

**DO
WE
HAVE
YOUR**

ATTENTION

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Orange 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.

(We see a brief FLASH, the imagery in which lasts no more than a couple of milliseconds, too short to be decipherable. This is the first in a series of FLASHES the viewing audience sees, one every few minutes, throughout the first two thirds of the film.)

Staring at the SCREEN of the laptop, 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.

(MORE)

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

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. 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.

(MORE)

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

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. 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.

(MORE)

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

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?

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.

(MORE)

MR. JENNS (cont'd)

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.
(MORE)

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

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?

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?

(MORE)

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

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.

(MORE)

MR. JENNS (cont'd)

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. 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.

(MORE)

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

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

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.

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.

(MORE)

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

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.
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. 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.

(MORE)

MR. JENNS (cont'd)

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. 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.

(MORE)

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

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. 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.

(MORE)

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

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? 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.
(MORE)

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

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. Jennis 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!

Noooooooo!

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.
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.
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.

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.

(MORE)

YOUTH A (V.O.) (cont'd)

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.
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.

(MORE)

YOUTH A (V.O.) (cont'd)

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.
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.
Pleeeeeeeeease! 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.

Nooooooooooooo! Nooooooooooooooooooooo!

Mr. Maxwell shrieks in horror.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM TWO - CONTINUOUS

MR. MAXWELL

Please 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.)

All riiiiight.

I'm going to pause it here and change it back to where we can all see each other.

A VIDEO GROUP CHAT shows a man inside a box titled FACILITATOR, then shows six more boxes for JAY - 19 years old, TRAVIS - 38, DARA - 31, GARY - 47, RITA - 56, and ALLY - 23.

FACILITATOR

There's a couple small visuals at the end, after the credits, but in the interest of time, I think it's best we get right into it.

I see we're all still here and we're all still awake, so that's promising.

Like I said earlier, we want to thank you not only for coming in today, but for hanging out in the booths. We would prefer doing it in the same room together, but we're still trying to be as careful as we can and respect folks who are either immunocompromised or in contact with the immunocompromised. Unfortunately, masks don't make for the best focus groups. And at least this way, we can all still see each other talking.

First things first. As I mentioned before, we are recording the session. But only the filmmakers will see it. So don't hold back.

This focus group will not be conducted in the most traditional manner. But we're hoping that will make it fun, or at least not a drag.

The Facilitator pauses to smile.

The FOCUS GROUP members reciprocate, some awkwardly.

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

I usually start out by asking if there was anything, as you were watching, that you thought, "I'm going to bring this up in the focus group."

Jay politely holds off a few seconds, to see if someone else wants to start.

No one does.

JAY

I liked that they didn't show the face of the person who kept coming in the room.

FACILITATOR

Why do you think you liked that?

JAY

I don't know. I guess it just added to the mystery of who these people were.

FACILITATOR

Well, that was clearly a stylistic choice, so I'm sure the filmmakers will appreciate that insight. Anyone else have anything that stayed with you?

TRAVIS

I don't think the actors looked the part. I would have gotten different actors.

FACILITATOR

For Mr. Jenns *and* Mr. Maxwell?

TRAVIS

That's the main two dudes?

FACILITATOR

Yes. Mr. Jenns is the one you see at first. Mr. Maxwell is the one whose identity is revealed later.

TRAVIS

Right. Well, I wouldn't have chosen the same actor for either one of them.

FACILITATOR

You didn't think they were convincing?

TRAVIS

No, they were good. I just don't see them when I think about the characters.

FACILITATOR

You think the way the actors *look* matters more than the dialogue they're executing.

DARA

What do you think they should have looked like?

TRAVIS

I don't know. I'm just telling you I don't think *these people* are who would be these characters.

DARA

From the look of them.

TRAVIS

Yeah, from the look of them. Movies are visual, so you gotta get that part down.

FACILITATOR

That's absolutely right. Casting is crucial.

DARA

Well, I disagree. I think they did look the part.

FACILITATOR

Did you also think they were convincing?

DARA

Yeah, I mean there were a couple moments here and there. But for the most part, I thought you got the right people.

FACILITATOR

Well, that's good input as well. And there is no right or wrong with any of this. Each contribution is important. Did anyone else have problems with the actors or the acting?

GARY

I don't know if this is as much about the acting or the script. But I thought the hostage was unfairly represented.

FACILITATOR

You're referring to Mr. Jenns.

GARY

Mr. Jenns, that's right.
(MORE)

GARY (cont'd)

I thought he was too much of a stereotype. Like the rich villain.

JAY

Like a caricature.

GARY

Yeah, like a caricature.
It's like he wasn't human enough.

FACILITATOR

You mean how he was portrayed.

GARY

Yeah.
Until the end, we don't really see any humanity in him, anything we can connect with.

DARA

Maybe it's not what we see but what he sees.
Maybe he doesn't come back to being human until he's come to terms with the reality of the situation, he created.

JAY

But he didn't create the situation.

ALLY

That's not what the hostage takers think.

GARY

Hmm.
I guess I see what you're saying.

FACILITATOR

Did anyone else have any suggestions for improvement?

GARY

If no one else is going to go, I was also going to say there's not enough action. It's so much talking, I got a little bored in parts of it.

FACILITATOR

So too much talking?

GARY

I just think people are going to want to see more than dialogue, even if it's good dialogue.

FACILITATOR

You don't think the situation is enough to keep an audience's interest?

GARY

It's not that I was *not* interested. I just don't like sitting through that much uninterrupted dialogue.

JAY

I agree. Maybe it's an attention span thing. But at some point, I was like, "Is something going to happen or what?"

GARY

Right?

DARA

Something did happen. The guy's been kidnapped.

GARY

Yeah, but that's just the setup. It's what the character does in that setup. And calmly talking for that much time isn't enough. At least not for me.

TRAVIS

Maybe you could have him escape and then get caught and put back in the chair, and that would break things up. And then you could go back to the conversation.

JAY

Yeah, maybe he could say he needs to use the bathroom or fake a heart attack or something.

RITA

But if he's just going to end up back in the same position, is that necessary?

JAY

At least we would have seen him try something. Him just talking like that. It doesn't make it seem like he's taking the situation as serious as it is.

ALLY

Isn't that what those little flashes were? Weren't they like a way to visually break things up?

FACILITATOR

The filmmakers had hoped that would be sufficient. They knew it was a lot of lines. They thought the flashes might give your brain a marker for dividing up the scene, subconsciously. From what a couple of you are saying though, it may not be enough.

RITA

Maybe instead of that, you could just go to black every now and then, and then come back, like time has gone by.

FACILITATOR

I'll make note of that, and your suggestions as well.

GARY

What were those flashes anyway? It was hard to tell.

FACILITATOR

That was intentional. Each flash was a different environmental disaster brought on by Climate Change.

JAY

But why so quick, if we couldn't even make it out?

FACILITATOR

It doesn't really work if I tell you.

ALLY

I think I know.

(MORE)

ALLY (cont'd)

It's a representation of how insignificant these things are to us, and the irony of these disasters and what's up ahead really only being a blip in what we're processing.

GARY

Wow. That's crazy. I wouldn't have put that together.

TRAVIS

Yeah, it makes sense when she says it. But if you don't think about it for that long, you just see it and forget about it.

JAY

I think it would get the point across better if you could actually make out what they are.

DARA

Then it becomes clunky. Draws you out of the conversation.

ALLY

Maybe it's like a subliminal thing. That we actually do get it, even if we don't know it when it's happening.

GARY

And is that ok? To manipulate us like that?

FACILITATOR

Are you asking if it's ethical?

GARY

Yeah. I want things to get better with the environment too. But I don't want to be manipulated.

ALLY

What if you're manipulated into taking the action that would save you?
Would you still consider that unethical?

GARY

If I'm going to save myself, I want it to be my decision.

ALLY

Maybe it's not your decision, because it's not just you that's affected. If everyone in the world is being affected by this, maybe you don't have the right to do nothing. Besides, it's not like you're the one being taken hostage. They just showed you a few little flashes of what it means to do nothing.

GARY

That doesn't make it right.

ALLY

It doesn't. But it also doesn't mean you're not already being manipulated. You said, "if I'm going to save myself." But you're not saving yourself. None of us are. Why do you think that is? It's not just movies. It's all entertainment. And art, and news, religion, everything. All communication could be seen as manipulation. Especially when the balance of that communication has us watching our planet burn to pieces.

GARY

But you said none of us are. That means you too. If you think it's ok to do whatever, then why are you not already out there?

DARA

That's a bit presumptuous. You just met her.

GARY

Are you?

ALLY

No, I'm not. I didn't say it was ok. I was just saying that I understand that it's not black and white. As for why I'm not doing enough, I don't know what to tell you. I know it's serious. Yet it's not enough for me to disrupt my life over.

(MORE)

ALLY (cont'd)

Maybe that's why I'm ok with it being
subliminal.
I kind of wish someone would just slip me
something, slip us all something, that would
make us do whatever it takes to fix this.
Because I'm scared that we're not going to do it.
And it is going to be worse than we can imagine.
I don't want that.
But what I'm even more scared of is that the
movie is right. That nothing will work. And no
one has any real answers. And if that's the case,
maybe all we do have left is violence.

RITA

Don't say that.

ALLY

I'm not saying I want violence or that I'm going
to commit violence. I'm saying... I don't know
what I'm saying.

RITA

There's got to be a way.

ALLY

Then what is it?

RITA

Numbers. If enough people get together, they
can't deny us all.

ALLY

But we don't have that.
And numbers doing what?

RITA

Numbers doing what they suggested in the
movie. The stuff he was asking if it would work.
We have to try everything. We can't just resort to
violence.

DARA

And how long do we try everything for?
Is there like a warning that goes off that says if
nothing else has worked by so and so day, it's
time to start kidnapping rich people?

RITA

That's not funny.

JAY

Maybe the flashes could be suggestions of things to try, other than violent things.

TRAVIS

That's not bad.

GARY

I still don't think they should be flashes. Though... if it's going to be something subliminal. Might as well make it positive.

FACILITATOR

Then I'll make note of that. I'm making note of all of it.

RITA

But, hang on.
What's the film trying to accomplish?

FACILITATOR

The filmmakers simply want to make the project effective.

JAY

What if it isn't?
Regardless of the flashes, for me, the setup didn't really make sense.
I don't think you can trust a hostage in this type of situation. They're going to say whatever you want them to say.

FACILITATOR

You think we should just kill them?

JAY

I didn't say *that*. And what do you mean by we?

FACILITATOR

I mean should we kill Mr. Jenns in the film, no matter what he says?

JAY

The movie's done.

FACILITATOR

Nothing's done. That's why we're conducting the focus group.

JAY

I get focus groups. But this is an indie film. If you rewrite it, it makes it a whole different kind of movie. You'd have to do everything all over again.

FACILITATOR

But that's your vote, not to trust them, no matter what?

JAY

I'm not saying that. I just...

FACILITATOR

If Mr. Jenns were to say, "Sure, I agree to whatever your terms are," would you trust him?

JAY

Probably not.

TRAVIS

That doesn't mean the earlier point is wrong. He's going to say whatever you want to hear.

JAY

This Mr. Jenns dude knows this is something super serious. Why wouldn't he say whatever to just get out of the situation?

FACILITATOR

Maybe because he knew no reasonable person would trust him. Just like you.

GARY

That still doesn't make their plan coherent. The whole point of them kidnapping this man is to get him to cooperate. But if they think he's so awful, how do they expect him not to betray them the moment they let him go?

FACILITATOR

That's a good question. Does anyone have any ideas?

TRAVIS

Maybe they could give him like an ankle bracelet or something, and some type of monitoring system. That way he knows, if he doesn't come through, they can just blow him up at any time. Or maybe a chip they implant in him, with some kind of poison.

RITA

Are we supposed to know that?

DARA

I think we're only supposed to know what we need to know.

GARY

But not everybody needs the same thing. If some people in the audience need to know that, and we're not given that information, then that could be an issue.

FACILITATOR

Does anyone else feel like this is something they need to know?

JAY

I'd like to have an idea.

ALLY

It wouldn't have hurt to at least mention it.

GARY

They didn't mention it because it makes no sense.
Jay's right. Mr. Jenns is definitely going to betray them. It's just a matter of how he gets around whatever anklet or surveillance they come up with.

ALLY

Maybe that's another part of it.

JAY

That's true. If you followed what happens after, you could make it into a feature.

DARA

That would make the movie about him though.

TRAVIS

If it's not about him, then who's it about?

DARA

It's about us. It's about everybody else.

ALLY

But it's not. It's *important* to us. But it's *about* him.

He's only thinking of himself. And if he can't be convinced, then we're all done for.

DARA

But watching him try to get out of an ankle bracelet is beside the point.

It would turn it into an entirely different film.

GARY

So you agree, if he has the chance, he would try to betray them.

DARA

Of course he would.

RITA

Then doesn't that make the whole film a moot point?

If he really can't be trusted, then everything they're doing is meaningless.

ALLY

Maybe that's the point.

This possibility commands a brief but quiet consideration.

FACILITATOR

So should they have just killed him?

GARY

They shouldn't have gone about it this way to begin with.

FACILITATOR

Then what should they have done?

ALLY

It's like Jay said, the movie's done. It's not like everything is going to get reshot.

FACILITATOR

You don't know that. This film is important to the filmmakers.

Maybe they would reshoot it. If the idea is good enough.

But like you said, it has to be convincing.

What do you think would make it effective?

Silence, for seconds.

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

No one?

JAY

We came to watch the movie, not write it.

FACILITATOR

Are you sure about that?

TRAVIS

We're not filmmakers, man. We're film watchers. Big difference.

FACILITATOR

In a film like this, you're all stakeholders.

TRAVIS

You saying we're gonna get paid if we help make this movie better?

FACILITATOR

Not monetarily. But if it is going to be rewritten, you can know you helped with that.

RITA

What makes you so sure we want to help you write this kind of a story?

FACILITATOR

Maybe you don't.

But you're here for the duration of the session.

It would be a shame if you didn't make the most of it.

Again, silence. For seconds.

FACILITATOR (cont'd)

If there aren't any suggestions right now, does anyone else have a critique of the story?

ALLY

I liked the movie, but there was something that bugged me.

It's like I don't know what they expect from this guy. If he goes out there and starts saying and doing the right things, which like he said in his class of friends is the wrong thing, what he's doing is still going to be overpowered by all those rich friends.

I don't care how much money the guy has; he's not magic.

FACILITATOR

Would anyone like to address that?

DARA

Maybe that's why we see that he's not the first or the last.

ALLY

So they're really supposed to convince that many rich and powerful jerks to just do the right thing?

DARA

They're not convincing them; they're forcing them.

TRAVIS

But it didn't work. At least not with these two.

FACILITATOR

That's true.

TRAVIS

Then what are we supposed to get out of it? Because it seems like a plot hole.

RITA

Not really. If she's right, then it's only a plot hole if Mr. Jenns agrees.

ALLY

But if I'm right, then what's the point of them kidnapping him?

RITA

It's not about why they're kidnapping him. It's... why make the movie?

GARY

Wow. Ok.

RITA

Maybe it's to show us how flimsy an idea like this is, and that we have to find something else.

ALLY

On one hand, the rich aren't going to choose to save us, no matter what we do. And on the other, even if they wanted to, they couldn't. Is that what you're saying?

RITA

It's not what I'm saying. But maybe it's what the movie is saying.

ALLY

Then where does that leave us?

RITA

I don't know. But either way, there's no point in targeting them other than vengeance.

JAY

So is the movie about vengeance, or is it about finding solutions other than violence?

DARA

Couldn't it be about both?

JAY

How?

DARA

Mr. Jenns didn't agree to help. Which proves violence won't work. But also punishes him for being so selfish he wouldn't help even under threat.

ALLY

It's like they knew he wouldn't.

GARY

If that's the case, it's all just a cruel joke. On Mr. Jenns. And the other guy.

FACILITATOR

Mr. Maxwell.

GARY

Mr. Maxwell. And all of them really.

DARA

Are we saying they don't deserve it?
Whether we find solutions from this movie or not, do people like that deserve some kind of payback, for trapping the rest of us into this cage?

RITA

That loses sight of what *we* need. We need to find answers. We don't need vengeance.

DARA

What about justice then?
Shouldn't they be held accountable?

RITA

It's still a distraction.

DARA

We can do two things at the same time.

ALLY

Plus, it might be smart to leave an example for the future.
If we actually find our way out of this.

RITA

But this is vigilante justice.

DARA

It's the privatization of justice.
Isn't that what guys like this preach?
Privatization?

ALLY

Poetic justice.

RITA

That's not funny. They're still human beings,
and they still have rights.

DARA

More than us?

RITA

What are our rights worth if we can so easily
devolve into them?

DARA

Devolving into them would mean we have the
power to sentence ten million people to death.

RITA

So with your power, you only sentence one.
How are you better?

DARA

Because I'm sentencing one person for allowing
destruction, and he's sentencing all of us for not
being rich.

TRAVIS

Maybe that's why it *would* work. If money is all
that matters to this guy, don't you think he's
going to do anything to protect that money?
I could imagine someone with nothing to lose
holding out. But look at this guy's life. He's got
so much to lose.

I don't even think he would have to be
threatened with torture. Even the thought of
him not making it out of there, and him then
having made all that money for nothing, is going
to be enough for him to give in immediately.

RITA

You have to think about what his life is like.
For him to have been targeted, he's probably one
of the most powerful people in his industry, if
not the world. It would probably be hard for
him to process that there's any situation he
doesn't have control over.

GARY

You're assuming that after watching the film. But we don't know what someone that rich actually thinks. Because none of us have that kind of money.

RITA

You're right. Maybe I'm assuming wrong.

FACILITATOR

That's ok. We're just looking for participation. Assumptions are a form of pretending.

ALLY

Can you pretend? Does pretending get you any closer to understanding?

FACILITATOR

What do you think?

RITA

If people like Mr. Jenns are part of the solution, then we have to try and put ourselves in the shoes of the rich.

GARY

But we don't even know what industry he's in. The movie didn't say.

DARA

It doesn't have to be Mr. Jenns. It could be anyone with that kind of money. Or maybe they don't even have the money yet. Maybe they're in a wealthy family and they're waiting for the money.

ALLY

That's not the same though.

DARA

Would you speak out and risk losing your inheritance? If you knew you had a life waiting for you where you didn't have to worry about anything, would you risk throwing all that away?

ALLY

It depends on if you had the kind of parents that would disown you just for being young and speaking your mind.

FACILITATOR

Let's assume you do.

JAY

Yo, what the fuck is this? Is this some kind of prank?

FACILITATOR

I'm not sure I understand.

JAY

I agreed to participate in this focus group because it's part of my film studies class. I didn't know you were going to have information about who I am. And that you were going to tell *them*.

RITA

What's he talking about?

FACILITATOR

We don't have information about you.

JAY

So what they're talking about is just coincidence?

The Facilitator looks perplexed.

As does everyone else.

JAY (cont'd)

(reluctantly)

My family has money.

DARA

I'm sorry. I didn't know. I swear.

TRAVIS

Like a lot of money?

JAY

Yeah, a lot of money.

FACILITATOR

Why couldn't that be a coincidence? Rich people have children. Almost all of them are in college. I assume many of them take film studies classes.

JAY

Is that supposed to be amusing?

FACILITATOR

I can assure you. We would have had no knowledge of your situation.

JAY

I don't believe you.

DARA

I promise you, I didn't know.

FACILITATOR

You volunteered for the focus group.

JAY

Fuck this, I'm gone.

RITA

Don't go.

It's not your fault your parents have money.

JAY

You're right. It's not my fault.

RITA

No one's holding that against you.

JAY

Yeah, but now I feel like you're all looking at me like some spoiled trust fund baby.

GARY

Is that how you see yourself?

JAY

No.

GARY

Then we have no reason to think that about you.

JAY
Everybody's making all these assumptions about Mr. Jenns. Why wouldn't you make them about me?

TRAVIS
Because you don't have the money yet.

JAY
But I will.

FACILITATOR
So what would you do? If it was you in the film, twenty years from now? And it's even worse, because twenty years from now, those with resources never put them to use, for good?

JAY
I wouldn't be in that situation, because I would have already done my part.

FACILITATOR
Are you doing it now?

JAY
I'm a college student.

FACILITATOR
Then when? Are you going to wait until you get out of college? Are you going to wait until you're secure in your career? Are you going to wait until you get your inheritance?

JAY
I don't know. I'll probably wait until I get out of college.

FACILITATOR
But you'd run the risk of not getting your inheritance.

JAY
You think my parents are like Mr. Jenns?

FACILITATOR

I don't know what your parents are like. But if you were to do what was necessary for someone with your privilege to do right now, you would definitely risk losing that privilege.

JAY

So I'm supposed to save the world all by myself?

FACILITATOR

Not all by yourself.

JAY

Then what do you expect me to do?

FACILITATOR

The only thing you're expected to do is put yourself in everyone else's shoes.

ALLY

Figuratively or literally?

FACILITATOR

Figuratively doesn't really count, does it? We'd never really know if he did all he could.

JAY

So I should just give up all my money?

FACILITATOR

You don't have to give it up. You just have to risk it.

JAY

And what makes you think I won't?

FACILITATOR

Because you brought up your money. No one here would have known. But you brought it up.

JAY

So what?

FACILITATOR

You're self-conscious because you know you wouldn't give up your privilege.

JAY

You don't know that. You don't know anything about me.
Besides, me giving up my privilege isn't going to solve Climate Change.

FACILITATOR

Well, there you go. That wasn't so hard, was it?

JAY

What?

FACILITATOR

To begin making the arguments for why you have to keep it all.

RITA

Stop it.
You're manipulating him.
You're manipulating all of us.

FACILITATOR

I'm just demonstrating that Mr. Jenns is not necessarily a caricature.

GARY

Yeah, but this isn't the way to go about it.

RITA

This isn't normal.
And piling on some kid is not why we're here.
He's not Mr. Jenns.

FACILITATOR

Not yet.

TRAVIS

Dude, what the hell? Why are you being so hard on this kid?

DARA

I know why.
He's trying to show us how easy it is for us to protect the rich.

FACILITATOR

Very perceptive.

RITA

We're not being protective because he's rich.
He's a kid. And he hasn't done anything wrong.

DARA

Not yet.

JAY

Fuck you.

DARA

I'm not saying you're planning on becoming Mr.
Jenns.
But neither did Mr. Jenns.

JAY

Anyone in here could become Mr. Jenns.

DARA

True.
But you have a huge head start.

RITA

That's not fair.

ALLY

It may not be fair, but it raises a question.
A good movie has at least someone you identify
with.
Whether he wants to or not, Jay probably
identifies more with Mr. Jenns or Mr. Maxwell.
But who are the rest of us supposed to identify
with?
Are we the kids on the screen giving the orders?
Are we also Mr. Jenns? Or Mr. Maxwell?
Are we the people on the screen Mr. Maxwell is
seeing being hurt in some way?

DARA

Why do we have to be just one of them? Why
can't we be all of them?
Climate Change has brought all of them to this
place. And now they all have choices to make.

TRAVIS

What about the hostage takers? I know what choices Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Jenns have to make.

What choices are the kids on the laptop screen giving the orders making?

DARA

They have to choose who Mr. Maxwell is going to be looking at on the screen at the end.

RITA

But what choice do those people have, the people we assume are being hurt?

TRAVIS

We don't know, because we don't know who's really on the screen.

DARA

That means it could be anyone. And that everyone has a choice to make.

FACILITATOR

Or maybe you're none of them.

TRAVIS

Well, if we're not them, then who are we?

FACILITATOR

You're the people in the focus group.

TRAVIS

But what does that mean?

FACILITATOR

It means you're more a part of this movie than any fictional character.

RITA

Does that mean we're supposed to identify with the audience?

FACILITATOR

It's not you identifying with them; it's them identifying with you.

TRAVIS

I don't get it.

JAY

He's saying we're in the post-production phase.

FACILITATOR

Very perceptive, Jay.

TRAVIS

Still don't get it.

JAY

In here, in the focus group, we give our opinion and it could alter the final result.

We have the power.

If we think of this *not* as an indie movie - but like a regular movie, lots of movies have focus groups. We just don't think about them. Because we don't see them.

But they're still there, and they have influence.

TRAVIS

But how is the audience supposed to identify with that?

JAY

Because no matter what happens before the final credits roll. It's not the end of the story.

The story keeps going when the audience leaves the theater.

FACILITATOR

Well done. Your film studies professor must be quite the instructor.

TRAVIS

But if they're supposed to identify with us, who are they giving their feedback to?

FACILITATOR

Obviously, the facilitator.

TRAVIS

And who's the facilitator?

FACILITATOR

I am.

TRAVIS

I told you I don't get it.

FACILITATOR

It means in order for the audience to do their part, you have to do yours.

TRAVIS

But what's our part, other than being here for the hour?

FACILITATOR

By the end of the hour, you should be able to think like Mr. Maxwell.

GARY

And if we can't, or don't?

FACILITATOR

Well, that's not an answer, is it?
Rita, you had your hand up before and then put it down. Do you still have a question?

GARY

Don't change the subject.
You know what, let's do change the subject.
I have a question I want to ask you, personally.
Are you going to do this?
Because it sure seems like this focus group is you testing the waters to see how people would react to it when you do.

FACILITATOR

I'm just administering the focus group.

GARY

Then the filmmakers. Are they going to do it?

FACILITATOR

Does it matter? To you, personally?
If they plan to actually do it, or if this is just a philosophical exercise, or if this movie is them trying everything to not have this happen. Does it matter, to you?

GARY

Of course it matters.

FACILITATOR

Why?

Why do you care what happens to the very people who've proven they don't care what happens to you?

GARY

Because they're still people.

FACILITATOR

Yes, but they are the worst of people.

GARY

I don't care. They still deserve to live, and not suffer.

FACILITATOR

Are you telling me you would save Mr. Jenns?

GARY

Of course I would.

FACILITATOR

What if there was a chance of this working?
Would you still save Mr. Jenns?

GARY

I would.

FACILITATOR

Are you sure about that?

GARY

Yes. I'm sure.

FACILITATOR

Then why haven't you done your part to save the rest of us?
Or would you only save Mr. Jenns? And not us?

GARY

That's not fair.
It's easier to save one person than it is to save everyone else.

FACILITATOR

Or maybe the latter just takes sacrifice.

GARY

I'm supposed to feel bad because I won't risk everything I have for something I didn't cause?

FACILITATOR

If everything *you* have is worth more than everything *we* have to lose, then I guess not.

GARY

So I'm the bad person? You made a movie suggesting people kidnap and torture people, and--

FACILITATOR

I didn't make anything. I'm just administering the--

GARY

Administering, yeah.
Is judging me part of administering the focus group?

FACILITATOR

You're the one who has to answer those questions.

GARY

But you didn't answer *my* question.
Are the filmmakers going to do this?

FACILITATOR

I don't know.
I can only assume they're trying to gauge how good the movie is.

RITA

Can you just tell us then who the target audience is for this?

FACILITATOR

I can't.
But you can tell me.

RITA

I asked because I'm not sure.
On one hand, it seems like it could be people like Mr. Jenns. Then you look at it another way, and it could be Climate Change activists. Then another, it could be the general public.

ALLY

Maybe who the target is depends on the reaction of those different groups to the film.

JAY

So it's whoever it makes the most headway with.

DARA

No. It's anyone who will listen.

ALLY

I don't think that's necessarily wrong. But I think it's more than that.
I don't think there's as much a target audience as there is an order of audiences.

JAY

What would be the order?

ALLY

I think Rita had it right. People like Mr. Jenns would be first. Activists would be second. Then the general public.

TRAVIS

That's not right. You're right about Mr. Jenns. But the general public is second, and then the activists.

ALLY

Why?

TRAVIS

Because if Mr. Jenns can't be convinced. You'd need the general public convinced before the activists know what they're planning to do is going to work.

JAY

That doesn't work either. Even if that's the way activism was carried out, that's not the way movies work.

It's not like the film's gonna be screened for the rich first, and then to a national audience, and then to the activist crowd.

You have to pick an audience.

ALLY

Then who do we think it should be?

DARA

I think it should be the rich people. They have to acknowledge that they can't just say no forever.

RITA

I don't think it should even matter what they think. The audience should be the general public. They're the ones with the most to lose, and if they get excited enough to join the fight, the numbers will be too much to ignore anymore.

GARY

You think average people are going to get that animated from a movie?

RITA

We did.

GARY

We're getting paid.

ALLY

Too bad survival doesn't look like compensation.

FACILITATOR

Does anyone think it should be the activists?
That they should be the audience?

JAY

No.

I assume they've been having this conversation for quite some time.

ALLY

The question is, how long are they going to keep having it?

RITA

That doesn't mean violence is the answer. I agree with Mr. Jenns' character that any kind of violence is going to backfire and be counterproductive for people trying to get something done.

DARA

What did you think about what Mr. Maxwell said about it not mattering, because anything they do is going to get painted as violence?

ALLY

Plus, it's been decades, and there's really no more time to get it wrong by keeping within the lines.

GARY

They said it in the film. It's a concept of strategy vs. morality.

DARA

But Mr. Maxwell had a point that, with the scope of suffering that Climate Change could bring about, it's not hard to make a moral case for a relatively small amount of violence.

JAY

That's only if it works. And you can't know if it will work.

TRAVIS

So it's not really morality. It's just about strategy.

DARA

We see what nonviolence has got us.

RITA

It's actually got us a lot.

DARA

Not enough.
And if what I understand about things is right,
each day that goes by means exponentially worse
and worse circumstances down the road.

RITA

That doesn't permit violence. It means you
think harder and get more creative.

TRAVIS

Look at what the civil rights movement was able
to accomplish.

ALLY

I'm not sure that's the example you think it is.
Same way the opponents of progress have since
tried to whitewash Dr. King's message, they also
sanitized the overall movement. The truth is
that, despite the highlighted failures associated
with violent resistance, there was successful
armed self-defense throughout that time. And
there were times in which nonviolent activists
were guarded by those not opposed to violence.

JAY

Which do *you* think it is, for this situation?

ALLY

You're not getting my point. It doesn't have to
be just one. Back then the power structure saw
two options, and had to wrestle with the
consequences of both. It's not difficult to believe
that, without the demonstrated threat of what
might come if nonviolence was *not* respected,
the powers that be might have just kept on
ignoring the people they sainted years later.

JAY

You think it was like a sort of unspoken
partnership?

ALLY

I wouldn't say it was a partnership. But the
options did play off one another. And increased
the likelihood of winning. Even if they didn't
win everything.

JAY

I did read that certain civil rights leaders famous for nonviolent action feared that there was only so long nonviolence would prove viable as a tactic.

ALLY

That's right.

DARA

But can I say?

While I appreciate the nuance you bring up, I still feel like we're having the conversation they want us to have.

All of this hinges on our definition of violence.

They said so in the movie.

By running interference for fossil fuel interests, or even simply maintaining business as usual, Mr. Jenns is actively committing violence.

It's actually mass violence.

When you're that powerful, doing nothing in the face of needed action is violence.

TRAVIS

So Mr. Jenns saying that others can't use violence is hypocritical.

DARA

It's not just hypocritical, it's insane.

When actions are begun that will cause the death of large swaths of a population, what do we call that? We call it war.

And if a people are on the receiving end of that type of violence, or even the imminent threat of that type of violence, there's no one who doesn't believe they have the right to fight back.

TRAVIS

Using violence.

DARA

Yeah.

RITA

But it's not war.

DARA

Why not?

RITA

Because it's like Mr. Jenns said. It's not just him. It's the whole economy. It's the whole government. It's all the corruption. It's all of it. How do you go to war with that?

DARA

I agree that's a much bigger war. But that doesn't mean there aren't decision-makers. And in the long run, making these changes are going to benefit everyone.

ALLY

That's the thing. Nothing is ever done because it will benefit everyone. The decision-makers only do things to benefit themselves. And if it screws everyone else over, they don't even think about it.

TRAVIS

Until they're made to.

DARA

Absolutely.
You really *don't believe* they could ignore another thirty years of nonviolence? If they're not experiencing it, it might as well not be happening. All because they depend on *us* using *their* definitions, their definition of violence. If *they* set the limits of the debate, even when they concede - we still lose.

RITA

You seem to have made up your mind before this focus group.

DARA

It's not a matter of if violence will be used. It's when.
People will find a way to survive.

GARY

Then what does that make this movie?

DARA

I think we've all wondered whether this movie is a threat. And we've all wondered if that's wrong. But you could just as easily say, it's a gift. And that the rest of us are generous for even giving people like Mr. Jenns an option.

RITA

And what option is that?

DARA

The option to accept the violence that will inevitably come, or to reject it. The only argument to be made against that is one made with their definitions. When are we gonna be done letting them define the wellbeing of the planet and those on it?

GARY

You believe the threat is the gift.

DARA

If it's really a threat, then they know what's coming. Ahead of time.

The thought lingers, for a moment.

TRAVIS

I got a question. Who are we supposed to think the teens are? If the whole thing is some kind of satire or metaphor, and Mr. Jenns can represent somebody, and Mr. Maxwell can represent somebody. Who are the teens supposed to be?

DARA

They're just that, teenagers. Young people have the most to lose, so they're the ones who *have* to act.

TRAVIS

But that's a more *realistic* answer. Who else could they be?

JAY

Maybe it's supposed to be like Mr. Jenns' great grandchildren or something.

(MORE)

JAY (cont'd)

Maybe there's like a time machine or some other dimensional thing, where the descendants of all these oil and gas CEOs are sent back in time and tasked with changing the minds of their earlier family.

ALLY

Yeah, but maybe it's not voluntary. Maybe the ones tasked with this are also being held hostage - in the future, and they can only be let go if they're successful.

And the curveball is that they decide to put their great great grandfathers or whatever in the same position, being taken hostage and being forced to give in.

TRAVIS

Oh, man, that's pretty good.

GARY

Ok, but I've got one better than that. What if the teens are ghosts?

JAY

Like the hostages are being haunted in advance?

GARY

Yeah, something like that.

TRAVIS

By who?

DARA

Maybe it's the ghosts of kids who die in a natural disaster or in resource wars.

ALLY

Or maybe Climate Change ends up killing us all off and these are the ghosts of who might have been.

TRAVIS

I like that too, but I think I like them being the great great grandchildren better.

JAY

Me too.

GARY

All of them are great. Which makes it a shame. There's no guarantee anyone is going to derive any of that.

JAY

That's why it has to be open to interpretation. If you have to explain it, it cheapens it.

GARY

But if this is going to elicit the response that the filmmakers want, it's got to be more obvious.

TRAVIS

Then what's the response?

DARA

That's it.
The teens are the filmmakers.
The teens are the filmmakers, the audience is Mr. Maxwell. And the audience is tasked with convincing the Mr. Jennses of the world.

GARY

But Mr. Maxwell used to be in Mr. Jenns' place.

DARA

Sure, but *now* the only power he has is his imagination.

TRAVIS

I like that too, but I still like the sci-fi time travel explanation better.

RITA

There's still the possibility that it's none of it, and it's just a one-room psychological thriller.

DARA

It can't be. There's too much potential.

RITA

But we're the only ones who will have watched the movie and then gone into a focus group right after to discuss it. You can't make people talk about something or contemplate something.

(MORE)

RITA (cont'd)

Besides, there's probably a hundred more explanations we're not even thinking of.

FACILITATOR

Then what's the response? You never answered that.

Even if it could be all these things, there's still got to be a response the filmmakers want to get out of the audience.

So what is it?

TRAVIS

I don't know, but I got something else I gotta ask.

I've been in other focus groups before, and this is not how they usually work.

Normally, it's more back and forth between the participants, and the facilitator tries to stay out of it.

And the facilitator definitely doesn't argue with the participants, like you did before.

FACILITATOR

Do you think there's only one way to do a focus group?

TRAVIS

I guess not, but they don't work like this. It's like you have an agenda or something.

FACILITATOR

I do have an agenda. I'm trying to tease out of you what will make this project effective.

TRAVIS

Ok, but it's felt like you were crossing some lines. Like you were playing with us almost.

FACILITATOR

If that's the case, if that's how you felt, then I can only tell you it was per my instructions and that I've been trying to lightly steer you towards answering certain questions.

RITA

But you haven't said which questions.

FACILITATOR

I have. More than once. In addition to just saying it.

The filmmakers' aim is to make this project effective.

And pay close attention that I didn't say "more effective."

What should the filmmakers do to make this *effective*?

Let's say that this movie is everything you want it to be, that it's not about violence but instead it's about forcing us to use our imaginations and find creative nonviolent activist tactics that will finally be enough. What could the filmmakers do to make it effective?

JAY

For one, you'd have to make sure the movie gets seen by as many people as possible.

ALLY

How do the filmmakers do that? They don't have any money.

TRAVIS

There's got to be groups that will share it, or help promote it.

DARA

Those are the same groups that can't get enough public support to make a difference with their own work.

ALLY

And many of them may not want to have anything to do with this film if it could be seen as flirting with violence.

RITA

Then you have to make it clear in interviews, every promotional interview you do.

DARA

No one of prominence is going to interview the filmmakers about a movie with this low of a budget, or one that, as Ally said, flirts with violence the way this one does.

TRAVIS

I'm sorry, man. The prospects don't look good.

FACILITATOR

Is that all you have?

GARY

What do you want us to say?
You make a movie like this, with no money, with no distribution or marketing to get it out there. And we're supposed to tell you how to make it effective?

FACILITATOR

Take money out of it then. Assume we had all the money we could ever spend on this project. Budget to hire Oscar winners as Mr. Jenns and Mr. Maxwell. Tens of millions of dollars for promotion. What more could we do to make the film effective?

JAY

You'd make it into a feature.

FACILITATOR

Ok, but the story is in the room. It's in this situation.

What more could be said by Mr. Maxwell to make the film effective?

Pretend you're Mr. Maxwell. What else would you do to make your case? What else would you say to save yourself, from this unknown that is coming?

GARY

If you make it too much longer and don't add any more action, it's just going to end up boring.

FACILITATOR

Then make it not boring. Make it compelling.
(MORE)

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

What could you have said to Mr. Jenns? That would have made the people like Mr. Jenns watching this film come to their senses, whether by conscience or self-preservation?

What could Mr. Maxwell have said for the average person watching this film? People like you and your friends, your family. What could he have said to make them realize Mr. Jenns is not going to do it of his own volition, that *they're* going to have to force him?

How would you do it? If you were trying to save your own ass?

Pretend you're actually in this situation and there's no way of getting out unless you're successful in convincing the person on the other end of that screen.

Show me.

TRAVIS

Dude, we're not actors.

FACILITATOR

I'm not asking you to act. I'm asking you to show me.

Show me the urgency. Show me your desperation.

Think about the violence. Focus on the violence being done to you in this moment and find a way out of it.

RITA

But we're not in that room.

FACILITATOR

I don't mean Mr. Maxwell. I mean you. The violence being done to you.

TRAVIS

What violence?

FACILITATOR

The violence of Climate Change.

GARY

We haven't experienced what you're talking about.

FACILITATOR

Just because the violence being done to us hasn't happened yet, doesn't mean it's not real.
When someone seals you in a coffin and tells you not to use whatever you have to escape, do you listen to them? Just because the air hasn't run out yet?

DARA

Just because the air hasn't run out yet, doesn't mean it won't.

FACILITATOR

Now you've got it.
Now show me.

TRAVIS

Show you what?

FACILITATE

Show me how you would beg.
Beg for the planet. Beg for our lives.
Beg for your lives.

ALLY

But in the film it's not coming from us. It's coming from Mr. Maxwell.

DARA

And Mr. Maxwell is only trying to save his own rich ass.

RITA

That's why it's not effective.

FACILITATOR

Thank you.
Now you see it.

TRAVIS

See what?

FACILITATOR

I apologize for all the runaround. But I had to get you to acknowledge.
Even with the best script, the best actors. Fiction won't be enough to fix this.
(MORE)

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

That's why we needed you.

ALLY

What does that mean?

FACILITATOR

Think of this focus group as a sort of orientation.

And I need you to stay calm for what I'm about to say.

GARY

What do we need to be calm about?

FACILITATOR

I'm saying that it will go easier if you listen and come to terms with the situation.

DARA

What situation?

FACILITATOR

It's just what you said. You have time. But eventually the violence will become more pronounced.

Lucky for you, it won't be real violence.

TRAVIS

For us? What are you talking about?

GARY

I'm out of here.

Gary gets up and tries to open the door.

GARY (cont'd)

What the hell?

Why is the door locked?

FACILITATOR

Please sit down, Gary. And I'll--

Travis and Ally both get up and try their doors, both locked.

ALLY

Help! Someone open the door!

TRAVIS

Hell, no.
Hey! Can anyone hear me?

RITA

I'm calling the police.

Rita pulls out her phone.

RITA (cont'd)

Oh my God. I don't have service.

The rest pull out their phones.

DARA

I don't either.

GARY

Me neither.

RITA

This can't be happening.

DARA

What are you doing?

FACILITATOR

If you'll all take your seat, I'll explain.

TRAVIS

Explain what, motherfucker? That I'm gonna stomp your ass when I get out of here.

GARY

If you don't let us out, right now. I'm going to sue this company into oblivion.

FACILITATOR

I understand this is alarming. But I can assure you. You will not be harmed.
In fact, for the duration of your stay, you'll be taken good care of.

RITA

What stay? What's happening?

FACILITATOR

We're going to supply you with everything you need to be comfortable. In addition to books and entertainment.

ALLY

You're taking us hostage.

FACILITATOR

I wouldn't think of it like that.
Think of it like - a vacation, for a good cause.

DARA

If this is a game, it's not funny.

FACILITATOR

It is definitely not a game. And it is definitely not funny.

RITA

Please, you have to let us go.

FACILITATOR

We will let you go. As soon as we get adequate climate policy enacted.

GARY

You're not serious. What does that even mean?

FACILITATOR

It means that the members of this focus group, along with about 20 or so other focus groups, are going to be tasked with making an effective plea. Something, as you said, Mr. Maxwell was incapable of doing.
We believe you are capable. We believe you can convince the world to save you. And that saving *you* is merely saving themselves.
But you have to believe it too. Because *you're* going to be the ones doing the convincing.

ALLY

This can't be real.

FACILITATOR

We'll give you a few days to get adjusted. During that time, you can write and rehearse your first communications.

TRAVIS

Communication to who?

FACILITATOR

To the world.

We're going to release the film and all your focus groups, along with your first communications, on the same day. After that, whenever you want to speak, we'll broadcast your communication. The stronger you make your case, the better chance you have of getting back home in a timely manner.

GARY

This is insane.

RITA

Please don't do this.

FACILITATOR

During your stay, you'll be physically isolated. But you won't be alone. You'll have each other to communicate with on a closed network. This way you can commiserate, and strategize your pleas.

TRAVIS

No way. This isn't real.

GARY

I'm going to find a way out of here. And when I--

FACILITATOR

I'm telling you the way out. You just need to listen.

Although you're not fictional, you will share one problem Mr. Maxwell had. You're going to have to convince strangers to inconvenience themselves for the sake of someone they've never met.

ALLY

Are you serious right now?
You're holding us for ransom?

FACILITATOR

That's one way to look at it.
Another way is that we're clearing a path for you to all go down in history as the individuals who finally convinced our government to do something it would have never done on its own. But that's all the more reason to take care with your choice of words. The tone you take. The examples you use.
You need to think. How do you effectively mobilize a country to save a stranger, or a group of strangers, or generations of strangers? What does that sound like?

RITA

We're not orators. We're just regular people.

FACILITATORS

That's why you have a real shot. Certainly a better shot than a fictional Mr. Maxwell.

ALLY

But why us?

FACILITATOR

Because you and the hundred or so others in the other focus groups represent just about every demographic we could find. Every race, religion, background.
If an individual is watching, and they *need* to see someone like themselves, to empathize, we've tried to make sure - there's someone for everyone.

DARA

Why us specifically? We're not Mr. Jenns. We haven't done anything wrong.

FACILITATOR

Neither have any of the hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, who have *already* perished due to what people in Mr. Jenns' world refer to as Climate complications.

(MORE)

FACILITATOR(cont'd)

Neither have the hundreds of millions who will surely perish in the future if we don't get this under control.

Your innocence is the point. You represent what's at stake.

DARA

We're innocent, random people with no power.

FACILITATOR

And, most importantly, you're Americans. If we had scooped up a hundred people in Bangladesh, our government wouldn't even bat an eye.

ALLY

But our government doesn't care ever. Americans die in multiples all the time from Climate Change related natural disasters, and nothing has moved in the Congress.

FACILITATE

Hence the theatrics. The news cycle can move on from even the worst natural disaster, but it can't move on from hostages. Certainly not this kind of hostage. As long as you continue to make your pleas, they can't ignore the situation.

GARY

What makes you think they won't just find us?

FACILITATOR

We have a plan in place.

TRAVIS

What's the plan?

FACILITATOR

The plan is not the point. The point is that you need to convince the public that your fate is their fate. And by saving themselves, that's how they save you. That's the point. *They* have to understand, *they're* being held hostage by Mr. Jenks.

Except they actually do have the power to escape.

(MORE)

FACILITATOR (cont'd)

And Mr. Jenns has to understand acquiescing to power under these circumstances will be seen as an excusable offense within the circles of power.

RITA

You believe it's as simple as us making hostage videos and the public saying, "Yeah, why don't they just fix Climate Change?" And that will be that?

FACILITATOR

It's not simple at all.

DARA

And you really don't think they could eventually just forget us, and let us stay in here forever?

FACILITATOR

Do they have the capacity? They certainly have the capacity. It's what they're doing right now with the masses of Climate Change victims in this country and around the world. Your job is to make them see you. And to convince them that they *are* you.

GARY

And what if we refuse to participate?

FACILITATOR

Then you'll be let out the same as everyone else, when the project is successful. But the longer it goes, you'll have to deal with the suspicion that your participation could have made the difference. And win or lose, everyone will know. When it came to speaking up, you chose to stay quiet.

TRAVIS

Even if you're right. It doesn't change what I'm going to do to you when we get out of here.

FACILITATOR

That's fair.
If this is what it takes. We've conceded to the costs.
If only Mr. Jenns and Mr. Maxwell could have done the same years before.

CAPTION over BLACK reads:

March 14, 2101

Book Club - Mauritius

INT. UNIVERSITY STUDENT UNION LOUNGE - DAY

MOHAMMAD arrives to the COMMUNAL ROOM and sits down in the circle with KIRTY, SHREYA, SIDY, MILESH, and ANJA.

Translated from Mauritian Creole.

MOHAMMAD

Sorry, I just got out of class. Did I miss anything?

ANJA

No, we just started. Kirty was saying she had a question about the book also being a movie.

MOHAMMAD

I didn't mean to interrupt. Go ahead.

KIRTY

So I want to make sure I understand. Did the movie ever get made?

MILESH

No.

SIDY

I think he tried to get it made, but he couldn't get funding. Or something like that.

KIRTY

So he just put it out as a book?

MILESH

He did.

SHREYA

A book that originally tanked.

KIRTY

And this was 80 years ago?

MILESH

I think that's right.

MOHAMMAD

Why leave it in screenplay format? Why not just rewrite it as a novel?

SHREYA

That's what I was thinking.

ANJA

Maybe he thought people back then were too stupid to read books.

KIRTY

Maybe he was so disgusted, he didn't think it was worth the extra effort.

SIDY

I think he was trying to be artistic.

MOHAMMAD

That may be why it tanked.

MILESH

Maybe he still had hope someone would make it, as a film.

SIDY

I don't know, but I've never read anything in screenplay format before.

MILESH

What did you think?

SIDY

It felt like a short book about a really long movie.

MOHAMMAD

Why do you say long?

SIDY

Because of the focus group. It felt like it went on forever.

But I think it felt like that because the whole time I'm reading that part, I'm thinking that I'm kind of wasting my time with these people, because I know there's not going to be a real resolution.

MILESH

Because they were never going to really see what it is they were doing. Or what they needed *to* do.

SIDY

Even with them being made to plead for their lives. It's like I finally feel like there's going to be a payoff, and I really want to see what they're going to say, what they might have actually said. To save themselves. To save us.

And then it ends.

We don't even get that.

ANJA

Because it never happened.

They never made it to those pleas, for us.

KIRTY

They must have had glimpses as time went on. What they had done.

I'm sure a lot of them died with a much clearer picture.

MOHAMMAD

Do you think they felt bad? Do you think they felt like the fools we see them as?

SHREYA

The people in the focus group or the actual people back then?

MOHAMMAD

People back then. At that time.

SHREYA

By the time they died, yeah. At least some of them *bad* to.

At the time of the book, probably not.

ANJA

More like of course not. I bet they just saw it as something they had no control over and saw themselves as victims.

MILESH

They were victims, in a way. They were victims of the same system that caused Climate Change.

(MORE)

MILESH (cont'd)

That's why it wasn't a regular person in the hostage chair. It was someone powerful.

SIDY

But the hostage chair wasn't the only chair. Maybe *their* chairs are just as important as the hostage chair. Regular people had a decision to make, just like Mr. Jenns. Maybe their chair is *more* important, because there's more of them. And Mr. Jenns is only capable of doing his part in maintaining the system because of all the people who ultimately act like the people in the focus group. Like they did back then.

MOHAMMAD

Not everyone in the focus group was complacent. Some really cared. One of them even made a similar point.

KIRTY

They didn't care enough to resort to violence.

ANJA

I think that's because the author didn't care enough. With as tense as the first half of the book was, it's still just toying with the idea.

MILESH

That's why I actually *liked* the second half. It's possible the author was like the average person and didn't know that nonviolence would completely fail. For all he knew, something could have actually changed without a resort to violence. Whether we like it or not, it's important to inhabit that frame of mind. And the focus group, I thought, was a smart way to deliver that.

SHREYA

That seemed like the point of the book, at least for readers back then.

MILESH

To get them to ask what else is there to do that they haven't done - but nonviolently.

MOHAMMAD

Or maybe he really was giving them a choice.

SIDY

Maybe he did believe the situation warranted violence. But he knew one person doing that wouldn't have been enough. Hell, a hundred people doing it wouldn't have been enough. It would have taken a lot more.

KIRTY

So you think it *was* an implied thing? An implied incitement?

MOHAMMAD

I think he was waking people up to the option and trying to make them take seriously what all their options were.

MILESH

But is violence only an option in hindsight? It's easy for us to say they should have pulled out all the stops, because we see what happened over the decades. If you think there's still a possibility that nonviolence would work, then you would want to exhaust all options before resorting to violence.

ANJA

No. I can't.
The consequences were too dire to take the time to exhaust all other options.

SIDY

It's the problem with putting such a premium on nonviolence. The options never end. When you say "exhaust all other options," you pretend like that's a finite number. That you'll eventually check off the last of the boxes on your nonviolent options list, and only then is it ok to resort to violence.

KIRTY

That's a good point. When are you supposed to know it's time to use violence? Someone can always point to "other options."

ANJA

It's worse than that. Even if there are multiple nonviolent options left that *could* actually work, that doesn't mean you shouldn't "resort" to violence. When you're faced with something like this? It's not an either/or. It's all of the above.

SIDY

I understand that they don't have the context that we do, but they had a grasp of the stakes. And they had *enough* grasp that the risk of violence would have been absolutely worth it.

ANJA

Hindsight or no hindsight, if they'd have had to kill ten thousand people, a hundred thousand people, to stop what happened? Is there anyone who thinks that *wouldn't* have been worth it?

MOHAMMAD

Now we don't.

ANJA

I'm saying, even without hindsight, they should have known that.

MILESH

That's why the book is a better book now than it was back then. To readers at the time, it was controversial, *and* seen as condescending.

SIDY

Now it looks like he wasn't harsh enough. I do think it at least gives us an honest, if infuriating, look at why nothing happened.

MOHAMMAD

Why *not enough* happened.

SIDY

That's what I meant.

SHREYA

Then it gets resurrected decades later as this almost historical marker.

KIRTY

Becoming a cult classic due to the failure of your book to inspire adequate action has got to be the worst path to success.

SHREYA

He was dead by the time the book got revived. He couldn't have known it would ever find an audience.

KIRTY

Maybe he did. Maybe he knew his people would never do anything, and he really did just write it for us. Maybe he *wasn't* banking on them back then doing what they needed to, but actually that they *wouldn't* and that we would discover the work later and find it prescient.

ANJA

Now that's cynical.

KIRTY

It's not impossible.

SHREYA

That could be why he gave as much time to the focus group as he did the first part. To show the weight of their apathy. It's not a book saying, "Hey, wake up." It's a book saying, "Hey, look at how stupid we all were."

MOHAMMAD

That's if you think it was only for us. And that requires the gamble of it getting a new readership decades later.

MILESH

That *is* a pretty big gamble.

KIRTY

Yet somehow it was less a gamble than the book being in earnest and intending on spurring people into an action that would have saved us. Those odds were somehow worse.

SHREYA

What if it was more than that? Maybe the focus group is supposed to not just represent humans in that moment, but humans the whole time before that too. Over the previous decades that led up to that time.

ANJA

Not just for the idiots who couldn't be bothered to do something about Climate Change, but for those who gave them Climate Change.

SIDY

But wouldn't that be more of a focus on the Mr. Jenns type people than the average person?

SHREYA

Not necessarily. This is all Industrial Revolution/capitalism stuff. I was thinking about Mr. Jenns and how it reminded me of someone like the United States' Henry Ford. Someone who saw himself as this man of insight, this innovator for what he saw was the greater good. And yet no one stepped back and said to themselves, "My God, how much mining and extraction and human sweat and blood has to go into just one of these things?!... And you're setting up a system that is going to instill our reliance on millions, later billions of these things, these metal and mineral beasts, year after year, decade after decade, forever?" That's not something that should have just been obvious *and appalling* to the great Henry Ford; it should have been obvious and appalling to everyone. Even without Climate Change, were we supposed to just keep ripping up and sucking up the earth for a thousand years, for ten thousand years? It shows how inexplicably shortsighted we were.

MOHAMMAD

So you see the focus group as representing society as a whole, even before Climate Change had gotten to that point.

SHREYA

I don't know if they were that much different. Whether it was cars or food or just the junk that capitalism churned out at record speed, it should have been obvious to anyone in any decade that this was totally unsustainable.

MILESH

There were tons of people who saw that - and said as much.

SHREYA

Just like there were people working hard to address Climate Change during the author's time. It's that the rest of society wasn't listening.

ANJA

They were just too busy not thinking about their kids and grandkids.

SIDY

I'm not saying you're wrong. But it feels a little like you projecting what you *want it to be* onto it.

MILESH

Isn't that what experiencing art is all about?

ANJA

If you see it as art.

KIRTY

Either way, I like what Shreya's saying. It gives me even more people to be mad at.

Laughs.

MILESH

What if we're right about it not being for them? What does that make us think of the author?

ANJA

Narcissistic, cowardly, pathetic.

KIRTY

It's definitely not a good look.

MOHAMMAD

It could make him worse than the focus group members.

SHREYA

Why does it have to be one or the other? What if he was playing both sides?

SIDY

Doesn't *that* make it worse?

ANJA

If he is playing both sides, then he's still like them. Not doing enough.

SHREYA

Does that mean we can't enjoy it?

ANJA

Depends on what you mean by enjoy. You might appreciate it. But enjoying it implies that it's good.

MILESH

I don't think it's supposed to be judged as good or bad. I think it's supposed to be complicated.

ANJA

I get that. But there's still a part of me that says there's nothing complicated about unleashing death and destruction on future generations.

MILESH

Consequences are never complicated. But choices are.

SHREYA

That's like saying the choice to save a child from drowning is complicated. Except how many children were lost from *this* choice?

MILESH

It wasn't just one choice. It was hundreds of millions of choices.

KIRTY

Hundreds of millions more to be mad at.

MILESH

I just mean that if it was one choice, it *would* be easy. But the direction civilization takes is the sum of all these different moving parts, and some of those moving parts are bigger than others. And sometimes they're looking to go in different directions than others.

KIRTY

Like Mr. Jenns.

MOHAMMAD

That's why it was important to show both the hostage scene with Mr. Jenns and the focus group with all the regular people.

KIRTY

People like Mr. Jenns showed no reservation about their violence.

ANJA

And the focus group couldn't even humor the idea.

MOHAMMAD

I think they could humor it. I just don't think they were convinced it had gotten that far.

ANJA

You mean they weren't brave enough.

MILESH

Committing to violence when you're not sure what the outcome will be is not necessarily brave.

SIDY

They *were* sure of the outcome. Or they should have been. The information was there.

SHREYA

Regular people are always going to hesitate when it comes to violence. And in the big picture, that's a really good thing. It's probably saved us from a number of nuclear annihilations. This time, that hesitation *caused* the devastation.

ANJA

But Mr. Jenns was made out to be sophisticated and refined and sure of himself.

SHREYA

That's why he didn't hesitate. Regular people are not machines. They're full of knowledge and ignorance and belief and insecurities and virtues and prejudices. And all that stuff competes. But the one thing that keeps humanity moving in the direction of survival is empathy. Mr. Jenns *is* refined. Because he was put through a process of refining. And part of that process. The part that makes him so sure of himself and so quick with his answers. Is the subtraction of genuine empathy. In the sphere of his influence, he might as well *be* a machine.

KIRTY

And the regular people weren't willing to turn off the machine unless they could do so without damaging it.

SIDY

Even the ones who took Mr. Jenns hostage. They were giving *him* the choice.

SHREYA

It's because they still had their empathy.

MILESH

You said that's a good thing.
It's what has kept us alive, helped us progress.

SHREYA

It is. That's why you were right before when you said it was complicated.

ANJA

But it's not. Either the majority of humanity is valuable or it's not. Either you're going to allow the catastrophe or you're not. Even if the focus group are all simpletons, the people who took Mr. Jenns hostage aren't. They know the score. And even *they* had that hesitation. They had to make his punishment his own choice.

SIDY

If they had gotten to that point, there's no way they shouldn't have just committed to seeing it through.

MOHAMMAD

I think they believed there was more to be gained from having Mr. Jenns use his power in the system than by making an example out of him.

KIRTY

But all the other powerful people like him are machines too. You think a handful of outliers are going to persuade the rest, based on nothing more than their friendship?

ANJA

It should never have been a matter of forcing Mr. Jenns to change. It should have been a matter of punishing him for what he's done and using that punishment as severe disincentive for this kind of behavior.

MILESH

Even if we all agree on that - now. Back then people's sensibilities were not there. You put Mr. Jenns' head on a spike in front of his home office, and the average person would have instantly been on *his* side.

SHREYA

I'm not so sure of that. I believe regular people have great reservations about committing violence. But that doesn't mean there may not be something bubbling below.

(MORE)

SHREYA (cont'd)

For all we know, the average person back then may have been waiting to cheer on this type of violence, but just couldn't do it themselves.

MILESH

And what about empathy?

SHREYA

Empathy for billions of vulnerable people could easily outweigh empathy for a handful of greedy psychopaths.

KIRTY

As long as you're not the one committing the violence.

SHREYA

Complicated.

ANJA

That's not what I took from the focus group. Besides, we didn't need the average person to cheer on a handful of people doing what was needed. We needed all of them doing what was needed.

SIDY

It's because the powerful understood. The average person only matters if you're staying nonviolent. And that's exactly what they did. And this is where it got us. If you're resorting to violence, you're admitting it's the powerful that matter.

ANJA

The point of putting his head on the spike is to make all Mr. Jenns' colleagues wonder who's next.

MOHAMMAD

A strategy like that would never work. There'd be a security and surveillance crackdown like no one's ever seen.

ANJA

There's always someone you can get to. And you only need one every now and then.

(MORE)

ANJA (cont'd)

Just to show you're still out there. And still committed to getting them.

KIRTY

Maybe this was the last step before resorting to that.

SHREYA

Or maybe we're writing our own screenplay.

MILESH

Or maybe we're doing exactly what the book wants us to do. To place blame on the wrong people, to get distracted from the real culprit. And to make ourselves out to be saints. Isn't that what we're doing? Listen to our conversation. I don't think we're that much different from the focus group.

ANJA

It's not about us being saints; it's about us being victims. It's about our parents and grandparents being victims. Those people did this to us. And if the author wasn't serious about either pushing or punishing them, *he* did this to us.

SIDY

And a lifetime later, he gets cult classic status. When everything he got right didn't matter.

SHREYA

Because everything he got right didn't matter.

MOHAMMAD

But *did* it get anything right? I think we're still supposed to be deciding that.

KIRTY

For what? We already know they did the wrong thing.

MILESH

Maybe it's to warn future generations to not make the same mistake.

SHREYA

To not let anything ever get to that point again.

SIDY

Maybe it *was* never about Climate Change, and he always knew it would be too late.

ANJA

Then he should have said that. He seemed to explain everything else. Why not just say that?

MILESH

Maybe that's the one thing the reader is supposed to come to on their own.

ANJA

Or we're being far too generous. The only thing I took away from the book was that they should have turned to violence, probably even before the book was written.

MILESH

That's definitely not a lesson that can be applied to all situations.

MOHAMMAD

I don't think anyone's saying that. And maybe violence really wasn't needed. Maybe there were other nonviolent options they could have figured out.

I just think that by making the discussion taboo, by making any idea for a solution taboo to even bring up, you risk an outcome far worse than what you might have allowed for as a last resort.

A pensive, and unanimous, round of nods.

CAPTION over BLACK reads:

Questioning Boston - 2026

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

OFFICER KURTZ stares across at MATTY, a 20-year-old busboy, still in his work clothes.

Matty stares back.

OFFICER KURTZ

I assume you know why we asked you to come in.

MATTY

Actually, I have no idea why you asked me.

OFFICER KURTZ

You're aware of the film *Do We Have Your Attention*.

MATTY

The banned film? I've read things about it. Online.

OFFICER KURTZ

Read things.

MATTY

I know about it.

OFFICER KURTZ

Your relationship to the film is a little more than knowing about it.

MATTY

Tell me, how does one have a relationship with a film?

OFFICER KURTZ

When one distributes it.

MATTY

How would you know if I distributed anything?

OFFICER KURTZ

I'm not here to answer; I'm here to ask. How did you get the film, and why are you sharing it with others online?

MATTY

Well, I would much rather prefer a discussion. Otherwise, I feel like I'm in trouble. Now, are we talking about the government banning the film, or are we talking about the government protecting it with a copyright?

OFFICER KURTZ

Even banned, it still possesses copyright.

MATTY

To be charged with copyright infringement, especially if tried, there has to be harm done. Have the filmmakers brought charges against me?

OFFICER KURTZ

No one said anything about charges. I'm just asking questions.

MATTY

Asking me questions about a banned film that you think I acquired and am distributing.

OFFICER KURTZ

Well, you are a pirate. That's what you call yourself, isn't it?

MATTY

I prefer the term digital bootlegger.

OFFICER KURTZ

So you admit that you're infringing copyright.

MATTY

If this were about copyright, it wouldn't be about this movie.

OFFICER KURTZ

Why do you say that?

MATTY

Because banned movies can't make money. Therefore, distributing a banned movie doesn't result in a loss of revenue. If anything, distributing a banned movie only benefits the makers of the film.

OFFICER KURTZ

But you are admitting that you're distributing the film.

MATTY

I'm not admitting anything. But let's pretend that I did have it on a server where it was freely available for download. I would have no way of knowing who is downloading it. There's no giving or receiving of funds. There's no contractual exchange. There's no advertisement or promotion. Just someone seeing that it exists on a server and deciding to replicate it on their server.

There's no way of even knowing if they watched the film. Just that it now exists, on their server. Without knowing if they even plan to watch it, how could any of this be considered a crime on my part?

OFFICER KURTZ

Because they *could* watch it.

MATTY

Is it a crime once they download it, or once they watch it?

OFFICER KURTZ

It's a crime for you to make it available.

MATTY

No. That would be a copyright infringement. Breaking the laws around banned films requires proof that someone actually watched the dangerous propaganda in question.

OFFICER KURTZ

You seem to know a lot about the law.

MATTY

You seem to feign ignorance about it.

OFFICER KURTZ

Then tell me, why would someone download a film and not watch it?

MATTY

Why do people buy collectible toys or comic books and never bring them out of the packaging? Why did people ever buy NFTs?

OFFICER KURTZ

Are you saying that just possessing a banned film is worth going to jail over?

MATTY

Rich people buy heisted paintings and artifacts. Just so they can know - they have them.

OFFICER KURTZ

That's an object. There's only one of them. With a file, there could be literally millions of people who possess it.

MATTY

How many people do you think possess *Do We Have Your Attention?*

OFFICER KURTZ

I wouldn't know.

MATTY

You definitely would know. If you think that I possess it, it means that you have surveillance capacity to know if anyone possesses it.

OFFICER KURTZ

So you're admitting you possess it.

MATTY

I thought we were still in the hypothetical world.

OFFICER KURTZ

Ok, hypothetically, if you did possess it, how did you get it?

MATTY

Hypothetically, it would have been shared with me.

OFFICER KURTZ

By whom?

MATTY

I might not know. I might not even know what it was when I got it. I might not have asked for it.

OFFICER KURTZ

You're saying it might have been shared unsolicited from an anonymous source?

MATTY

It might.

OFFICER KURTZ

Isn't that dangerous?

MATTY

For the average person. But not for a digital bootlegger.

OFFICER KURTZ

Who do you think would share something like this with you?

MATTY

Hard to say. Maybe someone who wants to get in my good graces. Maybe someone who wants to rub it in my face that they got it before I did. Maybe the filmmakers.

OFFICER KURTZ

Why would the filmmakers send it to you?

MATTY

Why else? So I could distribute it.

OFFICER KURTZ

Is that what happened?

MATTY

It doesn't matter. Because I have no idea, and you have no idea, if anyone has watched a digitally pirated copy of the film. Unless you're saying you do have documentation of what people are doing on and with their personal devices.

OFFICER KURTZ

I'm not saying anything of the sort.

MATTY

Then why are we here?

OFFICER KURTZ

Why do you think?

MATTY

I think you're here to scare me.

OFFICER KURTZ

Why would I want to scare you? I don't know you.

MATTY

Because you're scared. And you do know me.

OFFICER KURTZ

Why am I scared?

MATTY

Maybe not you personally. But who you work for, who you represent. They're scared that they rushed to judgment and banned a film that probably wouldn't have gotten half a million people out to the theaters, and now thirty or forty million are going to see it. And by banning it, they're the ones who've created the buzz. They're the ones who told you there's something in this. Something dangerous. Something they're scared of. It's almost like they've told people that the violence depicted in the film - just might work.

OFFICER KURTZ

Is that what you believe?

MATTY

If I told you that, it would be an admission I've seen the movie. And I couldn't have seen the movie unless I possess the movie.

OFFICER KURTZ

Then in general. Do you think violence is the answer to the Climate issue?

MATTY

Let me put it this way. Your bosses and their bosses and their bosses have either ignored, defeated, or co-opted every nonviolent attempt made to wrest our future from their quarterly earnings projections. What little progress we've made isn't going to be enough. And if they're not put out of business, we may lose those gains too. They have all the politicians and courts and police they need - for nonviolence. But they banned this film before anyone could buy a ticket. And from what I've heard and read about the film, it doesn't even advocate for violence. It only advocates for a conversation about what nonviolent options are left.

OFFICER KURTZ

Isn't that the same thing?

MATTY

Only if you believe that nothing nonviolent will work.

OFFICER KURTZ

It could just mean that activists don't have as good an imagination as they think.

MATTY

True or not, it's not the imagination of the nonviolent ones they're afraid of. They've had decade after decade of nonviolent protests to study. They've learned how to adapt to nonviolence, no matter how militant. But violence. That's wide open. The imagination for violence is a whole new frontier. One they can't study. One they can't *really* prepare for.

OFFICER KURTZ

That's some big talk. I wonder what you'd say if someone you shared this film with took inspiration from it to break the law.

MATTY

I wonder what you would say if someone I shared a film with took inspiration to commit a nonviolent action that this time was enough.

OFFICER KURTZ

I guess I would be happy. But it wouldn't change the fact that you broke the law.

MATTY

How's saving us with nonviolence different from someone saving us with violence? We're not talking about a minor issue. We're talking about the future of the planet. Wouldn't you also be happy if we were saved by those who broke the law?

OFFICER KURTZ

You can't know that until after the fact.

MATTY

I'm asking you - would you be happy?

OFFICER KURTZ

I imagine... in the grand scheme of things, I would be relieved.

MATTY

But for the time being, you're tasked with doing everything you can to stop people from breaking the law.

OFFICER KURTZ

That's correct.

MATTY

Even *nonviolent* actions that break the law.

OFFICER KURTZ

Even nonviolent actions.

MATTY

Like file sharing.

OFFICER KURTZ

Like not following the ban order.

MATTY

You know the reason why I don't believe in intellectual property? I believe that the alphabet, like numbers, is like the planet. You can't own any of it. It's just there. It was here before us, and it will be here after us. Just like matter, you can arrange letters and numbers - and ideas, any way you want. But you can't own it. Unless we all own it. Banning a film is an act of taking. It's taking ownership away from the filmmaker and holding it with the state. But, see, I don't recognize either owner. Just like I don't recognize any laws that protect the immutable individual ownership of even the tiniest slice of our planet at the expense of everyone else.

OFFICER KURTZ

You think that's what the ban is?

MATTY

I think a film about saving the planet from fossil fuels got banned before fossil fuels did. And your job is to enforce that ban.

OFFICER KURTZ

Well, I don't exactly see it that way. But it is my job to enforce the law.

MATTY

Too bad you're just asking questions.

OFFICER KURTZ

That may not always be the case.

MATTY

That sounds like something you need to reckon with, not me.

You may not believe this, but I'm not an advocate for violence. In fact, I abhor it. But what I abhor more than violence is laws that protect it.

OFFICER KURTZ

So *you* can recognize which laws are truly just and which aren't?

MATTY

I can recognize there's more than one form of violence. And I can recognize proportionality.

OFFICER KURTZ

You sound like the actors in the book club scene.

MATTY

And you sound like you've seen a banned film.

OFFICER KURTZ

I've read things about it. Online.

MATTY

You don't think those people have a point? The people in that scene? Looking back at historical devastation, loss of life greater than you and I can conceive? Loss of species, loss of ecological balance?

OFFICER KURTZ

That assumes we won't avoid that future without violence.

MATTY

The only people asking us to assume that are the ones making sure it won't happen.

OFFICER KURTZ

And what do you think should be done with those people?

MATTY

I don't know. Cigarettes killed millions of people, and the people who peddled them never saw a day in a jail cell. They paid firms of liars to convince us there was nothing wrong with smoking. And as millions *more* died, none of *those liars* ever saw a day in a jail cell.

Those liars would later work for the same fossil fuel companies that realized as early as the 1950s that if they kept doing what they were doing, the death toll would eclipse that of cigarettes.

(MORE)

MATTY (cont'd)

And none of those executives, none of their liars, none of the media who helped them lie, none of the politicians who made it easier for them to kill more, none of them will ever see a day in a jail cell.

How do you stop them? With cigarettes, you could at least quit. It's hard, but it's possible. With this, you don't even have the option not to start.

OFFICER KURTZ

How do *you* think you stop them?

MATTY

By knowing. As long as we keep asking that question, "how do you stop them," we'll never do it.

The question is, if they must be stopped. And you know the answer to that, same as I do.

OFFICER KURTZ

Even if it means violence?

MATTY

I told you. I abhor violence.

OFFICER KURTZ

I'm sure the members of that book club also abhor violence.

MATTY

You said it. Not me.

CAPTION over BLACK reads:

The Judiciary
Washington, D.C. - 2027

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

82-year-old BEVERLY GLISPEN stands before a heightened semicircle of FIVE JUDGES. The COURT OFFICER steps forth.

COURT OFFICER

Please state your name.

BEVERLY

Beverly Glispén.

COURT OFFICER

Beverly Glispén, law enforcement has presented the courts with evidence of your guilt. 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?

BEVERLY

Honesty and truth are not the same thing.

COURT OFFICER

Then do you swear to be honest?

BEVERLY

That I can do.

COURT OFFICER

The judges will now ask you questions.

The Court Officer steps back.

JUDGE THREE

Ms. Glispén, you teach media literacy.

BEVERLY

Among other things, yes.

JUDGE THREE

As part of the course you titled “Media Literacy For A Free Society,” you reserved a week of instruction for *Do We Have Your Attention*.

BEVERLY

I always have a section for banned films. This year it made sense to cover one that had only recently been banned.

JUDGE FIVE

We’re not concerned with other films. We’re concerned with this one.

BEVERLY

The court’s concern was actually part of the class. We examined why the state would deem such a work dangerous enough to forbid its viewing.

JUDGE TWO

And what conclusion did you come to?

BEVERLY

That there is no danger.

JUDGE TWO

Then I guess it’s a good thing you’re not on the Review Board.

BEVERLY

From what I gather, no one on the Review Board has ever taken a media literacy class.

JUDGE TWO

And your point?

BEVERLY

My point is that a good society doesn’t infantilize people but rather prepares the minds of its citizenry for any communication they may encounter.

JUDGE FOUR

Even if that communication endangers a full segment of the population?

BEVERLY

That segment of the population are some of the most powerful individuals to ever walk the planet. And, if I am honest, some of the most menacing.

JUDGE THREE

So you have an agenda.

BEVERLY

If I have an agenda, it's in strengthening the minds of young people.

JUDGE FIVE

Like the young people who took Mr. Jenns and Mr. Maxwell hostage?

BEVERLY

Part of media literacy is how to assess fictional scenarios.

JUDGE FIVE

Did you condemn such actions in class?

BEVERLY

The actions are fictional. They didn't happen. Moreover, I don't tell my students what to think. Conscripting what people should think only produces weaker and weaker minds.

JUDGE ONE

Strong minds don't take it upon themselves to extrajudicially police the powerful.

BEVERLY

How else are you supposed to police them? The courts have said time and again that the powerful are breaking no laws, even as they blatantly seal our collective fate. I would say that's exactly the course for strong minds.

JUDGE ONE

So you're an advocate for this type of violence.

BEVERLY

No one said anything about violence. I simply affirmed the extrajudicial part.

JUDGE ONE

So you advocate for breaking the law.

BEVERLY

I advocate for finding a solution. And the only way we're going to find a solution is by having the very discussions that this film forces us to have.

JUDGE FIVE

This film points to violence over and over.

BEVERLY

That's if you take it as some kind of manual. But that's not how art works. How many anti-war films have used characters who either gleefully perform or rejoice in violence to paint said violence as repugnant?

JUDGE FOUR

Ms. Glispen. Do you think you were brought here to give a lecture on the virtues of ironic violence? Do you think you're going to turn us into your students? You're here because you screened a banned film.

BEVERLY

I screened clips from a banned film.

JUDGE FOUR

The key word in that sentence is not "clips." It's "banned."

BEVERLY

I was relying upon an exemption for university use.

JUDGE TWO

Neither you nor your university was granted such exemption. And I can assure you this is not a case of "better to ask forgiveness than ask permission."

BEVERLY

The film was banned for certain scenes. I didn't show those scenes.

JUDGE FOUR

No, you had students act them out as they read from the script.

BEVERLY

The script was never officially banned.

JUDGE THREE

Banning a film is an implied ban of the script.

BEVERLY

“Implied” doesn’t imply *legal* jeopardy.

JUDGE FOUR

Just like a university professor to think you’re smarter than the rest of us.

BEVERLY

I’m not the one telling people they can’t be trusted with material that I and my friends *have* had the privilege of seeing.

JUDGE ONE

The officers of the court have sworn an oath.

BEVERLY

And, in a moment where men and women like Mr. Jenns accelerate our demise, who do the officers of the court find themselves judging?

JUDGE FIVE

You’re here because you delight in dangling forbidden fruit in front of the innocent.

BEVERLY

Maybe it shouldn’t be forbidden. To withhold different perspectives is like withholding nutrition. It stunts one’s intellectual development.

JUDGE THREE

You think law abiding citizens are intellectually stunted?

BEVERLY

If a society is willing to watch one hundred thousand years of human struggle and survival be discarded by a relative handful of avaricious sociopaths, without doing everything in its power to stop them, I most definitely regard that society as stunted.

JUDGE ONE

All because they're not allowed to see this one film.

BEVERLY

All because they've mistaken the rule of the fallible for the will of God.
If the average person in this society is, as the court believes, not capable of processing a film that merely stretches the lens of self-determination and democratic expectation...
Then those persons are stunted.
And ban orders on films only shrink that lens.

JUDGE FOUR

This condescension. It may work in your classroom.

BEVERLY

I don't have to condescend in my classroom. My students actually take *their* work seriously.

JUDGE TWO

Not everything should be taken seriously.

BEVERLY

True. But Your Honors do. The authorities that deemed the work dangerous took it seriously. Even if my students found the film to be garbage, I wanted them to come to that conclusion through serious consideration.

JUDGE THREE

It appears some of them took it more seriously than they should have.

BEVERLY

Meaning what?

JUDGE THREE

We've read their final papers. It appears a number of them exhibited quite a bit of sympathy for the book club scene members.

BEVERLY

How could they not? They're just kids. They're worried about their future. Evidently more than their elders.

Had I possessed a bit more foresight of my own, I might have had more sympathy with the detainee.

JUDGE FIVE

That scene was an acknowledgement by the filmmakers. They knew it was worthy of being banned. And when you illegally viewed it, before you infected young minds with its message, maybe you should have taken the detainee scene as a warning.

You could have avoided all this.

JUDGE TWO

But just like the detainee, you offer no signs of remorse.

BEVERLY

I did nothing to feel remorseful for. On the contrary, having these types of discussions is important.

JUDGE FOUR

You gave a lecture on the significance of a film that wasn't going to be seen by anyone *not* breaking the law. How is that important?

BEVERLY

Because you gave it importance. You took a low budget independent film that might not have made it out of the third-tier festival circuit and told everyone in the world, there's something in this. But it's not for you.

Anyone who's ever had kids knows that's not how you deter people from seeing something. That's how you make it irresistible.

JUDGE ONE

Maybe you're right. Maybe the Board of Reviewers didn't do themselves any favors in issuing the ban order. Nevertheless, our role is to enforce the law.

BEVERLY

And my role is to challenge and strengthen young minds.

JUDGE ONE

Are you saying you can't do that without breaking the law?

BEVERLY

I believe you're saying that, not me.

JUDGE FOUR

What a surprise. We seem to be wrong about everything.

BEVERLY

Not everything. There's one thing you got right. When I first acquired and reviewed the different *pieces of Do We Have Your Attention* - before I exhibited those pieces in class. I should have viewed the detainee scene as a warning. Indeed, now, it seems almost prophetic. When the first set of officers knocked on my door, that scene is the first thing that came to mind. On the way to the station, I just kept thinking if the questions would be similar. And how my answers would compare to the detainee in the film.

JUDGE THREE

Evidently, they weren't sufficient to keep you from being charged.

BEVERLY

That's because I answered the officers' questions honestly. Like I have here today.

JUDGE TWO

Too bad the substance of that honesty is going to result in your conviction.

BEVERLY

It's not bad. It's good.

JUDGE FIVE

Since when is going to prison a good thing?

BEVERLY

Since you turned the world upside down.
If we're lucky, we have a few more years to erase
that book club scene. And with the kind of
change needed, a few more years might as well be
a few more days. And in those few days left, you
banned an open discussion about what is to be
done.

Beverly looks down, as if tired.

BEVERLY (cont'd)

I'm old. So old my children tell me *they* feel old.
But my students are young. And they have fire
in the belly.
I did this for them. For the stories they have
inside them.
Seeing what happens to me? They'll know what
the film was telling them.
And you? You'll just have to wait to find out
what that is.

JUDGE ONE

I think we've heard all we need to hear.

CAPTION over BLACK reads:

Raleigh Sci-Fi Writers Social

Raleigh - 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.

AMANDA, SHRUTI, and DAVID politely wait for him to speak.

WRITER

Show of hands. Who thinks I should keep going with this, and who thinks I should scrap it and start something else?
Keep it?

Everyone's hands go up.

WRITER (cont'd)

You lying motherfuckers.

Laughs.

AMANDA

What?

WRITER

No way everyone liked this.

SHRUTI

What else are we going to say? You put so much work into it.

WRITER

Yeah, but it's just a first draft. If it's shit, I don't need to spend any *more* time on it.

DAVID

It's not shit. It's just... ambitious.

WRITER

That's another way of saying I'm in over my head.

SHRUTI

Well, you kind of are. You're not a screenwriter, but you're writing the entire novel in a screenplay style.

DAVID

And you're not a scientist, but you're writing a sci-fi novel about a phenomenon that never happened.

WRITER

But did you buy it? That's the question.

AMANDA

I was able to follow the characters. But I was only half sure I really understood the premise. It's supposed to be set right now, if we had never paid any attention to the Global Warming reports sixty years ago. But it's about them *not* paying attention to it in the current day?

WRITER

That's exactly right. It's about them, in 2021, not paying attention to the danger *of* 2021, where they haven't done anything about Global Warming for all these years.

AMANDA

That's such a crazy idea.

SHRUTI

I think it's a good idea.

DAVID

It may be a good idea, but it also may be a hard sell. Even sci-fi readers want some kind of magic. The only magic in this is believing we would have ever let it get to that point.

AMANDA

Yeah, how could people not believe they would go down in history as the worst humans of all time by purposefully letting this happen?

SHRUTI

History is written by the victors.

DAVID

But if Global Warming would have taken over, there wouldn't have been any victors.

SHRUTI

If you think that, you don't understand the minds of the elite. The rich are building spaceships rather than solving hunger. These bastards could wipe out preventable diseases the world over and their lifestyle wouldn't change in the slightest. You think they would care if half the global population died? Dude, they would welcome that. Because that half would be the ones with the least. And they look at those at the bottom as not even worth thinking about.

DAVID

It's one thing to not think about them. It's another to ensure their demise.

SHRUTI

They do that by simply keeping their money.

DAVID

So what, you think this is about capitalism?

SHRUTI

Don't you?

AMANDA

Maybe it's about fascism.

DAVID

Why fascism?

AMANDA

Maybe the actions of the fossil fuel industry in this fictional scenario is tied to how the nation turned out. Maybe to get that far, the whole society would have had to go down the tubes.

SHRUTI

But we see that kind of power in all sorts of policy decisions. And *we* haven't gone completely down the tubes.

AMANDA

Yeah, about credit cards, or healthcare. But nothing like this.

SHRUTI

All this stuff has a huge impact.

AMANDA

I just think you would have to have slid into fascism for one industry to have this much power and the people not to be able to do anything about it.

SHRUTI

It's about the perception, and the language. The characters kept referring to them as policy decisions. Which is the same as what we call this stuff. Even the most outrageous stuff. It's not sins, or crimes, or outrages. It's all policy decisions.

DAVID

Calling them policy decisions makes it all sound banal.

SHRUTI

Energy policy sounds banal too.

DAVID

Plus, it's so important. It could easily be spun as a patriotic policy.

AMANDA

In the face of that kind of danger? I don't know.

DAVID

I'm skeptical too, but what Shruti said about the spaceships. That shit isn't fiction. And that's just over hunger. Can you imagine the space hard-on these rich dicks would have if the whole place was going up in flames?

AMANDA

Gross.

SHRUTI

I think it's worse than that. If we assume these people are that rotten, I don't think it would be spaceships. I mean the spaceship thing now is just that they have so much money they don't know what to do with it.

AMANDA

Except solving hunger.

SHRUTI

That's why I think it's for fun. For people who choose every year to *not* solve hunger, but rather build toys, I don't think they're scared of anything.

Whether it's hunger or if it were *this* scenario. If the rich ever think they're in any real jeopardy, they're not giving up the planet. They're going to take full ownership of a piece of it, and militarize that border like no other in world history.

DAVID

You think the real spaceship is going to be a buildup of private military.

SHRUTI

It'll be like a fortress.

It's not like a spaceship, where you have to invent the wheel. Modern military bases are impenetrable.

AMANDA

But that would cut them off from any kind of trade.

DAVID

They would take the best land. They'd grow and make what they need. And if they did need anything, those on the outside would more than likely get desperate enough to barter.

AMANDA

That's a mighty big gamble to keep a lifestyle.

SHRUTI

It's not a lifestyle, it's an identity. The suffering of others is part of their worldview.

It's like when I was a kid, at that Baptist church my parents made me go to, one of my Sunday school teachers said that the Bible said there would always be wars, until the last days. So if you heard someone calling for world peace, they were going against the Bible.

AMANDA

You had a *Sunday school* teacher say that?

SHRUTI

It wasn't just him. I heard that from multiple Christians.

AMANDA

Not every Christian believes that.

SHRUTI

But everyone that has climbed to the top of Inequality Mountain believes in inequality. Not for what they have acquired, but who they've become.

DAVID

I agree with that. But I think Amanda had a point too when she mentioned fascism. Even if you're right about everything, and we could just as easily replace one of our current messes with Global Warming, when I get to the end of what we read and see the different justice system, I think maybe it could be a different kind of government. Even the manner the judges speak in. It sounds so arrogant and authoritarian.

AMANDA

You could imagine the trials being just for show.

DAVID

Or amusement.

SHRUTI

It did say they were being “afforded” a discussion. Like it was some privilege to have these judges talk to them.

AMANDA

So you think it could be a fascist state?

SHRUTI

I don’t think it matters the exact state. I think it matters how they’re speaking to the people in front of them.

See, I didn’t think that part was as much about censorship as it was a metaphor for how the powerful entertain certain elements of democracy to keep up appearances.

AMANDA

For show.

DAVID

What? We gave you a hearing.

SHRUTI

What? We gave you an election.

AMANDA

But I think the censorship angle matters too. Because the only way you get to where they are with Global Warming is also the only way you can maintain a fascist regime.

DAVID

Through censorship.

AMANDA

It doesn’t have to be overt. It just has to be understood parameters.

DAVID

Lines you know not to cross.

AMANDA

It makes it an interesting place to arrive at. But I’m not sure it’s a good place to end.

SHRUTI

Didn't you say that wasn't the ending?

WRITER

It's not. That's what I wanted to talk to you about.

AMANDA

Well, before we do that, can I ask you about something that I had a question about?

WRITER

Sure.

AMANDA

It kind of goes back to what we mentioned at the beginning. I wanted to ask about the format you chose. It would have been one thing if the first part would have been a script, or maaaybe even the second part, but keeping the whole thing a script just seems too much.

WRITER

You all said it yourself. I'm not a scriptwriter.

DAVID

And?

WRITER

So I forced myself to do something that is completely out of my wheelhouse.

DAVID

And?

WRITER

That's exactly what we would expect from the people who live in this whole Global Warming scenario. They would have to step outside their comfort zone and figure out a solution. Even if it wasn't really in line with who they are.

AMANDA

You expect readers to get that just from the format of the book?

WRITER

It's not just that, it's a lot of things. But that's one of them.

DAVID

But nobody knows who you are. How are readers supposed to know you're not a screenwriter?

WRITER

Because the screenplay is only so good.

AMANDA

Are you joking?

WRITER

No. I'm not.

AMANDA

You're telling us you only made it so good because you're trying to make a point with the reader?

DAVID

A point that will almost certainly fly right by over 90 percent of readers, and an even greater percentage of critics.

WRITER

Commit to the bit.

AMANDA

No way.

WRITER

Writing a good book doesn't always have to be about presenting the best craft, or even the best story.

AMANDA

What else is it about?

WRITER

It's like watching a good movie. I like to judge how good a movie is by how much I have to talk about after the movie is over.

(MORE)

WRITER (cont'd)

Even if the movie is not shot that great, or maybe the actors weren't as good as they could have been, if it sparks hours of larger discussion afterward, then I consider it a success. Maybe that's like subconsciously another reason I went with the screenplay style.

DAVID

Whatever, man, you're full of shit. You know exactly what you're doing. This whole "it's all for discussion" speech is just an excuse for why you didn't do *better*.

WRITER

But the point *is* the discussion. Who really cares how good it is if there's nothing to talk about after reading it? If there's no good discussions to be had. The reason I feel good about where I'm at with it is because I think it gives so much to chew on.

AMANDA

I like that. I may have not thought it was the greatest read, but I definitely kept thinking to myself, "Oh, I want to bring this up with the group and see what they think about it."

DAVID

That's because we're in a writers group.

AMANDA

But it wasn't just stuff about the craft. It was the questions it brought up. The whole philosophical and moral dilemma they're in. And how easy it was for me to judge them all.

SHRUTI

Which is a bit like how the judges look at the people who violated the ban order.

AMANDA

Like it's all so easy. That someone gave them a few paragraphs of law and that's the only thing that matters in the world.

SHRUTI

Not who wrote the text or why they wrote it, or who it benefits. Just “these are the words, and the words are infallible.”

DAVID

What if that’s not really what’s going on? We were saying the trial might be for show, or amusement. But what if it’s more complex than that? What if the judges are definitely on the side of the ban being the right thing, and in their minds they’re *also* entertaining a real dialogue with the defendant?

SHRUTI

You think the judges are wrong, but earnest about the dialogue?

DAVID

If they were that rigid, why have all this back and forth? Even if they were assholes?

AMANDA

Maybe it’s to give the person before them false hope.

SHRUTI

Or maybe these aren’t opposing ideas. Keeping up appearances doesn’t necessarily mean you haven’t convinced yourself. The judges believe a censorship order is still in keeping with democracy - as long as there is some type of dialogue. Because that’s their brand of democracy. Just like Mr. Jenns can pay lip service to his environmental investments, but still keep on the same homicidal path.

AMANDA

Because that’s his brand of capitalism.

SHRUTI

How different is that from financial interests today? The more I think about it, I almost can’t believe we addressed Global Warming the way we did all those years ago.

DAVID

It's because they all still made money transitioning away from fossil fuels.

SHRUTI

I don't think they made as much.

WRITER

What if the difference had been enough for them to put us in the situation that these people in the book are in?

AMANDA

It's not the number that matters; it's if you can believe everyone would have gotten on board.

DAVID

In the book, everyone's not on board.

AMANDA

All the powerful then. I can't believe other powerful people wouldn't have done *something* to stop it.

SHRUTI

What do you think they would have done?

AMANDA

They can lobby just the same as anyone. Fossil fuels was just one industry.

SHRUTI

Yeah, but you even said it with healthcare. Or even something like guns. All it takes is one industry to stall progress long enough that we get stuck with policies that no one wants.

AMANDA

That's not this. I know that healthcare is existential, and guns being everywhere is existential. I know the argument. But the way the book paints it, this is like scarier than all the wars in the previous two hundred years combined.

SHRUTI

But it's only *this year*; it's only 2021 in the book.
None of the war stuff has happened yet.

AMANDA

They would have to know it would come.

DAVID

Just like we do with guns and healthcare, they
could shift the blame.

SHRUTI

Especially when you've got a hold on the media.
They're not going to lose any more sleep over
this than our politicians lose sleep over the
cancer caused by pesticides.

AMANDA

Are you saying that we just got lucky?

DAVID

If you look at what we got right - and they got
wrong. Is it that hard to envision a world where
we got guns and healthcare *right*, but not Global
Warming?
We definitely ended up with the lesser of the
failures.

WRITER

Maybe it is a matter of luck.
What they keep asking in the book is not that
different from what we keep asking.
Is there a world where there's all these various
nonviolent strategies that *could* work, and we
don't *have* to resort to violence?

SHRUTI

That's the wrong way to look at it. You can't act
on what you don't know. You can only act on
what you know. And with Global Warming, the
only thing you can know is what will happen if
you don't fix it.

DAVID

You end up 80 years later in the book club scene.

AMANDA

Does that justify violence?

SHRUTI

It doesn't justify anything. It just shows the weight of the consequences. And the consequences far outweigh it being an either/or scenario.

AMANDA

You would try both?

SHRUTI

I would try whatever it took until it was fixed.

DAVID

And if that was some kind of extreme violence, you would be ok with that?

SHRUTI

Nonviolence is no more moral than violence, if violence is the only thing that can stop it. In fact, if violence is the only thing that *can* stop it, nonviolence becomes the extreme.

DAVID

That's not how you view inequality. And we've got problems that in other worlds might be unthinkable. You're not out there doing whatever it takes to solve hunger or disease. Even though you said it could be fixed relatively easily.

SHRUTI

I want to make a really big argument about why this is different. But I can't. I mean I know it's not as severe as what's in *this* story. But you're right. Unless you're in the book club - decades down the road, you're probably all talk when it comes to talk about violence.

WRITER

So... not a *total* failure.

AMANDA

Not totally.

WRITER

That's good to hear.

SHRUTI

But you said it *wasn't* finished. You still wanted to talk to us about an ending.

WRITER

Yeah. I want something to wrap it all up with. I like where I took it with the judges scene, because it really doesn't feel like a resolution. I just don't know where to go after that.

AMANDA

Does it need a resolution?

WRITER

It doesn't have to have a happy ending, but I'd like to feel better about where it ends.

AMANDA

You could bring it back to the hostage scene.

WRITER

Like expanding it?

AMANDA

Maybe. Or maybe what happened before Mr. Jenns got abducted.

DAVID

Like a short prequel.

AMANDA

It might be good to see what he was doing that got him taken.

SHRUTI

And good for readers who've forgotten or never even heard anything about the whole Global Warming phenomenon.

DAVID

If you do that, you would have to tie his actions to something that could be seen as a threat in our world.

AMANDA

Or maybe you go in the opposite direction. Maybe you show him outside of his business life, with his family or his friends. Or with his church. Maybe he volunteers or coaches a ball team.

WRITER

So you feel bad for him potentially getting tortured.

SHRUTI

But also to show how someone can be a really great person in their personal life, but then go to work and do things so horrible they destroy tons of people's lives.

DAVID

That is something we can relate to.

WRITER

So just end it with Mr. Jenns being totally humanized, potentially even likable?

AMANDA

Yeah. I think it fucks with the reader.

SHRUTI

Speaking of fucking with the reader, I was completely caught off guard when the credits paused and the focus group came in.

WRITER

You liked that?

SHRUTI

I don't even know if I liked the switch, but it really startled me. And then listening to them analyze it, in some places maybe the same way I would, was strange. Strange but good.

DAVID

That was actually my least favorite part.

AMANDA

Mine too. I get it was supposed to be like a real focus group, but it just felt way too long.

SHRUTI

I think it was my favorite part. I actually wanted more of it.

WRITER

You would go back to the focus group?

SHRUTI

Maybe not the same one.
What about a different one? Or what about if you did multiple focus groups, and the reader got to compare what they have to say about the film?

WRITER

But Amanda was right. The focus group is long on its own. Doing multiple ones would make it crazy long.

DAVID

The other parts weren't that long though.

WRITER

So?

DAVID

What if you did a few book club scenes, a few police precinct scenes, and a few trial scenes? If you were going to put in the effort to do that many focus groups, it wouldn't be *that* much more to do the others as well.

WRITER

How many are we talking about?

SHRUTI

What do you think? Maybe four?

DAVID

Yeah, four would be perfect.

AMANDA

So this went from, factoring in whatever ending you decide, probably a little under 200 or so pages - to 800 pages?

WRITER

That's true. It would be a massive undertaking.

AMANDA

And what would be the point?

DAVID

Maybe you could get across different points in each new scenario.

SHRUTI

Or you could make it even more absurd by harping on the same points.

WRITER

As absurd as the whole not fixing Global Warming scenario.

AMANDA

I think it's too much.
No one's going to read a zillion pages about the same thing over and over.

SHRUTI

Then make them into four different books.

DAVID

Or what if you did it digital only? You could have a kind of random generator where it chooses which focus group, which book club scene and so on, but totally random.

SHRUTI

So the reader is kind of at the mercy of luck.

DAVID

Which may be the only reason *we* don't have the same Global Warming problem that's in the book.

WRITER

So almost no one would be reading the exact same book as anyone else.

AMANDA

But again, what's the point?

DAVID

Maybe it's to represent the points of view we often miss. Maybe it would make people want to go back in and try another version, to see what else there is.

SHRUTI

Maybe you could make it like a choose-your-own-adventure.

WRITER

That only works if it's digital.

SHRUTI

They have choose-your-own-adventures in print, but doing it digitally would make it a lot easier.

AMANDA

Or you could just make it four separate books.

WRITER

Would I have to have different hostages in the beginning part?

AMANDA

No, I think you could leave that part the same in all of them.

SHRUTI

Yeah, you definitely want it to start out the same in each.

DAVID

And just have the rest of the parts different.

WRITER

Then readers are definitely going to miss certain points of view. Unless they buy all of them. Which nine out of ten are definitely not going to.

SHRUTI

Maybe you could promote it as an alternative way of doing book clubs. Where if you have eight members, two would read one version, two would read another, and so on.

(MORE)

SHRUTI (cont'd)

And then when they get together to discuss it, they're all bringing up different points of view they read and it makes for a really interesting conversation.

DAVID

And they could then trade after the meeting, checking out a version different than they just read.

WRITER

That would be one crazy book club meeting.

SHRUTI

Maybe they could have multiple meetings after multiple readings.

AMANDA

Which, if they're trading the books, would save each the money of having to buy all four.

DAVID

That's a good point.

SHRUTI

And for those not in a book club, it still creates this mystique about what's different in mine than in the others.

DAVID

There would be different reviews for each version. Social media would have fights over which one is best. You could really do some cool promo for it.

WRITER

That would still take me writing the equivalent of four of the same book. When it took me forever to churn out this first draft.

SHRUTI

You don't *have* to. I just think it's a different idea.

DAVID

And it's not like you're under any deadline to release it.

AMANDA

Not like if Global Warming was still a thing.

WRITER

I would have to come up with three more focus groups, with different focus group participants; three more book clubs, with different members.

SHRUTI

Three more people being questioned, and three more people being judged.

WRITER

That's insane.

SHRUTI

You wanted it to be absurd.

WRITER

I wanted it to be sci-fi.

DAVID

What better sci-fi than multiple versions of an alternative reality?

SHRUTI

And even if someone just reads one of them, they can still get the basic gist.

AMANDA

But again, then what's the point?

SHRUTI

Aaaaah, maybe you're right. Maybe it's too much.

WRITER

I like the idea. I just don't know if I could pull it off.

Would I have to have four different endings?

DAVID

No. Just one ending.

One same beginning and one same ending.

SHRUTI

That's right. Only the stuff in the middle would be different.

WRITER

That leaves me in the same place I'm at right now. Trying to figure out an ending. Except with four different books, that *same ending* has to be absolutely perfect.

AMANDA

You could go with good guy Mr. Jenns.

WRITER

I could. It's actually a really good idea. But I'd like to have a few different options to think about. Did either of *you* have an idea for how to end everything?

DAVID

I had a thought. You know how creepy the setup is in the beginning with the hostage scene? And how you have to kind of wonder how a group of teenagers were able to pull this off? What if you come back to the beginning, but you reveal *that* part is like paranormal, or supernatural?

SHRUTI

Like the teens *are* ghosts?

DAVID

Yeah, it's kind of already teased in the focus group, with them trying to figure out who the teens are. I would just take that part out and actually write it in for real as an ending.

AMANDA

If you did it like the focus group suggestions, it would be ghosts from a future they would have had if Global Warming hadn't devolved into what it did. Like the teens would be the ghosts of kids who were never born because generations before them whole villages were wiped out.

SHRUTI

Or maybe it's the teens from the book club scene.

DAVID

Like the book club scene wasn't real? Or that it's them reading it - if they would have existed?

SHRUTI

I don't know.
You'd have to figure out how to make that work.
Maybe the one you said was better.

AMANDA

What if the teens are God? Or like Mother Nature or something?

WRITER

What do you mean?

AMANDA

David was saying about how it's kind of hard to believe a bunch of teenagers would be able to abduct some rich and powerful person, probably with security and all that. But if you make it supernatural and he just finds himself in the chair in front of the laptop, then that's what becomes important, and not how he got there.

WRITER

So it's actually God putting Mr. Jenns in the seat.

AMANDA

God or the Earth or whatever. The idea would be that either the creator or the creation itself is defending against total destruction.

DAVID

Or maybe showing judgment.

AMANDA

Maybe. But I think it's more to do with them trying to intervene before it gets too out of hand.

SHRUTI

Giving humans one last chance.

AMANDA

Otherwise, Mr. Jenns would just be smote or some shit.

WRITER

And God is just taking the form of these teens' faces on the laptop.

AMANDA

Reading it, you never really see them. And the face was supposed to look really weird and ominous on the screen. I was thinking, in a way, it's kind of like nature has been taken hostage. And being forced to respond in this manifestation.

DAVID

The way like, if you're religious, you don't believe God has shown him or herself since Old Testament times. But humans screwed the pooch so bad with not doing anything about Global Warming, they're forcing God's hand.

WRITER

God is really the one taken hostage. That is definitely a different take.

SHRUTI

It's a bit strange. But it opens up a whole new avenue for discussion about violence.

WRITER

In what way?

SHRUTI

If we're talking about the Bible God, we're talking about a God who was cool with all kinds of violence. Some of the most horrific violence that's ever been dreamed of has come out of the Bible, both Old and New Testament.

WRITER

So?

SHRUTI

So it changes the question of whether violence is ok.

(MORE)

SHRUTI (cont'd)

If the teens are God, and God is saying something's got to be done, then who's going to question God?

DAVID

God is cool with some pretty sick shit as long as it's in his name.

SHRUTI

And if it's to protect its very creation, the creator is not going to mind doling out a little tough love to those fucking that creation up.

WRITER

It definitely casts the whole conversation around violence in a different light.

AMANDA

Or does it?
We still have free will. Maybe it's not a nudge *toward* violence, but a test instead.

WRITER

Whether or not we'll use violence.

SHRUTI

But if God is real, and it's to save creation, wouldn't we be expected to?

AMANDA

Maybe it's like Carlin said with pollution. The planet isn't going anywhere. Humans are.

SHRUTI

Then what's really the test?

AMANDA

Maybe it's a question of what we believe about everything. About, if there's a God, what we believe about the planet we've been given, about whether it's really our job to protect it, or maintain it to a certain standard. Whether we have a responsibility to the animals and plants and insects and fish, to other humans.

(MORE)

AMANDA (cont'd)

If who the teens are is ambiguous, and it *could* be God, or nature, or anything supernatural - just personified, then it's kind of up to you, in your belief system, or your faith system, or your morals or whatever, to decide. Who are the teens? And what are they really asking of me? Have the teens, whatever it is they represent, taken Mr. Jenns hostage, or has Mr. Jenns taken the teens hostage? And is the question really violence? Or is it something else?

WRITER

The teens as God. I didn't see that one coming.

AMANDA

Or you could go with the ghosts thing too. They're all just suggestions.

WRITER

But they're good ones. It's going to be tough. Did you have any others?

DAVID

I kind of had one.
If you didn't want to take it in a supernatural direction, I was thinking with all the different scenarios you've laid out, what if you end it with a really serious interview?
Like maybe a reporter interviewing someone.
But the someone is a person who has committed some form of violence after seeing the film.

SHRUTI

Like they were inspired to?

DAVID

Yeah. And the interview reveals how they're dealing with having committed violence. Maybe it's them saying they don't know how to feel. Because they don't know how much of an impact it's going to have. That they just took a chance. Because they didn't know what else to do. But they felt they had to do something.

AMANDA

And the movie opened them up to this.

DAVID

I guess, yeah.

SHRUTI

What if they didn't even see the movie? Instead, they just read a review, or heard about it from all the controversy.

AMANDA

So the harm wasn't even crafting this particular story, but just putting the idea out there for people to consider.

SHRUTI

Yeah.

WRITER

Hmm.
Ok.

AMANDA

What if you make it even heavier than that, and the person interviewing them is not a reporter, but instead is a family member of the person they killed? But it's not like in court when a family member flips out and screams at the person before they're sentenced. This is like a restorative justice session.

DAVID

Maybe in order to reduce their sentence, they have to meet this person they affected so permanently and harshly.

SHRUTI

Maybe it's after he's been executed, but it's to decide whether he goes to hell for it, or not.

WRITER

We're going supernatural again?

SHRUTI

Or maybe you don't. Maybe it's just a part of the court's sentence. Like Amanda was saying, restorative justice.

AMANDA

Either way, the family member, or loved one, whoever it is, is not screaming. They're not even mad. They just want to share their grief and all that they lost. And how those consequences are so much bigger than what the person allowed themselves to see before doing it.

DAVID

Showing what violence really is.

AMANDA

It's like Mr. Maxwell turning the screen around for the teens to see what it is they've really done. By resorting to all this violence.

SHRUTI

That's only if the person who's committed the violence is remorseful.

DAVID

It's possible they're not. But they should still have to sit with their victim's loved one and have to process the loss they've caused.

SHRUTI

Ok, but - and I think that's good. But, what if the person interviewing them is not really interviewing them, but they are interviewing each other? And it's not a loved one or anything like that?

WRITER

Like what then?

SHRUTI

Like - what if the other person is the opposite? They're someone who saw all of this, all that the filmmaker put in the movie, and still opted for a nonviolent solution. A unique one that no one had ever tried, but totally nonviolent. And they're giving their take.

DAVID

So one watched the movie and went with violence, and the other watched the movie and went with nonviolence.

SHRUTI

That's it. Except the kicker is that you don't know which one worked, or if either one worked.

AMANDA

Or maybe both worked, but only because both were tried in concert.

DAVID

But they don't know.

SHRUTI

And each of them shares their own feelings about not knowing. Not knowing before doing what they did. And not knowing after they did it.

WRITER

I can imagine that going in all different directions.
But the not knowing. That's what makes it.

SHRUTI

That's why it's an interview. Each of them takes from what the other says to help them process their own feelings.

DAVID

Coming from two different stances, but wanting the same thing.

AMANDA

But maybe hating each other for the stance the other took.

WRITER

And is the interview going to change any of that?
Having to make that decision, as a writer.
It almost seems like it's too much responsibility.
Even though it's fiction.

SHRUTI

Do you see now what you've gotten yourself into?

Laughs.

WRITER

I do. I see it.
And this is great. This is really great.

I don't know which direction I'm going to go,
but all this is really great.

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

