for longer and longer sentences.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You take for granted a necessity defense won't work. When juries hear just how dire the warnings are, do you really think they'll find fault with such understandably desperate actors?

MR. JENNS

Maybe, maybe not. But they'll definitely find fault with you in the court of public opinion. A little artificial inflation here, a whole lot of media scolding there.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

That's assuming you *have* to tip the scales.

MR. JENNS

What else would you expect? I'm not going to apologize for believing in law and order. What you're describing is vigilantism.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Then let's keep within the law. Pretty soon countries are going to see more than just civil suits as an option. There's even talk of charging the worst offenders with crimes against humanity.

MR. JENNS

Didn't you say you only have a few years? Lawsuits can be dragged out for decades. And even if you were to pull off a miracle in some judicial body, it's completely unenforceable. The United States isn't going to recognize that. And there isn't a corporation worth its stock price that would comply.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

We could always take your cue and bring it to the court of public opinion.

Make it a show trial. Lay it all bare for the public to see how you used your power to actually hinder our salvation. An exercise in shaming, one the world has never seen.

After it's over, we could construct a permanent memorial. Something for posterity. So when the children of each generation ask their parents how it ever got this bad, they will point to this historical beacon. Your names, forever associated with this lasting crime.

Or maybe the crime will be so absolute that the memorial will ultimately be for those who come along after us. Those who may one day happen upon our cities, our technology, what we called civilization. Except they won't have to wonder how it was all lost. They'll know who did it. And they'll pass down that legacy as a lesson to their own. What not to do. What not to be.

MR. JENNS

How many people do you think already look at someone like me and believe that?
Thousands? Hundreds of thousands? Millions?
Would it matter if a few more thought it?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Would it?

MR. JENNS

No more than it would 10 billion.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

And why is that?

MR. JENNS

Because it's not true.
I don't make the laws.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You *do* make the laws. You make them with your campaign contributions.

MR. JENNS

People can vote for whomever they wish.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Hence your choice to fund media and social media and influencers. Not to mention the think tanks and the donations to universities and the manufacturing of activist operations.

MR. JENNS

Every bit of which is legal.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Legal is a matter of design.

MR. JENNS

Then find your own designers.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You control more wealth than some countries.

MR. JENNS

You say that as if I'm supposed to feel guilt. If you know enough about me to have taken me hostage, you also know I didn't start out with money. I had to build it. I took what I had, and I made the most with it. You should take a lesson from that, and quit blaming your losses on the winners.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Is this what you think winning is? Our glaciers disappearing? Our oceans acidifying? Storms we can't defend against?

MR. JENNS

Why do you think I invested millions into renewables? I'm just as concerned about those things as you are.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You're hedging your bets.

MR. JENNS

I'm doing what I'm able to do in a market setting.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Then you won't fault us for using the market as well.

MR. JENNS

Certainly not. In fact, I'd love to hear what you have in mind.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

With the right coordination, there's a good chance we could take down your stocks. One after the other. Cut your wealth in half. Make an example of you.
It would wreak havoc on Wall Street.

MR. JENNS

It's conceivable. But to what end?
Threatening a handful of wealthy individuals isn't going to get you change.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Then we'll add a boycott.

MR. JENNS

What product?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

All of them.

MR. JENNS

(smiling)

That's your plan? To get Americans to quit shopping?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Of course not. It's to get the rest of the world to quit purchasing American products.
There are already dozens of buy-America apps. If the information from those apps were to strategically find their way into the hands of international consumers *slightly more* concerned about the dangers of Climate Change, how long do you think it would take for American exporters to cry Uncle?

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

And that's just consumers acting. If longshoremen were to refuse goods shipped from the United States, it's not hard to see the politicians of those countries conveniently throwing up their hands.

MR. JENNS

We'd go to war before we'd let that happen.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

With who? Who will you go to war with? The first country you attack, you'll add twenty more to the pile.

MR. JENNS

Then we'll convince those countries to *do it for us*.

When it comes to money, there is no neutrality. No matter how much they may delight in our temporary discomfort, their leaders know. We don't forget.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Is it really worth that much? To not do the right thing?

MR. JENNS

That's not democracy. That's coercion. The moment we let outsiders dictate our rules--

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

What if it weren't outsiders?
What if the pressure came from within?
How many days could the politicians withstand a general strike?

MR. JENNS

How many days before we find the most unflattering images of protestors clashing with police? How many days before we discredit the organizers?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

And if none of that happens, how many days could the politicians withstand a general strike?

MR. JENNS

As many days as we tell them. There's a hundred ways for you to lose the narrative. We only have to wait you out.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Are you sure about that?

MR. JENNS

It doesn't matter how sure *I* am.
The burden of proof is on you.

Mr. Jenns uncovers more than a hint of a smile.

INT. WATCHING ROOM - NIGHT

SHOT from behind, over the shoulder, of SOMEONE in a dark room watching on a laptop SCREEN as Mr. Jenns smiles.

SHOT from behind, over the shoulder, of SOMEONE ELSE in another dark room watching on a laptop SCREEN as Mr. Jenns smiles.

And another. And another. And another.

INT. ROOM ONE - CONTINUED

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You're so confident, in your rebuttals.
How is it that you're not afraid?
If not for yourself, then what about your children? Your grandchildren?
You're not stupid. You know what's coming.
What plans could you possibly be devising that will make it ok for you to have allowed this? You really want to isolate yourself, isolate the ones you love?
And where will you go? Underground? An island? A floating city in the middle of the ocean? Throw your lot in on space travel?
The gates can only go so high.

MR. JENNS

Who are you?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

I'm the one tasked with finding a tactic worthy of your mercy.

MR. JENNS

You seem quite confident yourself.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

I'm not confident.

Quite the contrary. I'm frantic.

Because it's become clear to me.

Every couple years, the world's foremost experts in climate science confirm that there is a bomb set to go off. And every time they make this announcement, the detonation of that bomb is closer to us than previously predicted.

You may not have the code, but I believe wholeheartedly you have a piece of it.

To deny us what we ask is to embrace the measures we must resort to.

It is to demand vengeance be visited upon you, decades, maybe even centuries, before your crimes can be fully realized.

If you will not save us, will you at least--

MR. JENNS

Please.

You're embarrassing yourself.

This is fantasy.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Are you saying you don't believe the bomb is real?

MR. JENNS

The bomb is real. I never said it wasn't.

It's the code that isn't.

There is no code.

There is only doing the best with what you have.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

I know you don't believe that. I know that you know the system.

You have enough money to buy the Congress twenty times over. You've got an army of lawyers *and* a reserve of judges.

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

You have phone numbers to individuals that most people don't know exist. And if you don't have all those things, you have friends who can help you get them.

MR. JENNS

And you know what keeps those friends?

It's not wealth.

It's shared interest.

And the moment you don't share their interests, they no longer see you as worthy of your wealth.

You might as well be some bumpkin with a winning lottery ticket.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

There *has* to be something you respect.

Something you'll yield to, short of violence.

MR. JENNS

If it were up to me, I'd wave the magic wand and make everything all right.

But it's not just me. It's all of us. It's everything.

It's too much to put back in place.

Mr. Jenns waits for a comeback, then delights in the lack of.

MR. JENNS (cont'd)

You know I'm right.

The pause grows, slightly morbid.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

In a situation like this, the Army Field Manual says to build rapport. Find commonalities.

Potentially befriend the person you're interrogating.

Unfortunately, we don't have the time for building. And I suspect you have no interest in comradeship.

But more than that, I can't in good conscience pretend to be your friend.

MR. JENNS

Because of my money?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

No. It's not your money.

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

It's because I know what comes next, if you don't comply.
If you truly can't offer me an answer, then we *both* have to come to terms with the suffering up ahead. The immeasurable suffering.
We don't want to have to break you down into another person. Where you'll say anything, do anything.
We want you to *want* to help us.

MR. JENNS

And what if I think you're bluffing?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Like you said. We've already abducted you. We'll be seen as terrorists.
The consequences have already been set in motion.
What's a little more suffering?

MR. JENNS

Mine or yours?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

If yours is productive, it will be worth ours.

MR. JENNS

So that's all there is?
Strategy?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Humanity is facing the plausibility of our planet no longer being livable.
If avoiding that fate means us using measured instances of physical harm--

MR. JENNS

You mean violence.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

If avoiding that fate means using violence, it's difficult to conceive of a moral case to be made against it.

MR. JENNS

How do you calculate the amount of permissible violence?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

It's a good question. One to be wrestled with.
I can say we'd prefer not to follow your lead.

MR. JENNS

What's that supposed to mean?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

What would you call the destruction caused by
once in a century weather events, if not violence?

MR. JENNS

I'm God now? I control the weather?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

No one said you were God. But it is ironic, isn't
it? As we brace for yet another Climate Change-
related tragedy, you want *us* to be clear about
what actions are synonymous with violence.

MR. JENNS

What's ironic is that I'm willing to bet I've done
more for your cause than all of you put together.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Are you referring to the chump change you pat
yourself on the back for? Diversifying your
portfolio with a few shares of wind, a few shares
of solar? While we have less than ten years before
certain factors are entirely out of our hands?
You called *our* efforts a fantasy. As you
simultaneously pump money into green
washing and window dressing.
You'd spend millions to placate us, but you
won't make a phone call to save our lives.

This is no fantasy for us.

We take no pleasure in these actions.

We abhor them. We feel shame that our
civilization has arrived at this place.

And we know. Participating in this kind of
violence will forever change us.

But we are committed to it. If that's what it
takes.

I tell you this, not to absolve myself.

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

I tell you because I do not want you to have to experience what we are prepared to carry out. As much as I do not believe you deserve reprieve, I am trying, with every word I speak, to save you.

MR. JENNS

Whatever you have in mind is not going to work.

Righteous or not, you have to know that those actions will be counterproductive. Even the slightest act of violence will be used to tar your message. Before you know it, even your goals will be seen as extreme.

If anything, this kind of violence is welcomed. It's seen as a gift. It saves the time of having to conduct smear campaigns.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Incredible.

After all this, you're still playing games.

We have no illusions as to how our actions will be mangled to fit your narrative.

Just like you have no illusions that the same would be done with the most peaceful of protests. You said it yourself. You make nonviolence look like violence all the time.

You don't need violence as a pretext to try and discredit us.

Whatever we do, no matter *what* we do, you'll find a way to use it against us.

MR. JENNS

But this you can't come back from.

Using peaceful means, you at least have a chance.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Then tell us. Tell us what will work.

There's been peaceful climate actions for thirty years.

And yet here we stand, with less than a decade left. Nowhere near where we need to be.

You're the ones who have convinced us that nonviolence won't work. That violence is the only thing you do understand.

If I'm wrong, you have to show me. Right now.

Show us that we're wrong.

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

Show us that there is a path, any path, where we can save our future without resorting to savagery.

This, right here, in this room, in this moment, you, watching the screen in front of you, this, is your last chance.

What do we have to do?

Mr. Jenns takes a while to contemplate.

MR. JENNS

You've already done it.

I was skeptical at first. But I can see from our conversation that you didn't bumble your way into this.

You asked me to be candid with you.

I ask that you hear me out.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Please.

MR. JENNS

The truth is I want to help. I want to save our planet.

But you're right. In my position, there are certain expectations.

I want to make a deal with you.

I'm being truthful when I say that I don't know if any one of your ideas is better than any other. I only know it doesn't matter which one I favor if you can't make it happen.

So *you* decide.

Anyone of the ideas you proposed.

If you can actually make that happen, if you can corral the masses into one disciplined force putting that kind of sustained pressure on the system, I'll use whatever standing and power I have to advocate behind the scenes to acquiesce to your demands.

But you have to give me something in return.

(MORE)

MR. JENNS (cont'd)

If you can hold up your end and I hold up mine, and we actually pull this off, I need at least one of you, after it's all over, to give yourself up. To come forward and admit to the authorities what happened here today.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

That would seem to put whatever progress we would have made at risk.

MR. JENNS

Not necessarily. If this effort were to win, the public could be sympathetic to what you did in their interests. And the results would be too great to suggest reversing.

Granted, you may have to serve time. Or, like you suggested, you could end up with enough peers on the jury to walk away.

You said you were committed to the consequences of your actions. This would prove it.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

And if that person, say me perhaps, were lucky enough to walk away from punishment, what would you get out of it?

MR. JENNS

I need an out. I need to be able to show my peers once this is all over that what I did I did under duress.

Otherwise, I'll be a financial pariah.

A few seconds of silence, as Mr. Jenns waits for an answer.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

And you're being sincere? All you need is our word?

MR. JENNS

I believe you've demonstrated what you're willing to do for *your* cause.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Ok then. I give you my word.

Once we're in the clear, I'll come forward. Tell the world what I did.

MR. JENNS

Then we have a deal.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Almost.

Before we go forward, we're going to need a bit more than your word.

MR. JENNS

I'm willing to take your word. You're not willing to take mine?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

I think it's fair to say that you too have demonstrated what you're willing to do for your own personal interests.

MR. JENNS

Fair enough.

What is it that you want?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

If we were going to let you go, we would need to know you have skin in the game.

MR. JENNS

What exactly does that mean?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

It means this.

We want you to transfer all current assets to two separate trust accounts. One holding 10 percent. The other holding 90 percent. The smaller account will sit idle. The larger account we will have the capacity to draw from, up to five percent, for our organizing efforts. Also from the larger account, we will appoint a fiduciary to make sure all your bills are paid and to issue you an allowance so that you may operate on our behalf, as you said behind the scenes, without raising any red flags amongst your friends or family.

If and when there is government enactment of adequate and enforceable policy, you will receive the principle remaining from the larger account.

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

The 10 percent in the other account will go to fund mitigation and adaptation in the worst affected of the Global South.

If a period of three years has gone by and we have not achieved our goals, the reverse will happen. The remaining principal from the 90 percent will go to the Global South, and you'll receive the 10 percent.

In short, you have three years to persuade the *other* powers that be to embrace our endeavor and comply with our demands. After which, regardless of outcome, our ties will be cut.

If you go to the authorities, if you try to recover this money outside of our arrangement, I can guarantee you. It will not bear fruit.

On the contrary, breaching the deal will result in a total forfeit of assets and will be understood as your abandonment of faith in nonviolence and an explicit instruction for us to engage in - last resort tactics.

Mr. Jenns takes his time, before asking.

MR. JENNS

And how do I know that this isn't just some elaborate scam?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You don't.

Just like we don't know that you won't walk out of here and call the FBI - the first chance you get.

What you do know is that, in the time you have been with us, we have not struck you nor caused you any physical trauma. If all we were interested in was your money, you would be missing most of your fingers by now.

MR. JENNS

Still. Even if you're everything you say, *especially* if you're everything you say, why only the five percent to operate on?

(MORE)

MR. JENNS (cont'd)

Wouldn't it be far more effective to put the entire amount towards your efforts and to hell with me?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

If we can't win with that five percent, the rest won't make a difference. The difference is you. You're the key. The money is only an insurance policy. It's the only way we can know you're serious.

Are you - serious?

A pause, as Mr. Jenns ponders the offer.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

We are prepared to make the arrangements.

A longer, serrated pause, as the silence begins to suggest serious reluctance.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

Do you have an answer?

More silence, even than before.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

All we're looking for is evidence of your com--

MR. JENNS

All you're looking for is everything I've built. Everything I worked to put together. You think I can just sign that over to you? I don't even know who you are.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Knowing is not the issue. It's what you don't know. And what you don't know is what will happen - if you do nothing. We're asking you to take a chance. Asking you to utilize--

MR. JENNS

You're asking me something you don't understand. Because you have no understanding of the world I live in. What it took to get me where I am.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You're right here. In this room.
With me.

MR. JENNS

No. I'm not.
I'm not here. I'm still out there.
Still acting. Still making moves. Still dominating.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

I take it you're referring to the money.

You couldn't withdraw it all if you wanted,
could you? Couldn't physically touch it.
It might as well not exist. All in your head.
Stacks and stacks of imaginary bills. Like a
cartoon.
Do you even know it exists?

MR. JENNS

It exists.
It may just be numbers on a screen. But those
numbers are more real than anything else in the
world. They may be all that is real.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Do you believe we exist? Are we real to you?

MR. JENNS

In here you are.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

But not out there?

MR. JENNS

I said I would help you.
I'll give you money to fund your efforts.
But what you're asking is impossible.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

So you're admitting. The money that you can't
hold, can't see. The money you'll never be able
to spend, that your great great grandchildren
will never be able to spend.
That's more important. Than us.

MR. JENNS

It can't just be me. There are other people that have what I have. There are people with more. Why not kidnap them? Do to them what you've done to me. Put them here. Get *them* to agree. It's got to be more than just me.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

It isn't the money, is it?

MR. JENNS

Of course it's the money.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Then why did you say earlier, "if it's money" that we want?

MR. JENNS

I thought you would be reasonable. What you're asking? It's too much.

His words hang in the air.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You don't believe it'll work. You're not willing to let go of the money because you don't think we have a chance.

After another deep pause, Mr. Jenns relents.

MR. JENNS

What do you want me to say? I can't give you what isn't there.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You won't even try. You would rather gamble on your money being enough. Against anything.

MR. JENNS

I can't change the world.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

You're telling us that it's ok. That we have no other choice. Violence is all we have left.

MR. JENNS
You'd eventually find out anyway.

For the next half minute, the AUDIO SIGNAL on the SCREEN barely flutters.

Then erupts.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)
No!
Noooooo!
You have to try. You have to work with us.
You have to show us something.

Please.
You don't understand what's going to happen.

MR. JENNS
Then tell me. Tell me what it is you're threatening me with.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)
I can't. I can't tell you. I can only promise you that you will not be able to recover.

MR. JENNS
Then tell me what it is. What is it that's so bad?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)
I can't tell you that. I can only tell you that if you don't give us something, it will happen.
And I'm sorry for that.

MR. JENNS
Why should I believe you? If I can't know the consequence of my refusal, why should I do what you're asking?

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)
It doesn't count if you know what's going to happen.

Mr. Jenns looks down at the floor for a few long seconds, then gently shakes his head.

MR. JENNS
I'm sorry.
(MORE)

MR. JENNS (cont'd)

Even if I could help you.

Mr. Maxwell returns, a few long seconds.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.)

Please. For all there is to save, I'm willing to beg you.

Please. I'm begging.

I don't know what else to say to make you believe.

You have to trust me. You have to listen. You have to listen.

We only have this moment.

Mr. Jenns refuses to look at the SCREEN.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

Say something.

Say something!

You have to answer.

Mr. Jenns stoically looks back up, yet offers nothing.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

You don't know what they're capable of.

You don't.

They're going to hurt you.

They're going to do the worst thing.

You're allowing them to do it.

You're telling them to do it.

Please. You have to cooperate.

Pleeeeeeeeeease! I'm beg--

The visual of the AUDIO SIGNAL disappears, as the laptop SCREEN goes blank.

Mr. Jenns sits in silence.

Not knowing.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM TWO – TWO MINUTES AGO

Same setup as ROOM ONE.

As we revisit the previous two minutes, this time from the vantage point of Mr. Maxwell, we alternate between a CLOSE-UP on the face of the 51-year-old white male, his forehead wet with sweat,

and

a TIGHT SHOT of the laptop SCREEN in front of him.

An AUDIO SIGNAL is also displayed, relaying the sound from ROOM ONE. However, this SCREEN hosts a small TIMER in the corner, ominously counting - down.

MR. JENNS (V.O.)

I'm sorry.
Even if I could help you.

As he processes what he's just heard, contemplating how to respond, the CLOSE-UP on Mr. Maxwell begins to ZOOM OUT.

We see Mr. Maxwell is also tied to a metal chair, but he is not impeccably dressed. Instead, he wears a prison-style jumpsuit.

The ZOOM-OUT stops with the camera slightly above but directly behind the laptop, still pointed at, directly in front of, Mr. Maxwell.

MR. MAXWELL

Please. For all there is to save, I'm willing to beg
you.
Please. I'm begging.
I don't know what else to say to make you
believe.
You have to trust me. You have to listen. You
have to listen.
We only have this moment.

The pause returns us to the taunting laptop SCREEN, TIMER ticking down.

MR. MAXWELL (cont'd)

Say something.
Say something!
You have to answer.

Nothing. Only the TIMER, taking us closer and closer to zero.

MR. MAXWELL (cont'd)

You don't know what they're capable of.
You don't.

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (cont'd)

They're going to hurt you.
They're going to do the worst thing.
You're allowing them to do it.
You're telling them to do it.
Please. You have to cooperate.
Pleeeeeeeeeeease! I'm begging you.

The TIMER hits zero, and the AUDIO SIGNAL visual disappears.

Mr. Maxwell begins to cry.

He then screams in anguish.

A few seconds later, the CLOSE-UP face of YOUTH A, a fifteen-year-old girl, appears on the SCREEN.

MR. MAXWELL (cont'd)

(intermittently stuttering)

Please, please. Put him back on. Just put him
back on. Give me a few more minutes. I know
there's a way. I'll find a way.
I promise you. I swear. Just give me two more
minutes. Two more minutes, please.

YOUTH A (V.O.)

You know that's not what we agreed to.

MR. MAXWELL

Then give me someone else. Give me another
chance with someone else. I'll do better this
time. I'll study more and I'll come up with better
arguments. I know I can do this. I just need you
to give me this, just one more chance.

YOUTH A (V.O.)

Twenty-three days. You told us you were
prepared.
We gave you access to all the resources you
needed. We let you watch the other sessions, so
you might build on the attempts of others.
There's no reason to believe giving you any more
time will make a difference.

MR. MAXWELL

It will. I know it will.
(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (cont'd)

Look, I know what we agreed to, but I need to tell you something. You need to understand something.

I didn't make those arguments just to get out of this.

In the time you've given me, I was able to reflect on who I am, what I've done.

And you're right. I was wrong. My whole life I've been wrong. I've helped put us where we're at. I've ignored the suffering. I've caused suffering. I have committed violence.

I can see that now. And I know that I can't undo the damage that's already been done.

But I can do something now, to change what is coming. I know I can do that. Not to save myself from serving sentence, but because I want to do it. I need to do it.

Every word I just said, I said because I believed it. You helped me see all of that. You helped me. I understand why you had to do this. I don't fault you for bringing me here. It's what was needed. It was the only thing that was going to make me see you, to see myself.

But I see myself, now. And I see you. And all I want to do - is to be of service.

Just let me do the right thing, right now.

Let me make up for what I've done.

I can do this. I *will* do this.

YOUTH A (V.O.)

Mr. Maxwell.

While this is encouraging to hear, your words are unnecessary now.

MR. MAXWELL

No.

YOUTH A (V.O.)

You'll have the rest of your life to prove your change of heart.

After we're sure you've come to terms with what you've done.

MR. MAXWELL

I'm telling you. I *have* come to terms with it. I've come to terms with all of it.

YOUTH A (V.O.)

I hope that's true. But there's only one way we can know.

MR. MAXWELL

No, but, see I'm telling you right now. You don't have to do anything. I'm ready.

I'll sign my money over. I'll go work behind the scenes. I'll do it right now.

I'll do whatever you ask me to. Whatever it takes I will do without hesitation. Just please. Don't do this.

I swear to you, I'm telling the truth.

You have to believe me.

YOUTH A (V.O.)

We want to believe you.

But we won't know, until it's real - for you.

MR. MAXWELL

No no no. I know you don't want to do this. I know you don't.

You wrote it in the scripted part. The process, this whole experiment. It's unfair.

How can I be punished for participating, if the process itself is imperfect?

Pause.

YOUTH A (V.O.)

Of course it's imperfect. But that's how you see. When it was you, when *you* refused. It was also a peer. Imploring you, pleading with you.

But you didn't know that. You thought it was one of us.

That was your answer. When you thought it was us.

It doesn't matter what the words are, how logical the argument. How moral.

If it doesn't come from someone like them, they won't listen.

MR. MAXWELL

And I'm telling you, I will do it. I will make the case. I'll do whatever you ask.

YOUTH A (V.O.)

You had your turn.
This is what comes next.

MR. MAXWELL

No. This can't be it. There's got to be more than this.
There's got to be something. Something I can do to convince you.
Whatever it is, just tell me.

YOUTH A (V.O.)

Mr. Maxwell. It's you that has to be convinced.

MR. MAXWELL

I am! I am. I am. I am. I am. I am. I am. Please!
Let me show you. Let me prove to you that I'm not that person. I'm someone else. I have a different heart.

YOUTH A (V.O.)

I'm sorry, Mr. Maxwell. We regret it's gotten to this point. We would have preferred a different route.
To be sure, this next part is going to be difficult. But it's the only way.

MR. MAXWELL

(throwing his head back)

Dear God.
Help me. Help me show them.
Let me make up for my sins. Let me redeem myself.

Mr. Maxwell closes his eyes and finishes his prayer in a broken whisper.

MR. MAXWELL (cont'd)

Let me serve you, Lord. I will give everything. I will give you everything.
I am a changed man.
Tell them, Lord.
Tell them not to do this.
Forgive me. For all I have done.
I submit to you. I submit my whole existence.
Wash me clean.
Save me, Lord.
Please.

(MORE)

MR. MAXWELL (cont'd)

Save me.

The Helper comes in and puts a pair of headphones on Mr. Maxwell.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM ONE – TIME ELAPSED

Mr. Jenns sits in silence, awaiting what's next.

Finally, an image appears on the SCREEN in front of him: A corner-view WIDE-ANGLE of ROOM TWO.

Mr. Jenns sees a man with headphones on, in a prison-style jumpsuit, tied to a chair, saying something at a laptop, the SCREEN of which Mr. Jenns cannot see.

At first, the sound is off.

Mr. Jenns focuses in on the man's face.

After about five lines of silent dialogue and a long pause, the sound of Mr. Maxwell's voice becomes audible. Yet, this time, clear, without effect.

A look comes across Mr. Jenns' face, as if he might recognize the man.

The AUDIO increases. Mr. Jenns can tell it's a recording of the previous conversation.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O)

Say something.
Say something!
You have to answer.

Mr. Jenns watches as his previous silence rips at Mr. Maxwell.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O) (cont'd)

You don't know what they're capable of.
You don't.
They're going to hurt you.
They're going to do the worst thing.
You're allowing them to do it.
You're telling them to do it.
Please. You have to cooperate.
Pleeeeeeeeeease! I'm begging you.

Mr. Jenns watches as Mr. Maxwell begins to cry, and scream.

The image vanishes. The SCREEN is blank for five seconds.

Then the CLOSE-UP face of YOUTH B appears on the SCREEN. A thirteen-year-old girl.

YOUTH B (V.O.)

Hello, Mr. Jenns.

MR. JENNS

Who are you?

YOUTH B (V.O.)

I think you might regard me as the bad cop.

MR. JENNS

Was that Ian Maxwell?

YOUTH B (V.O.)

You know Mr. Maxwell?

Mr. Jenns takes a moment before answering. It's starting to sink in.

MR. JENNS

What did you do to him?

YOUTH B (V.O.)

The same thing we did to you.

MR. JENNS

I know Ian. He would never participate in something like this.

YOUTH B (V.O.)

The conversation you had with Mr. Maxwell was of his own will and conception.

MR. JENNS

So what, you beat him? Tortured him? Is that what you're going to do to me now?

YOUTH B (V.O.)

We didn't touch Mr. Maxwell. We only showed him that we weren't, as you said, bluffing.

MR. JENNS

How?
What does that mean?

This time, Youth B takes a moment.

YOUTH B (V.O.)

If I were Mr. Maxwell, I would have asked you if it's wrong to convince someone of your capacity for violence. If it's the same as violence itself. Unfortunately, the time for questions has passed.

Mr. Maxwell was instructed to be vague regarding the form of danger you're in. Even then, if he had been forthcoming about the consequences of not complying, you couldn't be sure we would go through with our threat. That we could even be capable of such.

To make up for this inconsistency, we're going to give you another chance. But this time, there will be no doubt. You'll know. You'll know because you'll remember. You *did* this.

MR. JENNS

Did what? What are you talking about?

YOUTH B (V.O.)

What you're about to witness is not of our instruction. It's yours. Mr. Maxwell warned you. He told you it was going to happen. And you let it. You chose. Our violence.

The laptop SCREEN goes blank for five seconds, before

Another image appears: The WIDE-SHOT of Mr. Maxwell in ROOM TWO comes back on the SCREEN. He is watching the laptop in front of him, screaming. Because he has headphones on, we cannot hear what is on *his* laptop SCREEN.

We can only hear his anguish.

Mr. Jenns can only imagine.

MR. MAXWELL (V.O)

No, no. Not this. Please you can't do this. This isn't part of it.

You can't do this. You can't do this. You can't do this. This isn't part of it.

No. You know this isn't right. You know it. You know this isn't right. Please. I'll give you anything, I'll do anything.

You want to hurt me, I'll hurt myself. I'll kill myself in front of you. I'll torture myself. I'll do whatever it takes. Whatever you want to do. Do it to me. Hurt me. I'll hurt myself. I don't care. Please. It's me you want. I'm guilty. I'm the one that deserves it. You can do it all to me.

Just don't - do th- aaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

You bastards, you fucking bastards. I'll fucking kill you. I'll kill all of you.

Noooooooooooo! Nooooooooooooooooooooo!

Mr. Maxwell shrieks in horror.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM TWO - CONTINUOUS

MR. MAXWELL

Please kill me. Kill me. Kill me. Kill me.

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!

Mr. Maxwell closes his eyes and shakes his head, so hard that the headphones fall off.

Within seconds, the Helper arrives to put them back on.

Mr. Maxwell holds shut and tries to shake the headphones again, but the Helper holds them in place. If he will not look, he must hear.

In a fit, Mr. Maxwell rocks from side to side, trying to escape the grip of the Helper. His movement is forceful enough that the chair tips sideways onto the floor.

Mr. Maxwell lays sideways in the chair, with his headphones being held on, as he sobs and screams.

MR. MAXWELL (cont'd)
I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

CUT TO:

Five seconds of silence over BLACK, before

INT. ROOM ONE - DAY

The setup is the same as before, only Mr. Jenns is wearing the same prison-style jumpsuit that Mr. Maxwell had on.

YOUTH C's face appears on the SCREEN, CLOSE-UP. A fifteen-year-old boy.

YOUTH C (V.O.)
Hello, Mr. Jenns. I understand you're ready to proceed?

MR. JENNS
I'm ready.

YOUTH C (V.O.)
Ok, then.
Remember, you'll read from the script first.
Once you finish the script, the timer will begin.
That will be your time, to say whatever you wish, as long as you do not reveal your identity or that you were in their position earlier. Nor can you reveal the specifics of what will happen if you are unsuccessful.
You've been informed of what happens if you violate these rules.

MR. JENNS
I understand.

YOUTH C (V.O.)
Thirty-four days. You've read all the reports and the literature we've given you. Familiarized yourself with the various mitigation plans. You watched the other sessions.
Is there anything else you think you might need to make your case?

MR. JENNS

No. I'm confident.

YOUTH C (V.O.)

And you feel, from what we've provided, you know enough about your peer? Enough to overcome their resistance?

MR. JENNS

I know them well enough.

YOUTH C (V.O.)

That's good to hear. We trust your approach will be effective.

Do you need to watch the end of Mr. Maxwell's tape again? For motivation?

MR. JENNS

No. I'm aware of the stakes.

YOUTH C (V.O.)

You indicated that you've memorized the script. Is that correct? We can put it on the screen if you like.

MR. JENNS

No need.
I know it.

YOUTH C (V.O.)

And you know what to ask for?

MR. JENNS

I know what's being asked.

YOUTH C (V.O.)

Excellent.
Your peer is being situated.
The signal will appear on the screen shortly.
Do you have any last questions?

MR. JENNS

No.

YOUTH C (V.O.)

Then good luck.

The Youth's face disappears. A few seconds goes by.

Then the visual of an AUDIO SIGNAL comes on the SCREEN.

A voice, that of another PEER.

PEER (V.O.)

What is this?
Where am I?
What the hell is going on?

MR. JENNS

I'm going to say a few words, and then you and I
are going to have a conversation.

CREDITS begin to ROLL over BLACK to MUSIC on the right half of the
SCREEN.

CREDITS and MUSIC PAUSE...

FACILITATOR (V.O.)

I am going to go ahead and pause it right here and switch back over. No real need to sit through all the credits. Plus, I am excited to get into what you all think.

A VIDEO GROUP CHAT shows a man inside a box titled FACILITATOR, then shows six more boxes for AVA - 22 years old, DOUG - 24, RICHARD - 56, LORETTA - 68, BEN - 35, and MARY - 44.

FACILITATOR

First question: Is everybody still awake?

Yeah? Great. First box checked off.

But seriously, thank you for being a part of the discussion today. What you say in here is important to the ultimate destination of this film.

We also appreciate you not making a big fuss about being in the booths. We're still trying to be mindful of everyone's health. And believe me, doing it kind of semi-online like this is far less of a pain than being in the same room and having to constantly ask people to speak up because you can't hear them through their mask and you can't see their mouth moving.

As you saw in your Focus Group agreements, what you say will be recorded. But for the filmmakers' eyes only. So don't filter anything. We want total honesty.

Now I'm not sure if any of you have ever done one of these, but we're going to operate this session a little differently than most focus groups. But we will try to keep it interesting and fun.

The Facilitator pauses to smile.

The FOCUS GROUP members reciprocate, some awkwardly.

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

To get us going, did anyone have anything that jumped out at them? Something you thought you might bring up once the movie was over?

A few seconds of shyness elapse.

BEN

The way the teens' faces looked... kind of blown up on the screen.
It reminded me of the Big Brother face in the movie version of 1984.
I thought that was a good choice to do it like that.

FACILITATOR

Did it represent anything, for you?

BEN

Not really. I guess if I had to think about it, you could maybe say that now young people are the ones watching older, more powerful people to know which ones are getting out of line.
But mostly I thought it was a cool effect.

LORETTA

It did make them look like they were the ones who needed to be feared. Almost menacing.

AVA

Maybe it's telling young people they need to impose themselves more on the people who are not paying them enough attention when it comes to Climate Change.

RICHARD

That's a little more than imposing, don't you think?

BEN

It's a satire. You don't want to take it literally.

RICHARD

Hmm.

FACILITATOR

Thank you for sharing. These types of observations are a good way to get things started.
Anyone else?
Anyone have anything that bothered them?

DOUG

I don't exactly know how to say it. I don't want to be insulting.

FACILITATOR

It's ok. You're here to tell us what you thought.

DOUG

It looked... like... too indie.

FACILITATOR

Can you say a little more?

DOUG

It looked... low budget.

FACILITATOR

That's because it is. Unfortunately, studios are never going to put up money for this kind of a film.

So the filmmakers had to make do with what they had.

AVA

Kind of like the hostage takers in the film.

FACILITATOR

That's true, I guess.

Mary?

MARY

Does that mean you wouldn't take it seriously?
Because of the way it looks?

DOUG

Probably not. Or maybe not as seriously. I'm just being honest.

FACILITATOR

That's ok. That's what we're here for. Honesty. Anyone else have anything they didn't like about it visually?

And you don't have to raise your hands. You can just speak.

A few more seconds elapse.

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

If no one has anything else to say about the visual aspects of the movie, I'm going to move us along to the dialogue.

(MORE)

FACILITATOR (cont'd)

Was there anything that jumped out at you regarding chosen wording or language?

RICHARD

Was the actor that played the hostage--

FACILITATOR

You're referring to Mr. Jenns.

RICHARD

Right. Mr. Jenns.

Was he not American?

FACILITATOR

You mean the actor, not the character?

RICHARD

Right. Is he a foreign actor? I thought I heard a bit of an accent coming through.

FACILITATOR

To my knowledge, the actor is American.

Was the delivery of dialogue unconvincing?

RICHARD

No, I thought it was pretty good. I just wondered if it was his authentic accent.

FACILITATOR

Would it have mattered if he were not American?

RICHARD

I don't guess so.

I was just bringing it up because it was on my mind while I was watching.

FACILITATOR

Was it distracting?

RICHARD

I thought about it for a minute or two, but then let it go as it went on.

FACILITATOR

I'll note it then.

Thank you.

The Facilitator jots on a notepad.

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

Was anyone else distracted by anything?

BEN

I kind of was.

I was thrown off by how cool the hostage in the room acted.

FACILITATOR

Mr. Jenns.

BEN

Right. Mr. Jenns.

I mean the guy's been kidnapped and could be facing death or torture or who knows what. But he's like calm, and even clever. It's like he's trying to be charming or something.

I just don't think anyone who's been taken hostage would talk like that.

AVA

I thought that at first too. But then I thought he's there to represent the rich and powerful. And the rich do act like that. Like they're not bothered by the terrible situations they've created.

RICHARD

That's if you believe they're responsible.

AVA

And I do.

But even if *you* don't, the movie assumes they are.

BEN

Isn't there a difference, though, in what you're willing to ignore and what you can't ignore?

It's easy to act cool when you're not having to experience any of the negative consequences.

But this guy's been kidnapped. At that point, it's as real as it gets.

AVA

But he still hasn't actually experienced it. At least not yet.
He knows something bad is coming. Something maybe so bad he can't even fathom it.
But until it happens, to him, he just acts cool.
I think it makes total sense.

BEN

I know what you're saying. I just don't think *I* would be that cool.

AVA

Me neither. But neither of us knows what it's like to have that kind of money.

RICHARD

Excuse me, but what do you think happens to you when you acquire more money?

AVA

I don't think anything happens to you when you acquire more money.
But when you acquire the wealth of a small nation, I think you've probably had a little more than dirt on your hands.

RICHARD

That's really how you view success?

AVA

If success means the suffering of half the planet.

RICHARD

We'll see if you think the same way when you're my age.

AVA

Dude, were you not paying attention to the film? A lot of people my age may not make it to your age because of these rich fucks.

RICHARD

That's *if* you believe they're responsible.

LORETTA

You don't?

FACILITATOR

Please, let's not make this personal. We're here to express our feelings about the movie, not about each other.

AVA

Ok, but, a big part of the movie is who's the most responsible. And the only way I can see someone absolving this Mr. Jenns prick of his responsibility is someone who identifies with him.

RICHARD

I'm not rich, if that's what you're asking.

AVA

Then it doesn't matter what you think. Because you're just as fucked as I am. You just don't want to admit it.

RICHARD

How old are you, 27, 28?

AVA

Dude, what are you, like 58? Still holding onto the dream?

RICHARD

And what dream is that?

AVA

You know what dream. You're one of these losers who sticks up for the rich because you think there's still a chance you're going to be one of them.

FACILITATOR

Please. Let's not descend into insults and--

RICHARD

It's ok.
I was of a different mind when I was that age.
Blaming everybody else but myself.

MARY

You believe Climate Change is real, don't you?

RICHARD

I do believe it's real. I just don't think this is the way to go about fixing your problems.

MARY

Isn't that the point of the movie? That this is a resort to desperation, because nothing else seems to be fixing it? That if we don't fix it, this kind of thing is inevitable.

RICHARD

Well, that's not exactly what I got out of it.

BEN

Maybe you're not the intended audience.

RICHARD

Then why am I here?

LORETTA

That's a good question.
I was thinking that myself when we first got on the session here.
Our demographics are completely different.

BEN

That's right. Normally focus groups zone in on one intended audience.
Who's the intended audience for this?

FACILITATOR

Who do you think it is?

DOUG

I think Ava's right.
It only matters how the rich see this.

LORETTA

You think this is a movie just to convince rich people to do the ethical thing?

AVA

Not to convince them. To scare them.

RICHARD

Then why *are* we here?

MARY

To see if we agree. That this could be acceptable, one day.

RICHARD

Well, I don't. And I hope everyone else here shares my view.

FACILITATOR

I wanted to ask you, Richard. You said you didn't get the same thing that Ava got from the movie. What did you get out of it?

RICHARD

I thought the movie was showing how quickly good intentions could descend into chaos.

DOUG

It's not chaos. They have a specific plan.

RICHARD

Then depravity.
It's well-meaning to want to do something about Climate Change. But when a problem looks big, sometimes it makes people think their answer has to be over the top.

AVA

So what great ideas do you have?

FACILITATOR

Let's not get ahead of ourselves.
We may get to that a bit later, but I think this sets us up nicely to looking at the story.
Now, for this section, I'm really only looking for critiques or challenges to choices made in the script.

RICHARD

I've got one.
Where are they supposed to be?

FACILITATOR

Would anyone like to answer that?

LORETTA

We're not supposed to know. Just a safe location.

RICHARD

No, I understand that. I'm saying that if they're nabbing these... all these different important people, they have to either be doing it all in New York or D.C., or they have to have a network big enough to be everywhere.

BEN

They could be in different locations. Everything is done through the laptops, so it's possible the guy who is kind of interviewing him--

FACILITATOR

Mr. Maxwell.

BEN

Right. Mr. Maxwell could be in a room two thousand miles away from Mr. Jenns.

RICHARD

True. But that's my point. What kind of a secret network would this take?

MARY

I think that's one of those things that you're not supposed to concern yourself with.

RICHARD

Why not? If I'm gonna take the situation seriously, I need to believe it's possible. And I just can't believe that they have this many people working with them.

AVA

You don't think there's that many people who would do something like this, or that there's that many people who care enough to try something audacious?

RICHARD

There are definitely enough people that care. But I don't think you could find people to actually do something *like this*.

AVA

Because *you* wouldn't.

RICHARD

Not just that. I think within the time it would take to execute a plan like this, someone's going to come to their senses and pull the fire alarm.

BEN

What if you were to be convinced it would work?

RICHARD

I can't answer that because there's no way you could do that.

BEN

What about the rest of us?

MARY

It would be a hard sell.

BEN

That's if you assume you're in the first wave of people who attempt it. But let's pretend a close friend reveals to you that they're a part of an operation like this and they show you that they've already succeeded in getting a number of powerful people to cooperate, using this very tactic. And that they believe they have a target that would really make the biggest difference and could potentially be the last one they need. But in order to make it happen, they need help. And you're someone they can trust. Would you at least entertain the idea?

LORETTA

Even if it works, it's still illegal.

DOUG

She's right. That's all that really matters. Something like this? They could take you down twenty years later.

BEN

I understand that. But I'm asking - would you risk that, if you thought there was a real possibility your action could contribute to a solution?

LORETTA

An illegal solution.

BEN

Yes, an illegal solution.
Would you save the lives of countless millions of people if it meant risking serving time for it?

DOUG

When you put it like that, it makes it sound like I'm the bad guy if I say no.

BEN

Then let me put it another way. I think it's hard for us to imagine people committing to something like this because of the privilege that we personally enjoy.
But what if you were a climate refugee? Or what if you'd already lost your family and everything you own due to the type of storms made more likely and frequent? What if your island nation was going to go away if not enough was done? Do you think you might be more likely to risk prison to do something about that?

RICHARD

Are you saying that those people *should* do something like this?

BEN

Not at all. I'm merely demonstrating your willingness to risk depends on what *you have* to risk. And what is on the line if nothing gets done.

MARY

If there's enough people impacted that severely, then the plot isn't inconceivable.

BEN

Exactly.

A moment is taken, unanimously, as this thought sinks in.

FACILITATOR

These are all good insights.
Would anyone else like to go?

DOUG

What I don't get, and I guess this kind of goes along with what Richard said, is how did they kidnap this guy?

We only see one person going in and out of the room and then some teenagers on the screen. But to pull something like this off? To plan it out, to get past the security somebody like this has? It would have to be some *Ocean's Eleven* shit.

FACILITATOR

Was this a distraction for you while you watched it, or is it something that's only come to you now?

DOUG

I think I thought about it for a second during the movie. But it's bothered me more after.

MARY

Does it change the way you think about the film?

DOUG

I think so.
I think I'm like him. If the scenario isn't like a real one, you lose me.

BEN

But you make exceptions all the time.

DOUG

How do you figure that?

BEN

Because we all do.
Think about how many time travel movies you've watched. Or superhero movies. Suspending disbelief is what makes for some of the best films.

DOUG

This isn't a time travel movie. This is supposed to be something you could imagine happening.

RICHARD

I agree.

The only way you can get invested in a film like this is if you either identify with the characters or if you can envision it happening to you.

AVA

Well, you obviously identify with Mr. Money Bags.

RICHARD

I never said I identified with anyone. And I definitely can't envision it really happening.

MARY

But that's what Ben was saying. You don't have to.

Doug, you said this *isn't* one of those movies. Which I take to mean this person may have power, but he's not a superhero.

Mr. Jenns can make mistakes just like anyone. Especially if these people have been watching him.

DOUG

But the people who kidnapped him aren't superheroes either. And I don't buy that a group of kids could pull something like this off.

AVA

We don't know that it's all children. Maybe they had help.

LORETTA

That's a good point. Maybe they have a billionaire behind them.

RICHARD

And that's supposed to make it more believable?

BEN

It's not about whether it's believable. It's about if it's worth you suspending disbelief.

DOUG

I'm just saying. The more I think about it, the more I'm not buying it.

FACILITATOR

So it's *not* worth it?

DOUG

I can't speak for other people. But, personally, it's not something I would watch again.

FACILITATOR

Then that's important information.

The Facilitator pauses to make some notes.

FACILITATOR (cont'd)

Ben, you seem to be defending certain parts of the film. Did you find any problems with it?

BEN

I was thinking that the acts could be more clearly defined.

I couldn't really tell whether the second act began at the end of the first conversation. Or if that was the third act, and the second act was in the middle of the conversation.

FACILITATOR

That's a shame. The filmmakers had hoped it would be obvious.
It's all the first act.

RICHARD

Then what's the second act?

FACILITATOR

This is the second act.

Confused looks.

RICHARD

What?

FACILITATOR

Loretta, you had your hand raised earlier and then it went back down. Did you have something?

LORETTA

Oh, I was just going to say I didn't like the way it ended.

It's like you're saying that they deserve that.

DOUG

Me too. It seemed way too harsh.

MARY

I agree. If your point is really that you're trying to find a way to fix Climate Change without resorting to violence, this doesn't seem like the best way to get your point across.

FACILITATOR

Does anyone disagree?

AVA

It's not that I disagree. But I do get why there has to be some kind of credible threat. Seeing that people like Mr. Jenns haven't been moved by anything yet.

RICHARD

But this? I know you're no fan of these people. But surely you don't wish something like this on them.

AVA

I didn't say that.

RICHARD

Then you agree.

AVA

I agree that it was pretty rough.

FACILITATOR

So you all feel this way generally.

Nods all around.

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

Ok, well, the filmmakers do have an alternate ending. I don't have the footage right now; it's still being edited.

(MORE)

FACILITATOR (cont'd)

But basically towards the end, when Mr. Maxwell is sobbing and screaming, at some point the young person abruptly says, "Ok." And Mr. Maxwell stops, his face turns normal, and he asks if that one was good enough. And the young person says, "Yeah, I think that one was perfect." And we find out that Mr. Maxwell was allowed to make a deal at the very last minute. But it required him making this video to convince Mr. Jenns that what was being threatened was indeed real.

DOUG

So what Mr. Jenns saw wasn't real; it was only Mr. Maxwell pretending?

FACILITATOR

That's correct.

LORETTA

I like that a lot better.

RICHARD

Me too.

FACILITATOR

What about the rest of you?

BEN

As much as I agree the ending was probably too much in the one we saw, I feel like something doesn't sit well with this one.

AVA

Like they don't deserve to just get off.

RICHARD

You mean without something bad happening to them.

BEN

Kind of, yeah.

RICHARD

You're messed up. You know that?

MARY

It's not messed up. I understand what they're feeling.
But it doesn't mean I don't prefer this ending either. If I have the choice, I go with the alternate one.

BEN

I... probably would choose the same.

AVA

I don't want either.

FACILITATOR

What if I told you there are two different endings within the alternate ending?
One, the hostage takers allow Mr. Maxwell to accept the original offer. He signs over the money, goes out and advocates, does what they ask, and so forth, and the operation continues forward with convincing more people in his position to do the same.

Or. The deal is that he still has to make the video. But just when you think everything worked out with no one getting hurt, you realize the deal he made was just to save whoever really was on the screen. And that he's sacrificing his own life to spare them.

BEN

In one, he goes out and does the right thing, even if it's against his will.

AVA

And in the other, he's held accountable for all the death and destruction he was willing to allow.

FACILITATOR

Correct.

RICHARD

Why do you have to have an ending where he dies at all? If he made the decision?

AVA

He made it too late.

LORETTA

Well, I don't want him to die either.

BEN

Don't you think it's more fitting?

MARY

It preserves some degree of accountability.

RICHARD

It still doesn't make it right.

FACILITATOR

What about you, Doug?

DOUG

I like either of the alternate endings.
But there's just one problem.
It's too much like *24*.

BEN

You mean the TV show?

DOUG

Yeah, I binge watched it a few years ago. And
there's an episode in *24* where they do
something almost exactly like this.

RICHARD

I know that show. I watched the first season. But
I don't recall that episode.

DOUG

I'm pretty sure it wasn't in the first season; it was
a later season... I think.
When you were describing that ending, that's
what immediately jumped in my head.

AVA

Did it work? In the show?

DOUG

Yeah. It worked in the episode.

MARY

And that was quite a popular program.

DOUG

It was huge.

AVA

All the more reason to use it then.

RICHARD

We're still talking about the film?

AVA

(dryly)

Ha ha.

DOUG

But if it's too much like it, you can't use it.

AVA

If this was deemed an acceptable tactic for a highly rated TV show, then all that means is that there isn't much room to critique the film.

DOUG

That was fiction.

AVA

This is too.

DOUG

But the threat in this film is real. Climate Change is a real thing.

AVA

And 24 was about terrorism. Terrorism is real too.

DOUG

It was a different situation.

AVA

Yeah, this one's actually worse.

DOUG

This isn't some obscure reference. It's one of the biggest shows of the 2000s.

AVA

I don't see why the popularity of the show has anything to do with using the alternate ending.

DOUG

Because they could sue.

BEN

Maybe they'll see it as a tip of the hat.

RICHARD

A tip of the hat won't hold up against a lawsuit.

FACILITATOR

Then the filmmakers will claim fair use; that it's a critique of *24*.

MARY

You already knew about the show?

FACILITATOR

The filmmakers knew.

For that post-911 thought experiment to make its way into pop culture on a TV show that was wildly enjoyed, and the star of the show pulling off the experiment being generally seen as a hero doing what he had to do, it's just as much a part of the irony.

RICHARD

That doesn't mean you'll win, or that you won't go bankrupt defending yourself in court.

AVA

So what? If the movie gets the point across, it doesn't really matter.

RICHARD

So it's worth the filmmakers losing everything? What do they really think this film is going to do?

BEN

Maybe that's the real irony. That the filmmakers are the ones who ultimately get punished.

AVA

And that we think the big question is which ending the movie gets.

LORETTA

The ending matters.

FACILITATOR

It matters immensely.

DOUG

So which one are they going to use?

FACILITATOR

I assume they'll decide once they get the results from the focus groups.

MARY

I want to go back to what you said about this being the second act.

I didn't understand that.

BEN

Yeah, what *did* you mean?

If this is the second act, what's the third act?

FACILITATOR

Obviously, it's what you do after this focus group.

LORETTA

Don't you mean what the audience does after watching the film?

FACILITATOR

You're just as much an audience as anyone watching in a theater or online.

DOUG

But I'm not going to do anything. I'm just here for the gift card.

FACILITATOR

You're not going to do anything, and you don't think anyone else will. Is that what you're saying?

DOUG

I'm saying *most* people aren't going to do anything.

FACILITATOR

And you believe you're representative of most people?

DOUG

I guess.

FACILITATOR

Then why won't *you* do anything?

DOUG

This isn't about me.

FACILITATOR

You just said most people are like you.

DOUG

That doesn't mean my reasons are the same as everyone else's.

FACILITATOR

But you're fairly sure the average person watching this movie will not be moved to any action they would have not already taken.

DOUG

Honestly, yeah.

FACILITATOR

Then I'd like to hear why that is, for you.

DOUG

And I don't have to answer that.

AVA

It doesn't matter what his answer is. It only matters if he's right.

BEN

If he's right, then what kind of movie does that make this?

LORETTA

What do you mean?

BEN

The movie's clearly a satire.
So if no one does anything, does that make it a failure?

MARY

Or does it make it a most successful satire?

BEN

Exactly.

AVA

Or turn it around.
If, by some chance, it inspires people to act. Is it a success? Or a satirical failure?

LORETTA

Does it have to be one or the other?

MARY

Or can it be both?

BEN

It's Schrodinger's cat.

AVA

It's like us knowing the alternate ending.
If we've been made aware of all the possible endings, which one do we take with us?

BEN

It's Schrodinger's cat.

DOUG

So which is it?

MARY

Maybe it depends on who opens the box.

BEN

Exactly.

Ben revels in the silence of the Group's contemplation.

RICHARD

All right, enough of the philosophy. I want to know something.
We were contacted by the focus group company.

FACILITATOR

Yes.

RICHARD

So we don't know who hired you.

FACILITATOR

The filmmakers hired me.

RICHARD

That's what I'm saying. You keep referring to them as "the filmmakers." But we don't know who they are.

FACILITATOR

You wouldn't recognize their names. Any more than you would the average crew member from a blockbuster film.

RICHARD

I don't mean their names. I mean like *who* they are. What they're about.
Without knowing anything about them, we can't know why they're really making a movie like this.

BEN

Can you not enjoy the film without knowing what they're about?

RICHARD

I can't enjoy the film unless I know that's all I'm supposed to be doing.
If I knew it was just supposed to be entertainment, then I could leave it at that.

BEN

Why can't it be one of those movies that offers both? Entertainment for the people who don't want to think too hard, but deeper stuff for those who do?

DOUG

Because if the deeper stuff is really there, then it may be too deep.

AVA

What does too deep mean?

RICHARD

It leaves too much for interpretation.
You could watch this and get something really dark from it.

BEN

That's only if you want to interpret it that way.
Or to interpret it at all.

FACILITATOR

That's the question, isn't it?
Do you want more from this film?
Or do you just want to eat popcorn and wait to see what happens to the hostage?

DOUG

If I just want entertainment, I'm probably going to be disappointed.

FACILITATOR

So not a film that's better left for entertainment purposes only.
What about if you want more?

RICHARD

I guess that stuff's there.
But if it's more than entertainment, it feels like something is wrong.

MARY

In what way?

RICHARD

In how it could be interpreted.
Making it mean something doesn't feel right to me.

MARY

That's only because you fear the worst of interpretations.

RICHARD

It doesn't change the way I feel when I'm watching it.

LORETTA

Thank you.

FACILITATOR

What's that?

LORETTA

I was waiting for someone else to say it.

FACILITATOR

Say what?

LORETTA

I actually felt... dirty watching it.

BEN

Dirty?

LORETTA

Yes. I don't know how to describe it. Like you're committing a crime just knowing about it.

AVA

Knowing about a movie?

RICHARD

I don't think it's just a movie. I feel like this movie could be seen as a form of terrorism. It's clearly minimizing the suffering of civilians in pursuit of a political agenda. Whether or not you agree with Mr. Jenns' actions, what he is doing is legal. And kidnapping him and people like him and torturing them is not legal.

AVA

That's why you make a movie about it rather than do it.

RICHARD

But the threat implied in the film is terrorism too.

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)

It's meant to scare you into doing something against your will.

BEN

No one can argue that the film isn't meant to scare the audience. But to what end? Is this meant to be an example, to follow? Or a wakeup call, so things *don't* devolve into this kind of desperation?

MARY

The only answer is in finding a nonviolent solution.

RICHARD

Or they could not release the movie, because it has the potential to prove itself a form of terrorism.

AVA

Because it's meant to scare?

LORETTA

Not scare. Intimidate.

AVA

Doesn't it depend on the filmmakers' intent?

RICHARD

You can't prove intent.

AVA

You couldn't prove that the film inspired anyone to commit a crime either.

RICHARD

You could predict it. Fairly easily.

BEN

That's if you believe people can't process tough ideas.

RICHARD

All it takes is one.

AVA

So what, we give up freedom of speech because some nut could take the movie the wrong way and go do something stupid?

RICHARD

That's what fear does to people. It makes them do stupid things.

BEN

Or sometimes it can force you to use your mind. I had an old man tell me one time that if I ever got cornered by a group of guys, my only shot was to paint a picture of how bad it was going to be for the first one who came at me. Because even if they knew I couldn't take them all, if I was convincing enough, no one would risk being that first one.

Maybe that's what this is.

The old man said you probably weren't going to be able to actually do what you were threatening. But if they believed it, then it might as well have already happened. And at the end of the day, everyone walks away unhurt.

The threat isn't what matters. It's if it works.

LORETTA

But if the threat becomes real.

AVA

Then it matters who's backed up into the corner.

Is it the movie that is scaring the rich and powerful into acting? Or is it the rich and powerful that have scared the filmmakers into making this movie?

What Ben was saying about the old man's advice, that threats when facing violence could be seen as self-defense?

You have to agree. Words to avoid further violence have to be better than actually performing the violence.

LORETTA

We can't know if the threat is serious.

MARY

But we absolutely know what's going to happen to the person cornered, if they don't figure out a solution.

FACILITATOR

For those of you who are bothered by the implications, why can't this just be fiction, like any other film with violence in it? Why do we assume it's making a serious point?

LORETTA

Because the situation is real.

DOUG

That's what I was saying before.

FACILITATOR

Movies about married couples and partners being killed are watched every day, and people don't suspect they're inciting domestic murder. Those situations are also potentially real.

LORETTA

But this is something that we have to fix, and...

FACILITATOR

And what?

LORETTA

We don't really have a choice but to make ourselves a part of the movie.

FACILITATOR

So which are you? Mr. Jenns, Mr. Maxwell? Or the ones who took them?

LORETTA

I don't want to be any of them.

RICHARD

We're *not* any of them.

MARY

Maybe we're all of them.
Maybe there's aspects of us in each of them.
All of us are guilty in our own way.
(MORE)

MARY (cont'd)

At the same time, all of us want to fix this. But we don't know how. Or we don't care enough to do what it takes.

RICHARD

Is this what it takes?

AVA

It does force an answer.

LORETTA

Taking them hostage can't be the only way.

MARY

Isn't that what the movie is telling us? That we have to find something else, or eventually it *will* be the only way?

BEN

Or it'll already be too late.

DOUG

What if it's already too late now?

AVA

If you're not sure, then you only know you have to act right now.

FACILITATOR

Or you could just see it all as entertainment.

BEN

It doesn't matter what you see it as. It's destined to fail.
For this to be worth making, it needs to be seen by a lot of people and soon.
But you agreed that the movie was too indie. Which means it won't get into any of the big film festivals. Which means the filmmakers won't be able to find a distributor. So it's definitely not going to get seen by a lot of people. But let's just say that the filmmakers hit the lottery and were able to get it into a big festival. You're looking at a year before it gets screened to one audience. And getting picked up still doesn't guarantee it coming out for another year or two.

(MORE)

BEN (cont'd)

Which it probably wouldn't, because whoever picked it up would probably opt to reshoot it, which would start the whole process over and add even more years onto the date for when anyone actually sees it. And by then, it really will be too late.

FACILITATOR

Very perceptive.

BEN

You say that as if the filmmakers already know this is the likely outcome.

FACILITATOR

Nothing you mentioned would be a surprise.

BEN

Then what's the plan?
How are they going to get it out there?

FACILITATOR

That's not what we're here to discuss.

AVA

Then maybe we should discuss it.
People need to see this.

RICHARD

Do they?
Don't you think everyone already knows?

AVA

Maybe they do. But if they're not doing anything, maybe it's going to take something shocking like this to truly get across the severity of the situation. And the urgency of them finding some role to play.

FACILITATOR

Assuming it's more than just a movie.

MARY

What do you assume?
I'd like to know what you think.

FACILITATOR

I'm not allowed to say what I think.
I have guidelines for how to conduct the session,
and that's it.

MARY

Then let's take a time out. I want to know what
you personally think of all this.

LORETTA

I'd like to know too.

DOUG

Me too.

FACILITATOR

Why do you wish to know?

MARY

You're doing the focus groups. You must have
run across all kinds of arguments, both for and
against certain aspects of the movie, or the entire
movie itself.
After all that, what is it that you think?

FACILITATOR

If I tell you, you're not going to know whether
it's what I really think or if it's part of my
instructions.

MARY

Then humor me.

FACILITATOR

What I think is that it doesn't matter what I
think. Neither does it matter what you think.
It only matters what you do.

MARY

And what are you doing?

FACILITATOR

I'm administering a focus group for a movie that
appears to be desperately trying to get a
commitment out of you.

DOUG

A commitment to do what?

FACILITATOR

More than just what you think.

BEN

So it is more than just entertainment.

FACILITATOR

That's up to you.

RICHARD

It can't just be up to us.
You have to tell us. What do the filmmakers want?

FACILITATOR

I'm here to find out what you think. Not the other way around.

RICHARD

Well, I'll make it simple for you. I don't like the movie. I don't like the ambiguity, and I don't like the ambivalence.

BEN

Even though it's satire?

RICHARD

I would say especially because it's satire.

FACILITATOR

Do you not like satire?

RICHARD

I do. I just don't like this satire.
Satire is not some abstract painting. It has a purpose. Or it should.

FACILITATOR

Maybe the purpose is to demonstrate that most people have a very skewed perspective on their roles in finding a solution. And how, even when they come close, they quickly get distracted and pulled in another direction.

(MORE)

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

Take this focus group. From the very beginning, you were intent on poking holes in a satirical scenario rather than discussing how to fill the hole in a sinking boat.

RICHARD

That's not what we were brought here for. We're here to assess the movie.

FACILITATOR

You only think that because I told you that.

RICHARD

You're the one conducting the focus group.

FACILITATOR

You mean you assume I have authority.

RICHARD

We assume that's what's expected of us being here.

FACILITATOR

And that is *largely* the point of this satire. I've offered sparse guidance. But what have you decided to talk about? Just look at how little it took to keep you from answering the real question. You might as well be arguing over the color of soldiers' uniforms in a war.

RICHARD

So we're the butt of the joke? Is that what you're saying?

FACILITATOR

I'm not the one that's said anything. You've been saying it since the session started.

RICHARD

This is *not* a focus group on how to fix Climate Change. It's a focus group on a movie.

FACILITATOR

If that's what you think, then you should love this satire.

Richard fumes, but without rebuttal.

AVA

You meant “we” didn’t you, when you said,
“even when they come close to finding a
solution”?

You meant we’ve come close.

FACILITATOR

Very perceptive.

DOUG

And what have we come close to?

AVA

We have to answer the same question that was
posed to Mr. Jenns.

BEN

What’s it going to take?

DOUG

No one’s been able to figure that out.
How are we supposed to know?

MARY

It’s not that we have to figure out an answer. It’s
that we have to figure out the question.

FACILITATOR

Very perceptive.

MARY

It’s not as easy as finding out what will make a
powerful individual use that power for good.
Because we’re not up against individuals.
We’re up against institutions. That’s where the
power is at.

BEN

Institutions aren’t amorphous. They’re made up
of moving pieces.

AVA

And those moving pieces are people.

BEN

Exactly.

MARY

So what happens when a piece goes bad?

AVA

They replace it.

MARY

What happens if enough pieces go bad at the same time?

BEN

They might replace the whole thing.

RICHARD

Replace it with what?

MARY

That's the question.

RICHARD

Except it's not.
Even if you had an answer for that question, there's no way you can know the outcome will be any better. And by the time you convince enough people to change their foundational institutions of power, it'll definitely be too late. Either way, you're not going to do it with a movie.

AVA

He's right.
But that's why this movie is not about that. The question is, can we do enough to save ourselves without an all-out revolution?

MARY

And if so, how do we convince the Mr. Jennses and Mr. Maxwells to help steer the institutions a different way?

AVA

To temporarily make an exception.

BEN

That takes us back to where we began.

AVA

And the movie is more straightforward than we thought.

DOUG

Maybe you only think it's straightforward.

AVA

Then what do you think the movie is about?

DOUG

If you wanted to get conspiratorial about it, you could say this seems like a trial balloon. Like to see how mad people get about it. Kind of like you said, Mary. To see if people would accept it.

MARY

And if they're not mad?

DOUG

Then maybe they try to pull it off.

BEN

But making a movie ahead of time gives too much warning.

DOUG

Maybe this is their warning. A public warning, and those that have the power to get targeted for something like this have a chance to change sides, right now. Or it begins.

LORETTA

Don't say that.

DOUG

What?

LORETTA

The way you're making it out, it almost seems real.

DOUG

So?

LORETTA

So it's upsetting.
I don't even like talking about things like this.

AVA

You wouldn't be a part of it.

DOUG

Yeah, but what if it did turn out that was going on, and everything we said in the focus group was used to make the plan better? What if that's what we were here for?

BEN

If you don't know you're a part of it, you're not a part of it.

LORETTA

Ok, but now I'm thinking this movie shouldn't get released. That maybe we should tell someone.

AVA

Like the police?

LORETTA

I don't know, maybe.

FACILITATOR

You can't do that. You signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement.

RICHARD

An NDA doesn't apply if a crime is being committed.

BEN

It's just a movie.

LORETTA

What if it's not?

AVA

Are you serious?

LORETTA

I'm not going to be responsible for anyone getting kidnapped and tortured.

AVA

You're assuming that this whole conspiracy theory he just cooked up is real.

RICHARD

It's just as believable as anything else we've come up with.

LORETTA

That's it then. We have to tell.

MARY

Doug, can you not see you're upsetting her?

DOUG

Ok, I was just kidding.

LORETTA

Well, I'm not.
Even if it's a possibility, I have to say something.

FACILITATOR

For Mr. Jenns?

LORETTA

What?

FACILITATOR

You have to say something for Mr. Jenns?

LORETTA

I don't understand.

AVA

He's saying that you're worried more about people like Mr. Jenns than the people he's willing to hurt.

RICHARD

That's not fair.

AVA

Of course you would say that. You were on that team from the beginning.

RICHARD

There are no teams.

BEN

But there are victims.

LORETTA

It doesn't justify hurting anyone.
You said it too.

AVA

We all said it.
It doesn't mean we just let them off free.
We still have to find an answer to what will make
them act right.

FACILITATOR

A nonviolent answer?

AVA

Yes.

FACILITATOR

Nonviolence only?

AVA

Yes.

FACILITATOR

That's good to hear.

AVA

What does that mean, good to hear?

FACILITATOR

It means I can go ahead and tell you.

DOUG

Tell us what?

FACILITATOR

When you mentioned it looking "too indie"
earlier, I thought for sure you would put it
together.

DOUG

Put what together?

BEN

If they don't have a budget, how did they hire a firm that does focus groups?

FACILITATOR

Now you see it.
You also came close, Richard. When you asked me who was making the film.
The only reason I didn't tell you then was that we had to be sure.

LORETTA

Sure of what?

FACILITATOR

That you were all against this tactic.

AVA

You mean kidnapping Mr. Jenns?

FACILITATOR

That's right.
Or really any violence.

DOUG

What does that matter?

MARY

Because the people who made this film are not independent filmmakers.

FACILITATOR

Now you see it.

RICHARD

Then who are they?

AVA

They're rich fucks.

DOUG

Nooooo.

LORETTA

Why would rich people make a movie like this?

BEN

To gauge how safe they are.

MARY

It's a way for people like Mr. Jenns to put their finger up to the wind.

RICHARD

That doesn't make sense.
If they release the movie, then doesn't it give people ideas and put them more in danger?

FACILITATOR

Who said we were going to release the movie?

LORETTA

Then what's the point of making the movie if no one's going to see it?

FACILITATOR

You're seeing it.

DOUG

Wait. You made a movie just for six people in a focus group to see?

BEN

We're not the only focus group. For all we know, there could be hundreds of these.

RICHARD

No one would go to this kind of trouble. To hire a crew and actors and a director, just so you could see what focus groups think?

FACILITATOR

What trouble is it? For this type of strategic information, the production costs are well worth it.

RICHARD

Are you serious?
You're really not going to release the film?

FACILITATOR

Like you said, it could give people ideas.

AVA

How do you know we won't leave here and tell everyone we know, or go to the press?

FACILITATOR

We just discussed it. You all signed NDAs. You do that, and you're financially ruined. We'll take you for everything you own and everything you'll ever own. It's all in what you signed. I can show you again if you'd like.

RICHARD

Is this a gag? I thought I was signing up for market research.

FACILITATOR

What do you think this is?

AVA

This isn't research. This is evil.

FACILITATOR

Then do it. Go ahead. Tell everyone what we're doing here. The NDA is just a piece of paper. You're only bound by it to the degree you're bound to your money. But we believe that you're no better than us, and that you won't risk even what little money you have. Because you know the same as we know, there's no guarantee taking that step will do anything. So why take the gamble?

BEN

We could anonymously leak it.

FACILITATOR

You could. But there's still a slight possibility that we'd find out. And if we do, you're in big trouble.

DOUG

This is bullshit. You can't do this to us.

FACILITATOR

Do what to you? No one is physically imposing their will upon you. The NDA is only as strong as you are weak.

The Facilitator pauses for a smile, letting his words sink in.

FACILITATOR (cont'd)

What about you, Ben? Mary? Ava?
You see now, don't you? It's not that easy.
What's easy is being self-righteous and judging those who have more than you.

RICHARD

This is wrong. You can't just play around with people like this.
Ava's right. This is evil.

FACILITATOR

All you have to do is tell someone.
Tell them what we're doing, and how you feel about it.
And see who loses.

LORETTA

Why are you doing this?

FACILITATOR

I told you. We had to be sure that you didn't care enough to put your own security in jeopardy.
That you're not willing to sacrifice any more than we are.

MARY

And what happens if everyone in the focus group says they're ok with a scenario like the one in the movie?

FACILITATOR

Then we adjust accordingly.

RICHARD

You wouldn't do this. No one would do this.

FACILITATOR

And that reaction, your reaction, is all the surety we need.

(MORE)

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

After everything we've done, you're still in disbelief.

You think making a movie is going out of our way?

This is nothing.

And wouldn't *you* be curious? To see how much *more* you can get away with?

Or maybe I'm just kidding.

Not about the NDA. But maybe all that was just to see how different your reactions would be, about the movie.

BEN

Are you serious, or are you kidding?

FACILITATOR

If I am serious, and I am on the *bad* team, does that change the way you look at the film?

It seemed to change the tenor of the discussion.

And is that enough?

Even if you're bound by the NDA, you can still go out there and try to save the world from Climate Change and Mr. Jenns and our "rich fuck" filmmakers.

And if you're successful, if you can find the way to do it nonviolently, then wouldn't it be so ironic? That it all came from you watching *our* film?

AVA

And you get all the credit.

FACILITATOR

Or I'm not serious, the filmmakers are really broke, and this has all been one of my more unorthodox methods.

RICHARD

This isn't ok.

FACILITATOR

It's not, is it?

LORETTA

So is there a film or isn't there?

FACILITATOR

Of course there's a film; you all watched it.

DOUG

But is it really a film?

LORRETA

You really are messing with us.

FACILITATOR

Does it change the way you look at the movie? Is it going to change what you think, what you do, after the session is over?

RICHARD

Quit playing games.
Who made the film?

FACILITATOR

Why does it matter - who's making the movie?
In relation to what's in the movie, it *shouldn't*
matter.
But it does. Doesn't it?

BEN

It's Schrodinger's cat.

MARY

Except we're the cat.

AVA

Then who's going to open the box?

CAPTION over BLACK reads:

June 29, 2101

Book Club - Japan

INT. OBASAN RAMEN - NIGHT

Four students, KIYOSHI, NATSU, SACHIKO, and KATSUMI, are beginning to eat in the corner of a small Ramen Shop near the college.

Translated from Japanese.

KATSUMI

Should we eat first?

SACHIKO

We can talk while we eat.

KATSUMI

That's good with me.
Would anyone like to start?

NATSU

I would.

KATSUMI

Great.

NATSU

I actually don't think it's a cult classic like we normally think. I think it *became* a cult classic because of how hard it tried and missed. Almost like how really bad movies would sometimes get famous.

KIYOSHI

Maybe that's why it never got made into a film. Hollywood had the brains not to throw away their money.

KATSUMI

Then why was it seen later on as a cult classic?

NATSU

It was cult in the way some literary disasters were sometimes cult.

(MORE)

NATSU (cont'd)

It missed so many marks, over time it must have become emblematic of people thinking they nailed it with their response to Climate Change and having it completely backwards.

KATSUMI

Which part?

KIYOSHI

The focus group. I couldn't tell whether the author had sympathy for them because he knew people like this. But it's clear now they're all idiots. Even the ones who want to do something about it are not seeing the extent of the danger. Therefore not seeing the extent of their own apathy.

SACHIKO

I'm not so sure.

This is set a long time ago, generations ago.

KIYOSHI

So?

SACHIKO

Maybe we have the gift of hindsight. Who knows if 80 years ago we might have done the same thing they did?

NATSU

No way.

SACHIKO

That's actually something I liked about it. I think readers at the time would have had a moral quandary over Mr. Jenns and would have put themselves both in his position but also in the position of those that took him hostage. But by the end, it's not about whether you would have been the hostage takers. It's whether you would have been the focus group. Clueless that violence was even an option.

KATSUMI

I felt like the whole focus group thing was weird.

NATSU

You too?

SACHIKO

Why do you say weird?

KATSUMI

It just seemed like such a strange way to follow the hostage story. What *you* just said, that makes more sense. But... I don't know.

NATSU

I didn't like it either. I kept asking myself why you would have this as the second half of what was supposed to be a movie. There wasn't any story. It felt anticlimactic.

KIYOSHI

It actually made me angry. I was stopping and screaming at the pages as I read it. They just kept saying the stupidest stuff.

KATSUMI

That's how I was. I wanted to jump through the book and into each of their rooms and beat the shit out of everyone who questioned whether it was too much.

SACHIKO

That's the way I felt at first too. But then I kind of felt later on that it was perfect. The way they discussed it. Bringing up all these trivial aspects of the film. It was like a metaphor.

KIYOSHI

How casually they dismissed the tactic used in the movie.

KATSUMI

It was disgusting.

NATSU

Plus, it was so long. I felt like I was getting to know people I didn't want to know.

SACHIKO

Maybe that's what it's supposed to do. Put us in their shoes. They don't really know what is coming. To them, the threat isn't real.

NATSU

How can it not be real? It's only not real if they don't consider the fates of anyone but themselves.

KIYOSHI

Not taking it seriously is like signing off on a nuclear bomb to be launched ten years later.

SACHIKO

That's why it's the perfect cult classic. It almost seems like the book wasn't written for people at the time, but for us.

NATSU

How is that?

SACHIKO

You said it was anticlimactic. But only for them. We already knew nothing was going to come of it.

The only way it's anticlimactic, for us, is if it got our hopes up that something was actually going to happen to reverse course.

But that would make it a different type of fiction.

KIYOSHI

It would make it fantasy.

SACHIKO

Sort of. But more that it gives us a chance to evaluate what *we're* screwing up. The things that will disappoint people like us in the future.

What are *we* getting so obviously wrong - right now?

KATSUMI

I didn't see it when I read it, but I think she's right. For us, the consequences of their complacency are far more real than it would have been for readers at the time.

NATSU

That doesn't excuse their actions. They're still careless.

KIYOSHI

Reckless is more like it.

NATSU

To not take it seriously. They're just awful people.

SACHIKO

And yet we could have been in their places.

KIYOSHI

We would have done more.
I can't believe, with *that* amount of evidence, we wouldn't have.

SACHIKO

There *were* people doing more. A lot of them.

KIYOSHI

But it wasn't enough.

SACHIKO

That's what I'm saying. If we were around back then, what could we have done that would have turned the tide? Knowing what we know now doesn't change how hard it is to move history.

NATSU

Knowing what we know now, we probably would have been the teens on the laptop.

KIYOSHI

Or worse.

KATSUMI

So what should the book have done?

KIYOSHI

I don't know. More than it did. It goes right up to the line of calling for violence, but then leaves the decision with a population that had already proved its apathy for decades.

SACHIKO

You can't expect a book to change everything. I think the author was doing his part.

NATSU

But was there more he could have done?

KATSUMI

With the book?

NATSU

Yeah. The book makes us mad because of what we *do* know. Do you think it made readers back then mad? Ending such a serious, tense scenario with this absurd, dissatisfying focus group?

SACHIKO

Maybe it wasn't supposed to make them mad. Maybe the focus group ending was supposed to take them out of the realm of suspenseful entertainment and turn a mirror on themselves and make them choose who they're going to be.

NATSU

But they chose the focus group. They chose to be them instead of the teens on the laptop.

SACHIKO

That's not the fault of the author.

KIYOSHI

Then maybe the author should have done more.

SACHIKO

You mean written a different book?

KATSUMI

A follow-up?

KIYOSHI

No, I think the author should have done it. He had the idea. He was obviously creative. Who's to say he couldn't have figured out a way to pull this off?

KATSUMI

I think that's asking a lot.

KIYOSHI

Yeah, well, the last 80 years deserves a lot. A lot more than what these idiots gave us.

SACHIKO

Are you saying he *personally* should have resorted to these kinds of measures?

KIYOSHI

Are you joking? Is there anyone here who doesn't?

NATSU

If anyone understood the stakes, you would think it was him.

SACHIKO

That assumes the author believed that violence was a possible answer.

NATSU

He had to. Why else would he have brought in this insane focus group?

KATSUMI

Maybe it represented his own reservations about using violence. Maybe the purpose really was to get people to find a nonviolent solution.

KIYOSHI

There were no nonviolent solutions. They proved that.

SACHIKO

You can't prove something like that. Because there's always something else that could have been tried.

KIYOSHI

We sure know what they didn't try. At least not before *this* was written, in 2021. Not before it was too late.

NATSU

And even *after*, it wasn't to solve anything. It was just what the situation had come to.

KIYOSHI

They had all those years before that. Before 2021. And look at how little was done. The thing probably should have been written twenty years before then, at the beginning of the century.

SACHIKO

Isn't that the predicament?
Using violence to prevent violence?
It sounds counterintuitive. And if it ever is necessary, how do you know when? And how much violence?

KIYOSHI

If there was ever a time, it was then. If there was ever a time for war, it was right then.

NATSU

We could have avoided the wars that did come.

KATSUMI

We know that. We've had eight decades to put it in focus.
But they didn't.

NATSU

You really believe that? They didn't know?

KIYOSHI

The author did.

KATSUMI

The author is one person. One person can't start a war. At least not on purpose.

NATSU

Then he could have been more explicit.

SACHIKO

You can't call for real violence in the name of stopping prophesied violence.

KATSUMI

Especially if you're the prophet.

KIYOSHI

You're right. You have to do it yourself. What's the point of hoping others will get the hint if *you're* not willing to do it?

KATSUMI

Maybe that's why he only put it as a question. Maybe he wasn't sure himself.

NATSU

How could he not be? If it was worth kidnapping and torturing people?

KIYOSHI

Only people like Mr. Jenns.

NATSU

Still.

KATSUMI

It's fiction. It's fiction precisely because it's not settled whether it was worth it. Not to them. And I presume not to him either. That *was* the whole point of the focus group. It's not a foregone conclusion that he was for anything more than nonviolent action.

KIYOSHI

He obviously knows what's coming. You at least acknowledge that.

KATSUMI

I acknowledge that.

NATSU

Then, at that stage, what else was there to hope for?

KIYOSHI

Not hope for. Expect. What else was there to expect?

SACHIKO

It still doesn't mean anything specific would have worked. And being the one responsible for that kind of failure?

A war to prevent war?

KIYOSHI

Do you not agree a war was worth it, at that time?

KATSUMI

It doesn't matter what we think. It matters what they thought.

KIYOSHI

Bullshit. It matters what we think. We're the ones that have to live with their consequences.

NATSU

That's right. They don't get to *not* try - for us, because it would have been uncomfortable for them.

SACHIKO

But we're saying war. We're not just saying violence. War is a bit more than uncomfortable.

NATSU

Whatever it would have taken - would have been less than what they took. From us. He's right. It only matters what we think.

KIYOSHI

What do you think? Were we not worth a war?

KATSUMI

I never said we weren't.
How could you even ask me that?

KIYOSHI

I don't know. The way you were--

KATSUMI

I entertain ideas about the book because we're a book club. There's a difference between talking about a story and talking about us, now. Our history isn't some hypothetical.

KIYOSHI

What about you? You've been the biggest defender of the author. Are you just being a good book clubber? Or do you really think there's a line they shouldn't have crossed?

SACHIKO

I think it's always going to be easy for people in the future to judge people in the past.
But for us, it should be easy. A thousand books and a thousand movies will never make me think they were anything other than our butchers.
I entertain such work for what can be brought forward from it, not for what can be learned about our past. There's no mystery there. There is only what they created.
By fiddling with philosophy.

CAPTION over BLACK reads:

Questioning Oklahoma City - 2026

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - MORNING

OFFICER BYRD brings in ABRAHAM a cup of coffee, and sits down across the table from him.

The old man accepts the coffee and smiles.

OFFICER BYRD

So you run the independent cinema hall on 12th.

ABRAHAM

For 47 years. Though I prefer the title Projectionist Emeritus.

OFFICER BYRD

Isn't that a bit pretentious? There hasn't been actual film for a long time.

ABRAHAM

Maybe not with the new ones, but I show originals every Wednesday night. Since The Broadmoor opened, we've accumulated quite the collection.

OFFICER BYRD

Definitely been around a long time. My aunt used to tell me about seeing movies there.

ABRAHAM

You've never been in before?

OFFICER BYRD

Not really my thing.

ABRAHAM

Why is that?

OFFICER BYRD

Whenever I drive by, you've always got some foreign name on the marquee.

ABRAHAM

You don't like reading subtitles.

OFFICER BYRD

When I watch a movie, I don't want to have to feel like I'm putting in work.

ABRAHAM

Fair enough. But if you ever change your mind, I have some wonderful foreign films. I'd be willing to do a screening just for the department.

OFFICER BYRD

That's very generous. But we should probably get to why you're here.

ABRAHAM

Certainly.

OFFICER BYRD

You showed the movie *Do We Have Your Attention*.

ABRAHAM

I exhibited it.

OFFICER BYRD

In its entirety.

ABRAHAM

I don't see why that's a problem.

OFFICER BYRD

You know the film is banned.

ABRAHAM

Only if it includes the ending book club scene.

OFFICER BYRD

And that's the version you ran.

ABRAHAM

No. I ran the film up until the book club scene, and then stage actors performed that part. Only the *film* presentation of that scene is banned.

OFFICER BYRD

That's because it hadn't been made into a stage production.

ABRAHAM

So technically it's not banned. In that form.

OFFICER BYRD

You're assuming that the District Prosecutor will care about the difference.

ABRAHAM

I haven't been arrested. I'm only being detained. For questioning?

OFFICER BYRD

That's true.

ABRAHAM

Then I'm not worried.

OFFICER BYRD

That doesn't mean you won't be arrested.

ABRAHAM

Why would I be arrested in the future?

OFFICER BYRD

If other movie theaters get the same idea, that wouldn't look too good for you. God forbid something were to happen as a result.

ABRAHAM

As a result of what?

OFFICER BYRD

People seeing the whole thing.

ABRAHAM

God forbid people take a moment to look at our Climate situation and - see the whole thing.

OFFICER BYRD

You know what I mean.

ABRAHAM

How can the first two acts of the movie be ok, but then be banned for an extra scene? A scene that has almost no foul language, no nudity, and no violence?

OFFICER BYRD

It *does* have violence. The whole point of the scene they banned *is* violence.

ABRAHAM

In a lifetime of showing movies, I've never seen a serious film banned for a violent depiction. Not even the most gratuitous violence.

OFFICER BYRD

This is a different kind of violence. And it's not the depiction. It's the seduction.

ABRAHAM

The point of the scene is the same as the focus group scene before it. To rouse discussion about Climate Change and what is to be done about it.

OFFICER BYRD

It's an explicit call for violence.

ABRAHAM

It's a fictional account of how people 80 years from now will feel about activism and its failures.

OFFICER BYRD

But it does endorse violence.

ABRAHAM

It endorses violence the same way someone who's had a family member murdered by someone who just got out of prison might wish that person had been killed in prison before they could get out.

OFFICER BYRD

I think that's a bit of a reach. And I think you know it.

ABRAHAM

Maybe. But it's clearly a musing about a fictional violence after a far greater real violence has been committed.

OFFICER BYRD

And when is this greater real violence supposed to occur?

ABRAHAM

It's occurring right now.

OFFICER BYRD

That sounds like you're taking a side.

ABRAHAM

Paying attention to the weather forecast is not taking a side.

OFFICER BYRD

So you *are* taking a side.

ABRAHAM

And you're not?

OFFICER BYRD

I'm taking the side of the law.

ABRAHAM

Historically, that's not a sentiment you want written on your gravestone.

OFFICER BYRD

Is that some kind of veiled threat?

ABRAHAM

I'm too old and weak to threaten anyone. I'm just telling you, it's your gravestone. Not anyone else's.

Officer Byrd sits for a moment with Abraham's words.

OFFICER BYRD

Your establishment has a history of showing banned movies.

ABRAHAM

Only in retrospect.

OFFICER BYRD

Punishment Park. Over The Edge. He Doesn't Know. The Last Days of Nonviolence.

ABRAHAM
Have you seen any of those films?

OFFICER BYRD
I haven't.

ABRAHAM
Well, a lot of people did. And not one incidence of violence was ever reported after anyone left those screenings.

OFFICER BYRD
Like you said, they saw them in retrospect.

ABRAHAM
Has anyone who attended my exhibition of *Do We Have Your Attention* caused as much as a peep?

OFFICER BYRD
Not yet.

ABRAHAM
Not yet can last forever.

OFFICER BYRD
Or it can last a day.

ABRAHAM
Is that how you see everyone? As temporarily innocent?

OFFICER BYRD
My job is not just investigating crimes. It's in preventing them.

ABRAHAM
That's sad.

OFFICER BYRD
What's sad about it?

ABRAHAM

You're the police. More than all the protest groups in the world combined, you have the resources and the organization, and you have the government-recognized authority, to prevent the greatest crime in human history. And here you are, with an old man, asking why he showed a film to a room full of curious people.

OFFICER BYRD

You're acting like you don't know the power of ideas, or art.

ABRAHAM

I know that power very well. It's the only thing that keeps us from a fate worse than Climate Change.

OFFICER BYRD

And what's that?

ABRAHAM

A future where the solution to Climate Change was fascism.

OFFICER BYRD

And you don't see any irony in suggesting that violence is going to save us from that?

ABRAHAM

Irony is in the eye of everyone but the ironic.

OFFICER BYRD

I like that. Maybe you could use that for *your* gravestone.

ABRAHAM

Is that a veiled threat?

OFFICER BYRD

I'm just here to ask questions.

ABRAHAM

Only the wrong ones.

OFFICER BYRD

I'm surprised a supporter of the arts would see any question as off limits.

ABRAHAM

I didn't say off limits. I said wrong.

OFFICER BYRD

How can a question be wrong?

ABRAHAM

The wrong questions are the ones in which you'll only accept the answer you want to hear.

OFFICER BYRD

What answer do you think I want to hear?

ABRAHAM

Yet another perfect example.

Unwilling to play along, Officer Byrd shakes his head.

OFFICER BYRD

How did you get the film? The first two sections, that is?

ABRAHAM

How does anyone get *anything* these days? I would love to tell you I received it in one of the old metal film canisters.

OFFICER BYRD

You downloaded it?

ABRAHAM

It was emailed to me. Along with the script for the book club scene.

OFFICER BYRD

Emailed by the filmmakers?

ABRAHAM

I don't think so. The email address was just a bunch of random letters and numbers.

OFFICER BYRD

What did the email say?

ABRAHAM

It didn't say anything. The only words in the email were in the subject heading. It read, "Before it's too late."

OFFICER BYRD

And what do you think that's supposed to mean?

ABRAHAM

That's another one of those wrong questions.

OFFICER BYRD

Then what's the right question?

ABRAHAM

What *I think* it means is not the matter. It's what you think it means. Not as an officer. Just you. A man who has family. A man who has friends. A man who wants a better world. A man who believes in justice.

When you hear "before it's too late." Do you resign yourself to the last three words? Or do you hold out hope for the first?

Maybe you're right. Maybe the film is a call to action. But not to the kind of people who buy tickets to see it.

Maybe they knew if I showed it, you would pick me up. Begin asking questions. At some point arriving at this email and its message.

Maybe the movie, that message, wasn't for my patrons, or even me. Maybe it was for you.

OFFICER BYRD

And you expect me to ask, "Why me?"

ABRAHAM

I have hope you will.

OFFICER BYRD

And if I don't.

ABRAHAM

I guess I'll keep showing the film.

CAPTION over BLACK reads:

The Judiciary
Washington, D.C. - 2028

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

35-year-old NNEOMA IBEABUCHI stands before a heightened semicircle of FIVE JUDGES. The COURT OFFICER steps forth.

COURT OFFICER

State your name.

NNEOMA

Nneoma Ibeabuchi.

COURT OFFICER

Nneoma Ibeabuchi, you are being afforded the time and consideration of five members of the Judiciary. The following dialogue is a privilege earned solely through absolute honesty. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

NNEOMA

So help me.

JUDGE TWO

You don't believe in God, Ms. Ibeabuchi?

NNEOMA

I believe in a separation of state and superstition.

JUDGE TWO

(amused)

Hmm.

COURT OFFICER

The judges will now ask you questions.

The Court Officer steps back.

JUDGE ONE

You are challenging the ban placed on the film *Do We Have Your Attention*.

NNEOMA

I am, Your Honor.

JUDGE THREE

Multiple people have already been tried and sentenced for violating the order. Why did you not file your challenge before now?

NNEOMA

Honestly, Your Honor, I never thought the courts would stoop to enforcing the order. I see now I should have been proactive.

JUDGE TWO

It's the law.

NNEOMA

And it is within the authority of the court to rule it unconstitutional.

JUDGE FIVE

We wouldn't want to supersede the will of the people.

NNEOMA

The people didn't ask for this ban.

JUDGE FIVE

Their elected representation did though.

NNEOMA

Being elected and representing are two different things.

JUDGE FOUR

Meaning?

NNEOMA

I would challenge you to find me one person who believes themselves so mentally or emotionally fragile they couldn't handle sitting through this movie.

JUDGE FOUR

It's a precaution. Not unsimilar to the one mentioned in the beginning of the film.

NNEOMA

The hostage scene. With Mr. Jenns.

JUDGE FOUR

Yes. Except the ban order is concerned with actually protecting life. Unlike the propaganda in this film.

NNEOMA

Still, you made the comparison. And the precaution mentioned in the film *is* patently illegal.

JUDGE TWO

Not just illegal. Dangerous.

NNEOMA

It's certainly dangerous. But it's certainly fictional.

JUDGE THREE

Climate Change is not fiction.

NNEOMA

So what do we draw from that?

JUDGE ONE

It's not what we draw from it; it's what *can be* drawn from it.

NNEOMA

There have been literally thousands of books and movies with far more violent and suggestive premises than this film.

JUDGE TWO

And a handful of those films have resulted in serious violence.

JUDGE FOUR

Perhaps there should have been orders placed on those.

NNEOMA

That's the issue. You can't know if something is going to be a trigger.

JUDGE FIVE

Hence the precaution.

NNEOMA

Your Honors, if we look to ban the potential for inspiration, where will it end? Who's to say a Rorschach inkblot couldn't be the inspiration to commit violence? Or the alignment of cumulus in the sky on a lazy day of cloud gazing?

JUDGE THREE

We can't control the alignment of the clouds.

NNEOMA

Is this a matter of control or public safety? The mind draws conclusions from a plethora of stimulation. If the rule is what you can control, the state could find itself banning all manner of arbitrary inspiration.

JUDGE ONE

This is not a matter of the arbitrary. It's about direct inspiration.

NNEOMA

There is no more direct inspiration than the actions of those represented by Mr. Jenns. And those actions are something that very well could be controlled by the state.

JUDGE TWO

So if someone attacks, let's say, a CEO of a natural gas company after watching this film, you're saying we should blame the CEO?

NNEOMA

I'm not here to defend the violent actions of anyone. I'm here to defend a film and the free expression of ideas.

JUDGE FOUR

Then what about the film? The film claims no responsibility?

NNEOMA

Films like this are the logical conclusion of the actions taken by these industries. How people interpret the film is quite different from what they decide to do after seeing it.

JUDGE FIVE

Blame the victim. That's your answer.

NNEOMA

The film is searching for an answer. And victim is a quite subjective descriptor in this context. For decades, a war has been waged on humanity and the planet through bribery, misinformation, and skirting of the law. And not one corporation has been shut down, not one human being who represented it has seen a criminal sentence.

JUDGE FIVE

Your point?

NNEOMA

With odds like that, you're lucky the worst we have seen is a film.

JUDGE THREE

But that is *your* characterization. "The worst."
And yet you question the order.

NNEOMA

Your Honor, this illustrates my point perfectly. I was no more speaking literally than the film calls for someone to take a Coal Magnate hostage. I could just as easily twist your words as you could twist mine.

JUDGE TWO

Then what protection is the state supposed to offer?

NNEOMA

Offer whom? Those in line, taking their turn as the dutiful, profit-seeking hangman?

JUDGE FIVE

I would watch the inflammatory nature of your rhetoric, if I were you.

NNEOMA

Am I to believe Your Honors would engage in the irony of censoring me during my participation in a censorship trial?

JUDGE ONE

The ban order on this film was not censorship; it was under the combined purview of classified material and eminent domain.

NNEOMA

A technicality of taxonomy that is as boring as it should be illegal.

JUDGE FIVE

You can dazzle us with your alliteration all day, but you have not denied the potential harm in this production.

NNEOMA

The harm being done is here. In this courtroom. In this so-called dialogue.

JUDGE THREE

You sound like the subject in the interrogation scene.

NNEOMA

We should all have such moxie.

JUDGE TWO

Is that what passes for moxie these days? Attacking the state's right to protect its citizenry?

NNEOMA

It's not the *right* to protect that is being attacked. It's the record.

JUDGE FOUR

The detainee is meant to represent not a fictional character, but anyone who would help spread the concept that vigilantism and anarchy are the only solutions. It's an undermining of the state.

NNEOMA

The current iteration of the state is telling that detainee that even entertaining the discussion pushed in the film is a greater sin than Mr. Jenns not being able to let go of his relationships. Just like you can't let go of yours.

JUDGE ONE

And what relationships would those be?

NNEOMA

I fear they are the same.

JUDGE FIVE

This is the last warning I will give you. You are being afforded this privilege. If you throw it away, that will be your choice. Not ours.

NNEOMA

But Your Honor described the film as undermining the state.

What is left to undermine when defense of free thought is characterized as a privilege? Not the exercise, but the mere defense?

JUDGE FOUR

You used the word sin. Referring to Mr. Jenns. Why not "crime"? I thought you believed in a separation of morality and state.

NNEOMA

That's not exactly what I said. But you're right. I consider what Mr. Jenns is doing to be a sin. Because the institutions of our society have rotted so rapidly that his actions, his fortune, his career, none of it, rises to even the most modest of legally recognized infractions. In the eyes of the law, in the eyes of this body, his sins against our future are less problematic than a parking violation.

JUDGE TWO

You don't speak like a woman trying to change anyone's mind.

NNEOMA

You have all the reasoning in the world to reverse this ban order. Long before I filed my challenge, you had the power to reject it and affirm *our* rights. I have only to assume your disinclination to thus far do so is founded in Your Honors' confidence that the order is nothing less than legitimate.

(MORE)

NNEOMA (cont'd)

I may enjoy alliteration, but I do not presume myself to be skilled enough to defeat you with words.

Hence my reference to sin.

The version of *Do We Have Your Attention* that the detainee was accused of sharing ended with the book club scene. It ended with a glimpse into the future, where tomes of the human story were lost. To inaction.

But also lost to action. Action like that of Mr. Jenns. Action like that of the apathetic focus group members. Action like that of the officers, who occupied their time with a ban order. Action like that found in this courtroom.

If that book club scene turns out to be prescient, what will those young people, those very real young people, 80 years from now think? Of you?

I do not offer you a choice of legality. I offer you a choice of legacy. My only hope is that you understand the concept of shame well enough to recognize the gravity in what you are about to do.

JUDGE THREE

Shame? That's what you came here with?

NNEOMA

You've already made up your minds. My only hope is your pride.

JUDGE ONE

And if we are not moved by this profound insult to our conscience, not to mention the threat to our namesake, you're certainly aware the ban order deems unsuccessful challenges to its legitimacy - as violations of the order.

NNEOMA

I am, Your Honor.

JUDGE ONE

Then why file the challenge? As you intimated, you can't have walked into this courtroom today believing that what you were about to say would sway us. You're damning yourself.

NNEOMA

I guess... I... was also worried - what the members of that book club would think about me. Or even what the detainee in the interrogation scene might think. They're the only ones I see with any - real authority.

JUDGE FOUR

I think we've heard all we need to hear.

CAPTION over BLACK reads:

Durham Sci-Fi Writers Circle

Durham - 2021

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

The WRITER takes a sip of his drink, puts it down on the printed-out copy of *Do We Have Your Attention* in front of him, and opens his notebook. LAMONT, LESHANDRA, JUAN, PHONESAVANH, and BONITA are pulling out their own copies.

PHONESAVANH

So I have to know. Why the screenplay layout?

WRITER

Does there need to be a reason?

LESHANDRA

Of course you need a reason. That's ridiculous.

LAMONT

You don't have a reason?

LESHANDRA

Of course he has a reason.

WRITER

I have a reason, but I'm worried I've gone overboard.

JUAN

You're already worried you've gone overboard, but you wrote this much anyway?

PHONESAVANH

What's the reason?

WRITER

Is it overboard if the point is that we all seem to be playing our part, rather than tearing up the script and writing a better one?

LESHANDRA

Like I wanted to tear up this script?

Laughs.

WRITER

Perhaps.

LAMONT

That's your answer for why it's not that great?

WRITER

Perhaps it is.

Laughs.

PHONESAVANH

I've heard of meta within a story; I've never heard of meta for why it's so bad.

WRITER

It's my getaway vehicle.

JUAN

No pun intended.

LAMONT

Nice.

LESHANDRA

Is that really why you went with it?

WRITER

I don't know if that's the whole reason. I definitely think part of it was messing with the readers' minds after leaving the original movie premise regarding the hostages, and maybe having the reader a bit uneasy and always guessing as to what is really going on here and why this movie just keeps going and going.

LAMONT

And going.

JUAN

It's like there doesn't seem to be a satisfying end. Instead, it just keeps straying and gets more and more absurd.

PHONESAVANH

Ending with these authoritarian judges who are completely detached from the concerns that brought about the very movie they're enforcing a ban on.

JUAN

And *why* are they acting this way?

PHONESAVANH

Because that's the role they've been given.

WRITER

Exactly.

LESHANDRA

I don't know whether it's brilliant or corny as fuck.

WRITER

Can it not be both?

LAMONT

Maybe your novel is Schrodinger's cat.

Laughs.

WRITER

Maybe it is.

The Writer looks over at Bonita.

WRITER (cont'd)

Why are *you* so quiet over there?
What did you think?

BONITA

It's an impressive first draft.

WRITER

Impressive like a lot of pages or impressive writing?

BONITA

Both.

LAMONT

That means a lot of pages.

BONITA

No. That's not--

WRITER

It's ok. I know it's a bit all over the place. But I'm trying to weave a narrative about the intermeshing of power and protection and survival and desperation and morality and the absurdity of life when - you and everyone around you knows the ship is sinking, but the captain of the ship won't let anyone do what it takes to save it.

BONITA

But the captain didn't do that. We took care of Global Warming so long ago, it's hard to visualize it as a threat now.

JUAN

It's like if you wrote an apocalyptic piece about CFCs and the ozone layer.

PHONESAVANH

That's probably what I had the hardest time with. From a sci-fi perspective. I think generally it's a good idea. And I think, from what you've shown us so far, the writing is pretty good. But we're a sci-fi writing group, and I'm going to read it with a sci-fi writer's brain. And it just seems a little like you're asking too much of the reader.

WRITER

Why so?

PHONESAVANH

The story is set, aside from the book club scene, the story is set now, just in their world.

WRITER

That's right. 2021, but in *their* 2021.

PHONESAVANH

Then, like Bonita said, you're expecting readers to invest themselves into this ethical dilemma based on a threat they can't even relate to. We have to imagine a threat, right now - that is supposed to be almost insurmountable, that *we* know was dealt with easily.

WRITER

That's fair.

JUAN

That's only *because* we dealt with the threat so early. The longer you let something like that go, the more it spirals and gets harder to deal with, and so on. Besides, isn't that what science fiction is all about? Conceiving of what could be?

LESHANDRA

Yeah, but it's not just conceiving the science part of it. It's conceiving of humanity as being so stupid and greedy and apathetic that they would watch this fire run down the fuse, getting closer and closer to the bomb that's going to blow up over half the world, and they wouldn't stamp it out.

LAMONT

Human history is not all that great shakes.

LESHANDRA

Yeah, but do you believe the entirety of the world is just going to single file walk off the cliff?

LAMONT

I don't think it was implying the whole world. It would be the most powerful countries, the richest countries.

BONITA

Using the poorer countries as a cushion to land on.

PHONESAVANH

That's what I don't get. We're supposed to believe, for one, that even the greediest pigs on the planet would let something like this happen.
(MORE)

PHONESAVANH (cont'd)

And two, we're supposed to believe that there wouldn't be a war over this.

BONITA

Like a war against the powerful countries, to try to make them change their minds?

PHONESAVANH

I guess. Even if, let's say the United States and five other powerful nations were the obstacle, if the rest of the world got together and fought, it might be too much for them to withstand.

LAMONT

But that handful of nations will all likely have nuclear weapons.

LESHANDRA

Are you suggesting that the United States would nuke 75 percent of the planet in order to not make economic and infrastructure adjustments?

LAMONT

I think that's the whole premise of the story.

PHONESAVANH

Another reason I couldn't take it seriously.

JUAN

Does that mean you're on the side of violence?

PHONESAVANH

I didn't say that.

JUAN

You just said it would be rational for there to be a literal world war fought over this.

PHONESAVANH

That's different.

BONITA

How is that different? If anything, the world war is going to be a thousand times more catastrophic than the violence being floated in the first section of the book.

PHONESAVANH

Yeah, but which is going to get the job done? The way the book club talked about the wars that *did* come from doing nothing, the world war *we're* speculating about might be far less catastrophic. If the right people win.

LESHANDRA

But the point of the first part, with the whole Mr. Jenns thing, at least how I took it, was not to actually commit the violence. But to get those guarding their own interests to acknowledge what nonviolent strategy would get them to budge.

JUAN

That's if you're going one by one, with strategically chosen individuals, and hoping each of those people has not only got enough juice to make a difference, but hoping you can pull this ridiculous scenario off with enough of the *right* people.

BONITA

You're taking the scenario literally. There were also a couple of mentions in the book of it being about more than individuals. About systemic power.

JUAN

I'm taking it literally because I'm taking the sci-fi part of the story seriously.

PHONESAVANH

So even though it's the least amount of violence, we *don't* think the hostage idea is the way?

LESHANDRA

You think *war* is?

PHONESAVANH

I'm not saying war is the solution. But maybe an ultimatum.

LAMONT

You think countries so cold they would let the planet go to shit simply because they have all the goodies are going to let go of those goodies because weaker nations, who know they could be wiped out in an afternoon, threaten them with war?

PHONESAVANH

The nations you're referring to are not going to be made up of *all* rich people. If it's gotten this bad, there's probably crazy inequality. Which means the overwhelming majority of their populations are going to be screwed by Global Warming as well.

LAMONT

That's not how war works. As soon as one of those powerful countries is attacked, those poor powerless schmucks *in* that country are going to turn ultra-nationalist and start calling for the poor *nations* to be mowed off the map.

LESHANDRA

It depends on the PR.

PHONESAVANH

If the poorer nations message to the poor people within those richer countries that they're going to war to save their futures as well, maybe the vulnerable within those powerful countries would change sides and preempt there from even being a war.

LAMONT

That assumes that the powerful wouldn't put them down too.

PHONESAVANH

Maybe you're right.

LESHANDRA

What else chance is there?

WRITER

I think that's what the book is asking. At what point in the game do you begin to break the rules?

PHONESAVANH

That's interesting. I've read that in the years, even the months, before fascism takes over, there's this feeling of whether you're still making too big a deal out of everything or whether it's already too late and you waited too long. The people in the first part of this book. They really do seem to want a nonviolent solution, or else they would just start assassinating all these assholes.

But are they already too late?

BONITA

Maybe they are. But, like you said, they don't know it. And there's this part of them that wants to not resort to barbarity. So, in their minds, they're going to do everything they can to avoid that.

JUAN

They're taking hostages and torturing people.

LAMONT

It's a matter of scale.

JUAN

Oh really?

LAMONT

It is.

If over half the human race was looking down the barrel of an ecological gun, it's most definitely a matter of scale.

BONITA

It's a matter of language. And definitions. In the first part, they talk about what violence is. And if this whole Global Warming phenomenon is a form of violence.

And now *we're* here, talking about violence. But violence has different connotations.

(MORE)

BONITA (cont'd)

Unless you're like one of those hardcore Catholic pacifists, there's a serious difference between the violence of the aggressor and the violence of those defending against aggression. You were talking about the months before fascism takes over. What about the months leading to you finally having no choice but to address that kind of aggression? What if the violence has already started and you don't know it?

PHONESAVANH

Or won't acknowledge it, because you're afraid of what it means. For your options.

JUAN

I don't know if people are afraid of it, or they just prefer to see violence as a last resort.

BONITA

But why? If you had to punch another person, or maybe even temporarily disable them, or God forbid kill that person, to stop them from trying to hurt or kill you. We don't automatically label that violence. We label it self-defense. The same thing goes for using violence to stop someone who is going to hurt someone else, like a child. If someone is going to hurt a child, we don't refer to what was necessary as violence. We refer to it as force.

LAMONT

And this isn't trying to save one child. It's trying to save a few hundred million.

PHONESAVANH

What if the situation is so dire that violence can't be the last resort?

WRITER

Yep. I think I said something almost just like this with Mr. Maxwell.

BONITA

The way you set it up, it's like the teens feel like they're already in this war, but very few others in the book seem to know it, or believe it.

(MORE)

BONITA (cont'd)

If you take your setup of the whole Global Warming scenario seriously, it makes you feel insane. Like you're the victim of some rampaging imperial power, and the moment you get the idea to fight back, you're chastised for even the notion of using violence. Like you're the one contemplating invading *them*.

PHONESAVANH

They're not just chastised. In the end, people are being put on trial. Not for the act, but for even entertaining the discussion.

BONITA

It's because of those definitions of violence. If a law protects a company polluting the water, and that pollution causes cancer. Then that law is a form of violence. But no one in the media calls our laws violence. Or if an insurance company legally denies the surgery that could save your life, we don't call the insurance company an agent of violence.

LAMONT

Violence is the tool within your grasp.

BONITA

And when those judges use the ban order or any other legal orders to maintain a status quo that will inevitably result in mass death, they're using the tool within *their* grasp.

PHONESAVANH

The discussion we're having here, in that world, would be considered violence.

JUAN

Under that logic, isn't the person appearing before the court also cooperating in that violence? By even standing there and talking to these judges, as if it's not some cruel joke. By participating in this ruse of a conversation, shouldn't we hate her too? For playing along? If the situation is as dire as you're saying, isn't anyone *not* committing to violence at all times just some sell-out or collaborator or appeaser?

BONITA

I didn't say that the only answer was violence. I just said that it's not up to the greatest purveyors of violence to make that decision. Or the definitions.

LESHANDRA

You're only saying that because the book is fiction.
If we take your argument further, you could say the same about colonial aftermath, or inequality, or capitalism in general.
Or even what you said about pollution and insurance companies. Those are real things, not in a book but right now.
Or what about hunger? Or homelessness? Some would say we're in a class war all the time.

JUAN

The violence is just as real.

LESHANDRA

It's easy for us to say all this because we're not the ones that have to kidnap anyone, we're not the ones that have to torture anyone, and we're definitely not the ones who have to call for a freaking world war.

JUAN

What if next year they told us that microplastics were going to make half the population infertile, but the chemical companies were powerful enough to keep them in production? We already know about their prevalence in the oceans and the ground and in our bodies, and nothing's getting done about it. They're so ubiquitous now, even if we had conclusive proof they're causing that kind of damage, who's to say we *could* get rid of them?

LESHANDRA

Would we take the CEO of the chemical company hostage?
We haven't taken any of *our* billionaires hostage. There's no end in sight for a lot of what we deemed to be violence.

(MORE)

LESHANDRA (cont'd)
Aren't we all complicit in that violence, by not picking up the tool within our grasp?

BONITA
I'm not conceding, but...

Laughs.

BONITA (cont'd)
But, I'm starting to think the writing is a bit more impressive than I originally thought.

JUAN
It *is* a pretty good conversation we're having.

WRITER
So not such a bad book after all?

LAMONT
Not *so* bad.

WRITER
Man, that's good to hear.

PHONESAVANH
It *is* pretty good.

WRITER
Thanks, man. Did anyone else have anything before we move on to the ending stuff?

BONITA
Can we go back to the judges for a second?

WRITER
Sure.

BONITA
LeShandra was saying it was easy to nonchalantly talk about violence when you're not the one who has to perform the violence. And that reminded me of something I was thinking as I got to the judges scene, related to attitudes around violence.

(MORE)

BONITA (cont'd)

I thought it was interesting how the people who seem to be the most sure that violence can't even be a thought in the discussion were the officer in the questioning scene and the judges, the judges even more than the officer. But on the other side, the ones most sure violence should have been tried are those in the future book club who are looking back on their experiences of the worst of Global Warming.

LESHANDRA

Which do you think is right?

BONITA

I don't think either has to be right. I just think it's much easier for the judges to forbid a discussion that, for all they knew, could have produced a solution, when they're this privileged lot who will probably die before the most extreme consequences start showing up.

JUAN

Well, also because it's their job to think that.

PHONESAVANH

Their roles in society.

JUAN

It's kind of like we've been saying about the definition; they're only allowed to see one form of violence. One form of criminal.

BONITA

Where the definitions and perspectives on violence and who were the real criminals is completely flipped in the eyes of these people 80 years later.

LAMONT

It also proves the problem really *was* bad enough that people like Mr. Jenns, and maybe even the judges, simply couldn't save their reputations from even the most generous history.

LESHANDRA

You can almost see these same judges in the future becoming a cliché, like the crew rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

LAMONT

All the better reason to make them so smug.

JUAN

Doesn't that make the reader smug as well, when like us they may think they know the answer, but they really don't?

WRITER

That's why I'm not ending with the judges. I want to get the reader to that point of thinking they're superior to these pompous judges, and then I want to go in a different direction to end it.

LESHANDRA

Somewhere they don't see coming.

WRITER

Hopefully.

BONITA

Have you written *any* of that yet?

WRITER

Not yet. I wanted to talk to you all first.

LAMONT

What if you go even deeper into the judicial part? What if you go into the conversation they have on the committee that ordered the ban? And you get to see the arguments they make as to why this can't be seen.

JUAN

Would the committee be less or more smug than the judges?

LAMONT

Probably less, because they're not in public. *Their* conversation is not for show.

PHONESAVANH

That would also mean their conversation might be more honest.

LESHANDRA

It would be even more cynical.

JUAN

And more infuriating.

LAMONT

It would be yet another layer of people with God complexes. Telling the mere mortals what they're allowed to do.

WRITER

Are you all saying my book is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

Laughs.

LESHANDRA

Definitely not.

LAMONT

But the discussion about violence is definitely a forbidden fruit.

JUAN

This kind of discussion.

BONITA

What if the film isn't even made yet?
The way it is now, with the judges being this kind of united front unconcerned with real justice, implies some kind of authoritarian government.
What if everything we've read so far has just been the screenwriter writing this on his computer?
And *that* actually gets picked up on *this government's* surveillance. Or maybe the writer tells a friend and *that* gets picked up.
And this committee is debating behind the scenes about whether the ideas in this first draft are worth preemptively banning, or whatever.

LESHANDRA

Or worth letting the writer expand upon them any further.

JUAN

You mean before it's even done?

BONITA

Yeah. Like this is the first draft, and the committee is deciding whether they'll even allow him to finish it. Like whether to go ahead and arrest him.

JUAN

So they don't even give the writer time to release it.

LAMONT

Or maybe even the chance to change his mind, and make it different in the later drafts.

LESHANDRA

And this whole concept, and all that comes out of it, never fully makes it out of this one person's computer. Or really even out of their head.

PHONESAVANH

Kind of like the way the book club members said the film never got made, and that the book originally didn't make a splash.

LAMONT

I kind of like that even better.

BONITA

The arguments would be similar to the ones in the scene with the judges. It just drives home the point about the power of ideas.

PHONESAVANH

It's not even about what you're allowed to do in such dire times. It's about what you're allowed to talk about.

JUAN

Allowed to think.

LAMONT

That's kind of the point though. To keep authority in times that *you've* made this bad, you have to tighten the control all the way down to what people are allowed to think.

LESHANDRA

And to keep them focused on other things that don't have anything to do with the reality they're in.

PHONESAVANH

So much so that they're not even living in reality.

BONITA

It's not even if the writer has the right to release it. It's if anyone in society has the right to receive such ideas.

WRITER

Do we see what happens to the writer? Is the writer in prison for even having the idea?

LESHANDRA

Does that then become the real ending?

JUAN

Do they bring the writer before this committee and grill them?

LAMONT

That would be too much like the judges scene.

JUAN

But it would make it more absurd. I thought that's kind of what you were going for.

WRITER

You're right. But I don't know where the line is between effective absurdity and it being too much. You know?

JUAN

I guess you could drag it out forever.

PHONESAVANH

And at some point, you really lose the reader for good.

WRITER

Who's to say I haven't already done that with this?

JUAN

Depends on the reader.

The thought stays, a moment.

LAMONT

What if it's not a preemptive thing? What if it's been released, but instead of it being a federal government ban committee, it's different states deciding whether they're going to ban it? Some do, some don't. But you show why certain states decide to ban it, while others decide not to.

PHONESAVANH

Or maybe some states decide to ban it for a different reason than the other states. In one state, it's because of this scene. In a different state, it's because of another.

WRITER

So I would juxtapose the different deliberations.

BONITA

It showcases the different values of the different states, or committees within that state.

LAMONT

And again, the arbitrariness and absurdity of such discussions.

JUAN

But what if instead of some states not banning it, the law under the federal authority is that all states must ban it, but the states are given the *freedom* to decide why?

LESHANDRA

As long as the film is banned, they don't care what the criteria was.

JUAN

It's like a demonstration of freedom within total rule.

WRITER

I like that. It brings it back to the concept of what's acceptable discourse.

LESHANDRA

Then what if you took that and went a little further? What if, like you said, this authoritarian government *does* want to give the appearance of freedom, so they give the movie an official rating, like D for dangerous or something, but still allow it to be shown in theaters? The only catch is that anyone going to see it has to register their name and information and then sign a document promising they won't share their thoughts about the film with anyone else.

LAMONT

Damn, that's some layers of false freedom.

BONITA

But if you did it like that, then maybe you could also include a group of friends who all went and saw it separately, but then meet up later to talk about it in secret. And what their conversation looks like when they know that conversation is illegal.

PHONESAVANH

Then you could flirt with whether you want them to be inspired to imitate the violence in the movie, maybe because of how authoritarian things have become. And that the government is creating its own radicals.

LAMONT

Like telling a kid they can't do something makes them only want to do it that much more.

PHONESAVANH

Yet with this, it's like the government telling their citizenry that this is the only thing dangerous to us, thus this is the only thing that we think will work.

The Writer looks around and smiles.

WRITER

I really dig this. It gives me a lot to think about.
Anybody else got any ideas?

JUAN

What if you end it with the opening scene of
what's supposed to be the sequel?

WRITER

Like what?
What do you see being the sequel?

JUAN

It's wide open. But you would want to make it
really tie in to what this was supposed to get
across.

LESHANDRA

Like there's not really supposed to *be* a sequel.
The hint at a sequel is like a twist that forces you
to deal with *this* movie, and what's in *it*.

WRITER

What would that be?

JUAN

Maybe it goes back to the hostage scene, except
the hostage this time is a writer who's being
tasked with writing the sequel.
But the only way they can write the sequel is to
understand what was learned from the first
movie. What the real outcome of the first movie
is.

LAMONT

If that's it, then the first movie has to be a failure.
Or else there'd be no reason to write a sequel.

JUAN

Good point.

LESHANDRA

I'm assuming the Mr. Maxwell character is the
writer of the original?

JUAN

I think that makes the most sense. Otherwise, it's the teens. Which kind of disrupts the twist you had in the hostage scene at the end. Which I liked.

PHONESAVANH

I do like the idea of this one failing, and the task being passed onto someone else. Like it's being passed onto anyone in that society.

LESHANDRA

It makes you put yourself back in that same place. Where I kind of feel you were let out of with the judges.

BONITA

Then how do you do *that*? How do you make it clear that the writer of the sequel is actually the person watching this failed movie? How do you do that without it looking super cheesy?

LAMONT

Well, remember, in both the hostage part and the focus group part, just how many times it shows or kind of reveals who is on one end or the other of a laptop screen. If you think you're ending with the judges scene or maybe even one of the endings we were just talking about, what if - at the *very* end, the credits roll again, but half the screen is someone staring at their laptop while those same credits roll? And it's like they have to wrestle with what to do with what they just watched.

WRITER

Do we just assume it's in their hands now?

LAMONT

I don't know. It seems too much to have the last of the credits say something like "to be continued - by you" or "we look forward to your sequel" or something like that. Maybe the person just stares at the screen for a really long time after the credits, and then the screen goes blank.

WRITER

I'm not sure.
I like the implication, but it would definitely
have to be way more subtle.
It's something to think about for sure though.

Anybody got any other sequel ideas?

Everyone searches their thoughts.

PHONESAVANH

What if you make yourself as the author not
actually from this *time*, and I don't mean just
this dimension where we fixed Global Warming,
but what if you as the author were both from a
dimension where they *didn't* get it done, but
from the same chronological time as the book
club scene?

LESHANDRA

80 years from now.

WRITER

Hmmm. That definitely shifts the perspective.

BONITA

It kind of makes you question what you thought
about whether the author is for or against
violence.

LESHANDRA

If the author is from our time chronologically,
it's easier to believe they're really trying to keep
within a nonviolent framework of strategies.

LAMONT

But if it's from 80 years in the future, in their
world, it's a whole different ball game.

WRITER

And what is the sequel about?

PHONESAVANH

Maybe we find out *Do We Have Your Attention* was the book *that author* wrote to make people think about this new world-threatening thing that's come along and now they have to deal with, but haven't seemed to do so adequately yet.

JUAN

Which makes it even more ironic because they were so sure of themselves about what needed to be done 80 years *before* about Global Warming.

LESHANDRA

It makes them into hypocrites, talking big about violence when they're ignoring maybe something on the horizon just as scary.

LAMONT

You could even bring it back to the hostage thing we were just talking about, and the writer being in the Mr. Maxwell position. Maybe it's still 80 years from now, in their world, but this whole movie, book, whatever, was the result of *him* being taken hostage and given the task of convincing *his* society to act on this looming problem they have now. And the writer reached back to the whole Global Warming thing as this metaphorical argument.

BONITA

So the quote unquote real writer, who's also been taken hostage, uses their own hostage situation in the work they're being forced to write.

PHONESAVANH

Yeah, maybe that's the only problem. Looking at it like that, you could foresee it going on like this forever and ever into the future of failed attempts to address these periodic threats that keep popping up.

LAMONT

Maybe that's what society is.

JUAN

It's also a matter of what is *learned* from each failure.

LAMONT

But evidently not enough to avoid the failure.

LESHANDRA

Except we *did* avoid it.

WRITER

Which brings us back to the beginning of whether this idea, or any of these ideas, is worth the reader's time.

No one offers, either way.

BONITA

What if the sequel is actually the writer of all this - beginning to write the sequel, but it's from the prison they were put in for writing the original?

LAMONT

After what we were talking about, with them picking him up before he could put it out?

BONITA

Yeah, like maybe his idea now is that he could get cameras smuggled in and make the new film with prisoners.

PHONESAVANH

Representing imprisoned imaginations.

JUAN

Or the imagination of those imprisoned.

PHONESAVANH

Isn't that the same thing?

JUAN

I don't know. I don't think so.

BONITA

I don't know either. But I think there could be something there.

LESHANDRA

I like the prison angle. But what if we're making it too complicated? What if we bring it back to the reality of the original first scene, and it's the teens who are in prison for doing what they did to Mr. Jenns and Mr. Maxwell?

LAMONT

Like they got caught and are serving sentence for trying to save the world.

LESHANDRA

Not just serving sentence. They're thinking about what their next moves are.

PHONESAVANH

What options do they have, if they're locked up? Do we go with what Bonita was saying? Like maybe have their next moves not be real action, because they're locked up. But their next moves be like a stage play they put together about what the next moves *of the movement* should be. And they get other prisoners to play roles in this play. And the idea is that maybe they can eventually get the script out, or even film a performance of the play and get it out, or something like that.

LAMONT

Maybe that gets into the politics within the prison itself. And if they're ultimately allowed to have the other prisoners see this play.

LESHANDRA

It could be a play, it could be an indie film shot guerilla style in the prison, it could be anything. The whole thing about the sequel coming from inside the prison is that they've already lost their freedom, and there's not much left to do to them. So, in a way, it kind of frees up their inhibitions, by seeing so blatantly the unjust limitations being forced upon them.

JUAN

Do any of them change their minds? Feel remorse, for what they did?

PHONESAVANH

Maybe that can be a part of it too.

LAMONT

Maybe the ones who didn't change their mind
take the ones *who did* hostage?

Laughs.

LAMONT (cont'd)

I know. I saw it as I was saying it.

WRITER

No, but this is all really good stuff.
This is gonna help when I--

JUAN

Ok, wait, I got one more.
What about a fast forward to the future, in their
world, where the film *did* work? But they don't
end up getting credit for it.

LESHANDRA

Like maybe things start to happen, and the
powerful can see what's up ahead, so they co-opt
the direction of things, and put enough spin on
things to where they can take credit.

PHONESAVANH

Not just that, the film is eventually vilified for
being a distraction from what the powerful were
already in the works of doing. At least that's the
spin.

LAMONT

Maybe there's a rival movement, or maybe even
another movie about Global Warming, that tries
something completely different, goes in a much
safer direction, and they denounce the suggested
discussion in *Do We Have Your Attention*. And
the powerful, feeling the vibrations, embrace
that other one - so no one gets any ideas that *Do
We Have Your Attention* had anything good to
say.

BONITA

And in the end, they still figure out a reason to ban *Do We Have Your Attention*. Even after they've actually fixed things with Global Warming.

WRITER

Ooof, that's rough. It's like the least of the twists, but it stings only slightly worse than everything failing.

BONITA

That's because it's probably the closest to what would really happen.

WRITER

The question is, do I want to go in a direction that leaves hope, that leaves no hope, or that just goes sideways?

JUAN

Leaving room for a sequel, you could do any of them.

PHONESAVANH

Then what about a prequel? We said you could play around with the idea that Mr. Maxwell was tasked with writing this. What are the different scenarios that could have happened before this, but that could be just as wild?

LESHANDRA

If we go back to what we were talking about with the prison idea, what if *Do We Have Your Attention* was written from a prison cell? Then you could explore how the writer landed in prison, where he writes this epicly dangerous story.

LAMONT

That story could be just as crazy as this one.

WRITER

But then do I have to write that book too?

BONITA

Look at this fool asking as if he already knows
this one is going to be a big hit.

Laughs.

WRITER

Hell, with y'all pumping me full of these good
ideas, I feel like I can't fail now.

JUAN

I'm just gonna be looking for my royalty check.

LAMONT

Yeah.

WRITER

Now see, how y'all gonna do me like that?

JUAN

Like what?

WRITER

Y'all throw out all these great storylines,
knowing if I don't want to pay y'all's asses some
royalties, I'm gonna have to come up with
something even more outlandish.

BONITA

Good luck.

PHONESAVANH

That was the plan.

LESHANDRA

If you can come up with something more
outlandish than this, I want to see it.

WRITER

We'll see.

LESHANDRA

Oh, we'll see.

JUAN

We'll see.

WRITER

We'll see.

Laughs.

CAPTION over BLACK reads:

The Pitch

INT. CORNER OFFICE - DAY

PRODUCER

Look, I know you're passionate about Climate Change. *I'm* passionate about Climate Change. But this? I don't even know what this is. And what is it with this ending - where you don't even get an ending, just them giving suggestions for endings? What is that?

DIRECTOR

I admit. It's not a normal film project.

PRODUCER

That's the understatement of the millennium. This is weird at best, and weird is not enough to get greenlit. You know that. If you want to rework the first part, with the hostage, make it a feature, I might be interested in that.

DIRECTOR

It's a package deal.

PRODUCER

Says who?

DIRECTOR

Says the author.

PRODUCER

The author is a fucking nobody.

DIRECTOR

Everybody's a nobody until they get a hit.

PRODUCER

This is not a hit. It's not even a film. It's more like an art school graduate thesis. How do you even know this guy?

DIRECTOR

I don't know him.

(MORE)

DIRECTOR (cont'd)

He's a friend of a friend. That friend asked if I would give it a read.

PRODUCER

So your friend hands you what amounts to an experimental book of stage plays that's neither been published nor produced, and you decide you have to adapt and direct it for the screen?

DIRECTOR

I think there's something there.

PRODUCER

Then let it be a book. Let it get produced for the stage. If it catches fire, then we can revisit it.

DIRECTOR

If this is going to get made, it has to get made now.

PRODUCER

If it was good, it would have been published by now.

DIRECTOR

He just wrote it this year. And it will get published.

PRODUCER

Only if you make it as a movie.

DIRECTOR

It's a good project.

PRODUCER

I'm taking this meeting because I like you; I think you're immensely talented. But this is--

DIRECTOR

You think I'm talented because of the risks I've taken.

PRODUCER

I've taken risks too.

DIRECTOR

And that's why I requested the meeting.

PRODUCER

If this were just a risk, I would consider it.

DIRECTOR

You're not giving it a fair chance.

PRODUCER

I can tell a loser when I see one.

DIRECTOR

You know my track record. I've never had a flop.

PRODUCER

You're a good director. Hell, you're a great director. And that's not something I just say. I mean it.

But even you can't pull this off.

DIRECTOR

Just hear me out.

PRODUCER

What's there to hear? It's not a film. If you expanded out the middle parts, it's possible it's a mini-series. But TV is not going to--

DIRECTOR

It's a film. It's got to be one experience.

PRODUCER

Your notes said you want to play out each suggested ending given by the Writers Group members, and maybe even add more of them.

DIRECTOR

The author and I discussed making the endings more and more vulgar, saving the most vulgar for last.

PRODUCER

You do that, and the shit will end up 4 hours.

DIRECTOR

Maybe 5.

(MORE)

DIRECTOR (cont'd)

The *time* is the point. It's all the focus on these possible magical endings, instead of what we should be focused on in *avoiding* them all.

PRODUCER

5 hours of dialogue?

DIRECTOR

It'll keep their attention.

PRODUCER

You've got an intermission built into the fucking script.

DIRECTOR

It's a break for discussion.

PRODUCER

That's great. Maybe the audience can figure out what the hell it is they're watching.

DIRECTOR

You're making it out to be way more complex than it is.

PRODUCER

Are you kidding me? First it's a film, then it's not, then it is, then it's not. First it's about Climate Change, then it's about something else, then kind of about Climate Change, then kind of not. Never mind it weaving between this time over here and that reality over there. It lost the thread so many times, I almost forgot what the original story even was. And if you tell me that's what the author intended, because it's some kind of brilliant meta metaphor, I'm going to beat you to death with the script.

DIRECTOR

Everything in the script serves a purpose.

PRODUCER

That's assuming anyone is going to put up with it.

DIRECTOR

Are you paying attention to what's going on around us? It couldn't be more timely. There's literally millions of kids freaked the fuck out over their future.

PRODUCER

That doesn't mean those kids are going to buy tickets.

DIRECTOR

Why wouldn't they?

PRODUCER

It's not a movie. It's a fucking conference.

DIRECTOR

It's an event.

PRODUCER

By the time you're done with it, it'll be a *half-day* event.

DIRECTOR

So? Young people do music festivals all the time.

PRODUCER

That's because music festivals are fun. And you can take a shit load of drugs. This is not that.

DIRECTOR

There's a market for this.

PRODUCER

No way. It's too meta, it's too cerebral, too philosophical.

DIRECTOR

Since when do you make comic book movies?

PRODUCER

I'm all for making smart movies. And experimental movies. But this whole jerkapalooza? No one's going to take it seriously. The critics will burn you at the stake.

DIRECTOR

Critical success isn't going to get us any closer to a solution.

PRODUCER

And you think this film will?
You know I care about the environment. When your agent told me you had a novel take on the Climate Crisis, I was eager to read it. And I'm not saying there aren't novel parts to it. But novelty is not enough.

DIRECTOR

When was the last time a movie did something no movie has ever done before?

PRODUCER

Sometimes things aren't done for good reason.

DIRECTOR

It'll get attention just for the attempt.

PRODUCER

Attention is different than commitment.
Watching a multiple-hour movie is a commitment.
Watching a movie in so many parts is a commitment.
Asking people to talk to strangers - is a commitment. Most of these kids can barely look you in the eye; you think you're going to recreate the salons of yesteryear?

DIRECTOR

The film is not the point. It's the dialogue that comes out of it.

PRODUCER

But that's *my* point. These kids barely talk to their friends when they're sitting at the same table in a restaurant. You think they're going to instantly turn into campers around the bonfire? And what's there to discuss? Every section, you dissect the section before it. You're supposed to show, not tell.

DIRECTOR

The exposition is intentional.

PRODUCER

Oh yeah? Well, it comes off as you not trusting the audience.

DIRECTOR

I *don't* trust them. Things are where they're at because no one has been willing to ask questions that reflect the true threat.

PRODUCER

That may be true, but you can't make art if you don't trust what the audience will do with it.

DIRECTOR

Maybe I'm not making art. Or maybe I'm making a different type of art.

PRODUCER

Are you listening to yourself? Do you know how pretentious that sounds?

DIRECTOR

It's not pretentious; it's patronizing.

PRODUCER

Even better. You know how much kids *love* being condescended to.

DIRECTOR

It's better than lying to them.

PRODUCER

You just said you don't trust the audience.

DIRECTOR

But I'm not lying to them. I'm manipulating them.

PRODUCER

Manipulating is a form of lying.

DIRECTOR

Not if you're up front with it.

(MORE)

DIRECTOR (cont'd)

You don't believe people will come out to something like this. But what if we make it explicit in the marketing?

"This movie is not entertainment. This movie is meant to manipulate you. Somewhere between art and propaganda, it is an experiment. On you. Do you think you're smart enough to figure out what it wants? Do you think you're smart enough to know whether to resist or to give in? One day of your life. Could change everything. Your future depends on this movie. Do We Have Your Attention?"

PRODUCER

You're nuts.

DIRECTOR

They'll take it as a challenge. They'll show up just for the challenge.

PRODUCER

They'll show up to be patronized?

DIRECTOR

They will show up to be manipulated. But only if we tell them that up front. That way they have it in the back of their mind as they ask the same questions you did.

PRODUCER

Like why all the exposition?

DIRECTOR

Exactly. You said show, not tell. But this is an interactive piece. Where the audience does the showing.

PRODUCER

Audiences aren't used to that.

DIRECTOR

Audiences aren't used to their planet burning the fuck up either. They have to know there are certain expectations of them, or else they'll look at it like an art film.

(MORE)

DIRECTOR (cont'd)

If all people do is guess what stood for this and what metaphor was that, then it's an abject failure.

I don't want people leaving the theater sniffing their fucking farts.

PRODUCER

Then what *do* you want from them?

DIRECTOR

I don't know. It's an experiment.

PRODUCER

An experiment or a game?

DIRECTOR

It's more like a provocation. Leading them so far from the original premise is kind of like fucking with them.

PRODUCER

More like shaming them.

DIRECTOR

Not just them. All of us. Myself included. The author included. We should all be ashamed. A movie like this ever being conceived of is a show of collective shame. Just like the characters analyzing all the previous scenes demonstrates how misguided our focus is and how trivial our discussions have been. How we got this far away from the decisions we need to make.

PRODUCER

And you think they're going to get that?

DIRECTOR

I know they're going to get it. Because I'm going to make them get it.

PRODUCER

Well, I didn't get it.

DIRECTOR

That's because I didn't give you the ending.

PRODUCER

I thought all the stupid Writers Group suggestions was the ending.

DIRECTOR

I couldn't give away the twist at the end.

PRODUCER

The twist at the end is me not giving you the money to make this movie.

DIRECTOR

Come on. You know you could sell this. You've put out some of the strangest films I've ever seen. And you made money. You know you can sell this.

PRODUCER

I don't know that at all.

DIRECTOR

Even if it doesn't work in the theaters, it'll become a cult hit. I promise. You're not going to lose money.

PRODUCER

It's not the money. Well, it is the money. But it's not.

DIRECTOR

Then what is it?

PRODUCER

All studios have flops. But if this flops, it's different. I look like I took a gamble for the wrong reason.

DIRECTOR

Saving the planet is the wrong reason?

PRODUCER

No one in my cohort is going to see it that way.

DIRECTOR

Because of the not-so-subtle implications surrounding capitalism?

PRODUCER

That's part of it.

DIRECTOR

As long as you show them you made money from it, all will be forgiven.

PRODUCER

Not all.

DIRECTOR

Then what else is it?
Is it about the violence? Because the last time I checked, your crown has some pretty fucking violent gems in it.

PRODUCER

That was violence in the good way. This is not violence in the good way.

DIRECTOR

No one in the film even gets touched. The worst thing that happens is they imply violence.

PRODUCER

The worst thing that happens is they talk about violence. And not in the good way.

DIRECTOR

What is it with this good way shit? What the fuck is good violence?

PRODUCER

Grow the fuck up, you know what good violence is.

DIRECTOR

Then say it.

PRODUCER

Good violence is the violence that doesn't happen to people like us, or it's...

DIRECTOR

Or it's what?

PRODUCER

Or - it's violence that happens in our favor.

DIRECTOR

And you don't find anything wrong with that?

PRODUCER

No more than you have, since you joined the club.

DIRECTOR

Ok, fair enough. Whatever.
It's bad violence. They talk about it. So what?

PRODUCER

So what - is you'd have been better off just showing Mr. Jenns getting tortured and killed. Instead, you have everyone mull over whether that's an acceptable course of action for the rest of the film.

DIRECTOR

How is that worse than showing it happen?

PRODUCER

You show it, you move on. People get a nut in their pants, then go home and wash the dishes. It's fiction. And it stays fiction.
What you're doing, suggesting it's an option? That's not fiction.

DIRECTOR

I'm not suggesting it's an option. I'm suggesting it's inevitable.

PRODUCER

Either way, you're suggesting it.

DIRECTOR

The film is about finding a nonviolent solution. From beginning to end.

PRODUCER

If that's true, then why do so many people in the script imply that they understand violence being tried?

DIRECTOR

Because it's a warning. It's a fucking preemptive prophecy. Violence is coming. And if you want to deny it, you're going to be as disappointed as the motherfuckers who keep denying Climate Change is going to get worse.

PRODUCER

I'm not denying anything.

DIRECTOR

Well, you seem to be shocked that this is on the horizon.
We can't just fuck over on people this bad, with a violence they know is going to be worse than anything we've ever seen, and not expect those people to use violence to fight back.

PRODUCER

What's with this "we" shit?

DIRECTOR

Tell me you don't have shares in fossil fuels.

PRODUCER

Tell me *you* don't.

DIRECTOR

That's why I said we.

PRODUCER

So if I divest, will you drop this?

DIRECTOR

Stocks are only a small part of it. It's the industry you have power in. That I have power in.
How many movies have offered a serious take on what has to be done about Climate Change? On *why* we're not doing it?
The movie isn't about a mixed-up band of teens kidnapping some 5th Avenue asshole. It's about all of us acknowledging we have a place in this. And yes, we have power. And immense fucking privilege.

PRODUCER

There's different ways to say that.

DIRECTOR

Not to people like us. People like us have to be scared into it.

PRODUCER

That's bullshit.

DIRECTOR

Then tell me, when are you going to get arrested? When are you going to risk something precious to you?
We've got more money than we could have ever dreamed. Why haven't we taken more chances when it comes to this subject matter? Where's our sacrifice?

PRODUCER

Don't talk valor to me. It's self-righteous. You sound like the addict who just got clean telling everyone else not to party.

DIRECTOR

You're right. I've been signing my checks to the same charities you have. But I know now, I've got to do more. And I'm asking you to join me.

PRODUCER

Pushing violence is not courageous.

DIRECTOR

I'm telling you. The author wants nonviolence, and I want nonviolence. All this is - is us doing our part to ensure a nonviolent solution.

PRODUCER

And what if the audience doesn't see it that way? What if the critics don't see it that way?

DIRECTOR

You mean what if our peers don't see it that way?

PRODUCER

What if?

DIRECTOR

Then I'll tell them. I'll call everyone we know and tell them. And I'll do a press tour just to drive the point home to viewers.

PRODUCER

It doesn't matter what you say you believe, or even what you really believe. If some shit goes down, critics will paint the press tour as covering your ass and the movie as a wink and a nod.

DIRECTOR

I'll have the cast do the tour with me. I'll get the author too.

PRODUCER

You don't get it. This kind of shit takes on a life of its own. If anyone is underestimating the project, it's you.

Did you ever stop to ask yourself: What if they don't care what you think? Or what the author thinks?

What if they care what the characters think?

What if the characters are more persuasive than you are?

DIRECTOR

As much as I *am* for nonviolence, the truth is it doesn't matter whether we're for violence or against violence. What matters is a solution getting past the institutions.

Who cares if this film is an outright call for violence? That's of almost no significance, compared to what is ahead of us.

And don't give me that bad strategy backfiring shit. We're a fucking millimeter away from the point of no return.

Now, I'm telling you I'm for nonviolence. And I *think* you know me well enough to know I'm not lying. But my biggest concern is finding a solution. And I can't make any guarantees that the solution is going to look like, or that violence won't be at least some part of that.

PRODUCER

But why the hard sell on violence throughout the script?

DIRECTOR

Because there's different audiences. Even if the big players don't see this movie, they'll get wind of it. And they need to know. The violence they're committing, the violence we're committing, is not going unnoticed. And the system isn't infallible. Eventually the autopilot is going to run into something the engineers didn't prepare for. Then you crash.

PRODUCER

And you know what happens after a crash? Lawsuits. Lawsuits for everyone in the zip code.

DIRECTOR

We have insurance for that.

PRODUCER

If it were only that simple.

DIRECTOR

It is that simple.

PRODUCER

It's a headache I don't need.

DIRECTOR

That's your answer? In the face of this future?

PRODUCER

You know this movie is not the only way you can contribute.

DIRECTOR

I started giving to the nonprofits two decades ago. Half those organizations are now relying on funding from the very industries they're supposed to be fighting.

PRODUCER

Then go start your own. You'd be a hell of a spokesperson.

DIRECTOR

Spokesperson for what? What the fuck am I going to say?

(MORE)

DIRECTOR (cont'd)

"Listen to me and the celebrity friends I had to beg and plead before they would be a part of this..."

I might as well sign another fucking petition.

PRODUCER

I'm not even saying it can't be a movie. But why *this* movie?

DIRECTOR

I don't know what to tell you other than I have to do this.

PRODUCER

I understand that you have to do *something*. But you don't have to do *this*.

DIRECTOR

But I do. And you have to do it too.

Can you not see? This is not the warning I want to make. But I'm making it to try and save my friends.

I'm trying to save you. And myself. This is as much for us as it is for the fucking commoner. But the commoners are out there. And the temperature is going the fuck up. And if you can remember what it was like to be one of them, you know. People are not going to wait around forever as the system kills them.

We can wait for it. But I care about our friends, even if most of them are as heartless as we've been.

So I'm not going to wait. Scaring our friends into real action is a much better way of recognizing there's a few less people at the cocktail party.

And maybe you're right. Maybe this isn't *the* way. But it's one way. And, short of me taking an AR to the next Exxon shareholder meeting, I don't know any other ways right now that are going to deliver the message with any more force.

PRODUCER

You see, it's that mentality that's going to wind us all up in a knot.

DIRECTOR

We'll lose the planet before we lose freedom of speech.

PRODUCER

Jesus Fucking Christ. Are you listening to yourself? Freedom of speech. We don't have freedom of speech. We have amplitude of speech. And amplitude is a matter of purchasing power. When you give your couple grand to that politician, and then give another twenty grand to their Super PAC, you think you're participating in some egalitarian market of deliberative dialogue? Your money is there to eclipse any and all honesty. Any and all real debate. It's about getting the most and loudest megaphones. It's about pumping the voters full of fat until election day. So we can spend the next two years eating their votes like it's fucking foie gras.

Just because the policies you and I may want are better for those voters than the other side doesn't mean it's a game of equals. The point is that if we switched over and joined all the oil and coal worshipping cocksuckers, if we just woke up tomorrow and said fuck the people we used to be. We could do that. We could make sure those poor fuckers are fucked.

No matter how much the salt of the earth use their First Amendment, we could fuck them.

Because we can outspend them.

And right now, even though we're on the right side of this, we can't get around the fact that the other side can outspend us. And they're going to outspend us.

DIRECTOR

It's more than just money. That's why it has the extreme premise.

PRODUCER

Let's say you're right. Let's say you can find a way that makes philosophical reflection on the definition of violence sell popcorn and sodas.

Let's say this script were a hundred times better and I was rock hard from the moment I started reading it.

(MORE)

PRODUCER (cont'd)

I still wouldn't put it into production.
Because I know. I know more than you believe.
Freedom of speech isn't real. It's just another god
the hopeless pray to.

DIRECTOR

What are you saying?

PRODUCER

If I give you the money to make this movie, you
don't think word is going to get out? You don't
think our friends in *certain industries* are going
to confer on what to do about it?
You don't think they're going to all ante up a
little pocket change and hire some PR firm to
start a pressure campaign on theaters and
streaming services not to carry this "blatant
incitement to violence"?
Not because it is violent. But because you used
violence to make the point.
For all I know, this could be the movie that really
does save the planet. But it'll never see the first
movie screen.

That's the punchline. If violence is the premise,
they're not going to let you save them *from* that
violence.

DIRECTOR

But you're acknowledging that I'm trying to save
them.
The before it's too late part of the movie is not
about Climate Change. It's about the violence.
It's about saving *us*.

PRODUCER

There's a bigger violence.

DIRECTOR

And what's that?

PRODUCER

Going back to what we used to be.
Why do you think the splats on the streets
increase when the stock market crashes?
(MORE)

PRODUCER (cont'd)

It's not like these people aren't going to survive being *only* middle class, again. It's that they refuse to survive like that.

DIRECTOR

No one's talking about making the rich poor. We're talking about adjusting to a new reality where we might have slightly less than we had, in the short term. If anything, they should be jumping at the chance.

I like what we have to keep. I want to keep it. But they're going to stall so long they fuck it up for the rest of us.

When all they have to do is quit being complicit in the violence taking place right now.

That's all.

Quit funding it. Quit supporting it. Quit ensuring it.

We do that and we get to keep 70 percent of the playground.

PRODUCER

This isn't the way to convince me. I'm not our friends.

DIRECTOR

But you're the one I have to convince.

PRODUCER

It won't be a good movie.

DIRECTOR

It doesn't have to be a good movie. It just has to work.

I believe in the movie. But it's not about the movie.

It's about the window. We only have so much time.

PRODUCER

When you have no reason to believe giving up everything would even make a difference, you have all the time in the world.

DIRECTOR

Then we might as well be masters on the plantation, waiting to get murdered in our sleep.

PRODUCER

And you know what that would do? It would make it worse for the slaves on the next plantation over.

DIRECTOR

Maybe so. But that doesn't mean it won't happen again. On the next plantation over. It also doesn't make the masters right. We may debate whether it was wrong for the entire family to be killed in the revolt; we may acknowledge the repercussions for others enslaved. But we can't deny them the righteousness of trying to free themselves. Of trying to survive, with some kind of say in their lives.

If the Jim Crow South would have produced an era where black people *only* resisted with violence. Regardless of the outcome, it wouldn't have changed *why* they had to resist.

Whether it's Jews and Poles and Slavs and Gypsies before the death camps. Or Indians during Victorian brutality. You can't just say violence is not an option when a people are on their way to destruction.

If someone really did the worst things the movie implies, over and over, and it didn't work, and instead it backfired and got all the bad press in the world. It wouldn't even be a blip in history. Because it wouldn't change the fact of what's coming with the climate. Or the morality of trying to find a solution.

If we had a full-on civil war over this, and the forces ushering in Climate Change won that war? You think a hundred years from now the rebels are going to be seen as the bad guys?

I don't want violence. I don't want violence. I don't want violence. I don't believe - in violence. I'll say it a thousand times if it matters. But not stopping violence, or at least not fighting against violence, this type of violence, is a form of fucking violence.

(MORE)

DIRECTOR (cont'd)

Like everyone who stands by and watches a people get slaughtered are a part of that violence.

I don't want people to watch the movie and turn to violence. I just want them to not do nothing. Right now there's too many of us not doing anything. If everyone, and I mean everyone, put some form of concerted effort to turning the ship around, institutionally, politically, economically, it would be enough. And no one would have to resort to violence.

But until that happens, they're just making violence a certainty. They're ensuring that what little nonviolence is being tried will not be enough. And eventually those people will give up. Just like JFK said with that whole "those who make peaceful solutions impossible make violence inevitable" quote.

PRODUCER

You're using Jack Kennedy to make your point now?

DIRECTOR

How long are a people expected to lobby peacefully, while they're being violently oppressed?

PRODUCER

If they're the *oppressed*, forever.

DIRECTOR

I can't believe you're saying this.

PRODUCER

I'm not saying I believe it. I'm saying that's the way the world works. It's the world we live in.

You want me to make a movie for a world we don't live in.

You want to get philosophical, but you don't want to get real.

(MORE)

PRODUCER (cont'd)

The reason why it won't even make it to the theater is because of just how many Normal Nates and Regular Rhondas there are that have internalized their own oppression.

You try to save those people by threatening the rich, a huge number of them will side with the rich. Because we've told them their whole lives that one day they're going to be one of us.

You want to keep the lifers quiet in their cell? You promise them a lottery. Not to be let out.

But to become a prison guard.

I didn't fuck the world up. But I know how fucked it is.

If you want to save it, you better factor that into your script. A different script.

DIRECTOR

Now who's being philosophical?

PRODUCER

This isn't philosophy. It's who we are.

You think you achieved freedom. You just achieved success. Real freedom looks like something else.

DIRECTOR

You're saying you're a prison guard.

PRODUCER

In as much as I have a higher ration of freedom, yes. A much higher ration I'm proud to say.

Don't get me wrong. If you're a prisoner and you want to escape, I'll encourage you.

I'll tell you what it's like on the outside. I'll even slip you a chisel.

But I'm not the one you ask to blow a hole in the wall.

DIRECTOR

Because they'll put you back in the cell?

You're already in a cell.

PRODUCER

I am.

Just not that one.

DIRECTOR

It's a cheesy analogy.
I expect more from you.

PRODUCER

That's your problem. You expect too much.
Just like you expect too much from your
audience.
This whole climate absurdity-revolving door
marathon?
It's not going to enlighten anyone. It's just going
to make them dizzy.

DIRECTOR

It's worth making.

PRODUCER

It's too heavy, it's too convoluted. It's too -
much.

DIRECTOR

It has to be a journey, one they have to see to the
end.

PRODUCER

But they won't.

DIRECTOR

Only because you won't put the money behind
it.

PRODUCER

This isn't art.
I know you think it's Kafka and Serling and
Mailer and Malcolm all wrapped up in one. But
all I see is a wannabe, at best.

DIRECTOR

You can sell a wannabe.
It may even be more effective if it isn't Kafka. If
there's less to rave about literarily, then maybe
it's less a distraction from what needs to be
talked about.

PRODUCER

Again. Are you hearing - what you're saying?
(MORE)

PRODUCER (cont'd)

You want me to put my money into something you're admitting is not high art, but we're supposed to present it like high art, so everyone will talk about why it's not high art.

DIRECTOR

Yes. Because dying from Climate Change is not high art.

PRODUCER

Neither is losing millions of dollars. My dollars.

DIRECTOR

High art loses millions all the time.

PRODUCER

It doesn't lose you reputation.

DIRECTOR

Our reputation is flying around on private jets while women in the third world have to walk an extra mile this year to get water.

PRODUCER

I know. We're despicable. How many times do you want me to say it?

DIRECTOR

How many times *can* you say it before you're interrupted by a knock at the door?

PRODUCER

You see?
Threats, my friend, are never benevolent.
And you sound like a broken record.

DIRECTOR

You have to do this.

PRODUCER

Why me? There are other producers out there, other studios.

DIRECTOR

You don't want to make this film, then don't make it. But at least tell me. What do *you* think will work?

PRODUCER

So I'm the hostage now? Is that it?
Here's my answer. Fuck you. I want a solution as bad as you do. But I know it's not for me to dictate one. You ever stop to think that the scenario you're suggesting endorses the power structure you're claiming to despise?
If you could get the three richest billionaires in the world into your fictional lair, *and* Mr. Maxwell could get them all to agree, *and* it actually worked. You'd be saving us through dictators.

DIRECTOR

The movie is not meant to imitate.
But if we're talking consequences.
In order to live to fight another day, you have to be living.

PRODUCER

You're not going to give up, are you?

DIRECTOR

I can't.

PRODUCER

Of course you can. You can make a different film.
I'll make that film.
I'm just not making this one.

DIRECTOR

If I showed you the ankle bracelet they gave me, would it make a difference?

PRODUCER

Ha ha ha. Fuck you.
I could look down and realize I'm tied to my chair and you've turned into a laptop with a weird computer voice coming out of it, and I still wouldn't greenlight this.
That *would* probably make for a better ending though. Better than that stupid Writers Group shit.

DIRECTOR

You're not that far off actually.

PRODUCER

How's that?

DIRECTOR

I told you. There's a twist.

PRODUCER

Then what's the twist?

DIRECTOR

The twist is: If you don't want to make this film. If you're not going to try whatever it takes. Then I just need you to admit it. I just need you to say it out loud.

PRODUCER

Say what?

The Director hands him a folded piece of paper.

The Producer unfolds it and reads aloud.

PRODUCER (cont'd)

"I am going to do my part to make sure that my children, my grandchildren, all the generations of humanity that come after me, face a planet that was not meant for them. I'm doing everything I can to make that happen, by not doing everything I can to stop it."

Shakes his head, as he looks up.

PRODUCER (cont'd)

You really are an arrogant prick, aren't you? A delusional, self-righteous, arrogant prick.

DIRECTOR

You don't even really need to say those words, and mean them. You just have to tell me you're not making the film.

PRODUCER

I've been telling you that. I'm not making the film.

DIRECTOR
Ok then. That's all I needed.

PRODUCER
That's it?

DIRECTOR
That's it.

PRODUCER
Why do I get the feeling, all the sudden, that you wanted me to say no?

DIRECTOR
I wanted you to say yes.
But by saying no, you got to choose the ending.

PRODUCER
And how do *I* get to choose?

DIRECTOR
The last chapter.
That's what this was?

The Producer stares, in disbelief.

PRODUCER
You're fucking with me.
Are you recording this?

DIRECTOR
I had this whole monologue in my head I was going to lay on you if you said no.
But I think we both said all that was needed saying.

PRODUCER
Are you really recording this fucking conversation?
Because if you are, I'm going to make sure you never make another movie again. This one or any one.

DIRECTOR
Probably better anyway. That we both leave disappointed.
Don't worry. I won't use your name.

PRODUCER

Fuck you wasting my time. You never had any intention of making this movie.
This whole meeting was just to prove a point.

DIRECTOR

I had every intention of making the movie. I'm still going to try and make it.
But you're right. The meeting did prove my point.

PRODUCER

So I *am* Mr. Jenns. Is that it?
Is that your stupid fucking twist?

DIRECTOR

No. You're Mr. Maxwell now. You just don't know it.

The Director gets up to leave, extends his hand.

DIRECTOR (cont'd)

Thanks for taking the time.

The Producer declines shaking his hand.

PRODUCER

You really are something.

The Director walks to the door.

PRODUCER (cont'd)

And what if I would have said yes?

The Director doesn't answer, just walks out.

RESUME CREDITS from the original *Do We Have Your Attention* short film.

CREDITS continue to ROLL over BLACK to MUSIC on the right half of the SCREEN.

Seconds later, a TIMER appears in the middle of the SCREEN and begins to COUNT DOWN.

FOOTAGE appears at the bottom of the left half of the SCREEN. It scrolls upwards.

In this FOOTAGE, a new PEER is pleading at the end of their particular session acting as the Convincer.

Below this FOOTAGE is new FOOTAGE. It's the same person, delivering the first line of the script.

As that FOOTAGE scrolls up, the FOOTAGE below is yet a new PEER/ Convincer pleading as the clock ticks down.

And so on, over and over, while the CREDITS run.

The AUDIO goes in and out of each FOOTAGE so we can always hear the one in the middle, delivering the first line of their given script.

When the CREDITS are done and the TIMER reaches zero, we are left with FOOTAGE of Mr. Jenns.

As he looks directly into the CAMERA, the CREDITS and FOOTAGE disappear and the MUSIC stops.

The SCREEN is BLACK.

Mr. Jenns' WORDS appear, as he speaks them OFF SCREEN.

MR. JENNS (V.O.)
Do we have your attention?

The WORDS remain on the SCREEN for fifteen seconds.

This is the last thing we see.

FADE OUT

