

CUL-DU-SAC

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE #2 BEDROOM-EARLY MORNING

A man, ALEX, 48, and woman, SUSAN, 37, are sleeping together in a dim gray room. It is raining outside. A small beeping is heard and Alex wakes up when a tiny arm extends from his wristwatch and scratches his arm. He rolls over, looks at Susan still sleeping. He partially raises and puts his hand on her shoulder as he kisses her on the neck. She wakes, smiles but doesn't move. She pats his hand on her shoulder.

SUSAN

See you later.

ALEX

Sure you will.

Alex gets up, puts on a robe and quietly leaves by the back door holding an umbrella.

EXT. BACKYARD BETWEEN HOUSE #1 AND HOUSE #2-DAWN

Alex walks out the back door, opens his umbrella, turns right and walks across a wet lawn heading for the backyard of the house next door. He looks up and sees another man, DENNIS, 38, coming out of the backdoor of the house he's heading for. They pass each other and keep walking.

ALEX

Hey!

DENNIS

Hey is for horses. Call me Sir.

ALEX

Hey, Sir!

Right after they pass, a giant explosion is heard that stops them in their tracks. They look above the tree line and witness a giant orange fireball shooting up into the sky. A big ruptured propane tank is seen flipping end over end as it lands in the trees just outside a chain-link fence surrounding the Cul-Du-Sac.

ALEX

What the fah?

DENNIS

Whoa!

They hear sirens in the distance, Alex drops his umbrella as they both turn and run past Dennis's house to Rocky's. They go to the backdoor. Alex puts his finger on the fingerprint reader but it beeps and flashes red.

ALEX

When the fuck are the Chinese going to make something that actually works as advertised!

DENNIS

Here, let me try.

Dennis pushes Alex aside and tries his finger, which is so big it totally covers the reader button, but it beeps green and opens. Dennis gives Alex a smug look as they rush inside.

INT. HOUSE #5-CONTINUOUS

Dennis and Alex rush through the kitchen and into the dining room. ROCKY, 75, sits calmly in front of a desk with a 3-D virtual keyboard display. The desk faces a giant full-wall video screen segmented into many picture frames displaying the outdoor security cameras. Along the opposite wall are racks of computers and SSD mass storage. Rocky doesn't look up from watching a large segment of the wall, displaying a view from the flag pole out front pointing across the street to the only other Cul-Du-Sac in site. A foreclosure sign is seen at the entrance still smoking, with a burned company logo of a purple octopus and the words, "Arax Investments, The Future of Real Estate." The last occupied house is on fire, but with manicured lawns. Unrecognizable people in bright yellow protective gear and full-face masks are fleetingly seen darting in and out of the shadows while the firefighters are spraying water everywhere except on the fire.

ROCKY

I thought you two might be going home about now. But I think you missed most of the action.

ALEX

Jeez! What's going on?

ROCKY

It seems these guys in the yellow suits were trying to break in or something and the people inside fought back. They had guns.

(MORE)

ROCKY (cont'd)

They all started shooting at each other in the dark. A stray bullet must have hit their propane tank and *whoosh!* Then the local no-fighting firefighters just showed up and got into a gunfight with both sides.

ALEX

Doesn't sound like it's over yet.

DENNIS

Holy cow! Damned good thing we spent that money on the fence and these cameras. We could end up like them. They were relying on paid-for protection.

ROCKY

(sarcastically)

Maybe we should consider putting in some landmines or booby traps to slow'em down. Wait! What's this?

Rocky manipulates a joy stick and the camera view moves and zooms in to a view up the road. Private police cars are racing at high speed and come to a screeching halt just before the fire trucks.

ALEX

What the hell is that?

Alex points at another camera view showing the yellow suited people getting into a large black van behind the house which starts racing away toward the police cars.

ROCKY

That must be the evictors backup.

The backdoor is heard opening and closing. Susan and HARRIETT, 45, in their nightgowns slightly wet, enter the room.

SUSAN

I was just getting back to sleep and damned near fell out of my bed. What's going on?

DENNIS

Take a look.

Dennis gestures toward the big screen with the view of fire trucks, burning house, and private police running all over the place.

They watch as several people including children emerge from the burning house, some carrying rifles, and begin running toward the trees behind a nearby abandoned house.

SUSAN
Is that the family?

ROCKY
That's the evictees, and it doesn't look like they're taking much with'em.

Susan steps in front of Dennis and while she peers at the camera displays, he rubs her shoulders and kisses the back of her neck.

Harriett steps in front of Alex and pulls his arms around her.

HARRIETT
Oh my! That's horrible. What are they going to do? They've lost everything. Didn't they have protection?

Harriett begins twisting a piece of her robe obsessively while her eyes stay glued to the scene on the display. The police are arguing with the firefighters about something. Suddenly, the two sides back off and exchange some shouted insults and gunshots as they retreat to their vehicles and depart in opposite directions.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ARAX ENTERPRISES DRONE CONTROL ROOM-SAME TIME

A miniature 3-D holographic display appears of the same house on fire. As the view widens, the display shows drones directly above the scene moving around slightly, each one tagged with a color code and a status window. As the view widens more, the control room becomes visible, dark but with other consoles nearby with other 3-D displays in various states of activity. A shadow of a man appears watching the display, ARAX, 28, intently studying the miniature scene displaying police vehicles and fire trucks amid flashes of gunfire. He wears a plastic helmet, resembling a green-glowing yarmulke, which allows him to control and change the display by simple thinking. The 3-D display zooms out to a larger countryside area, showing roads, rivers and many housing projects interspersed with groves of trees and rolling countryside. On one side is a small suburban community of shops with a major road nearby.

Many areas are tagged with floating balloons or colored icons to indicate various states of transition by the purple octopus icons. Little black spots, representing drones, are zipping around like insects. Some are shown descending in a short line above the city-center building tagged "Headquarters" and colored purple with an octopus icon.

ARAX

(mumbling)

What strange behavior for advanced RANs. What a waste. I tried to help them. They simply didn't want to survive. They seem incapable of being adaptable. Such a shame. Doctor Nemski was right.

He nods his head slightly while concentrating and the little black dots above the image of a burning house move rapidly back toward the central control building just as the house display disappears. He rises slowly and two more similar 3-D displays come into view on either side showing two other workers hooked up with the glowing helmets. Operator 1 and Operator 2, 18, have brown hair, brown eyes, are good looking, androgynous appearing and intently watching their displays as they direct various activities involving drones and ground vehicles. They each wear a plain purple scrub-like coverall with name tags and a single purple octopus patch sewn on the right shoulder. Facing the three operators a wall-sized flat display with a scrolling banner displays a message reading, "...internal weather projections show a 30% increase in level 3 destructive storms as ordered for this area..."

EXT. CUL-DU-SAC ROADWAY AND LAWN-SAME TIME

The Wang's and the Johnson's leave Rocky's house and walk slowly through the drizzle toward their respective houses. SHIRLEY, 52, comes running up from the direction of her house wearing just underwear as she approaches the Johnsons, asking them what happened. GEORGE, 65, follows walking calmly and wearing a robe like everyone else.

SHIRLEY

What the hell is all the shooting about?

SUSAN

You're lucky you didn't have to see it.

SHIRLEY

Oh my god! It's finally come to our neighborhood.

Shirley hugs Susan and stands back. George walks up behind her and puts his hands around her waist. Shirley looks frightened at the smoke rising above the trees.

SUSAN

It was gruesome. There were firefighters spraying guys in yellow hazard suits who were running around shooting at the house. Then the cops showed up and all hell broke loose. The family finally escaped to the woods but their house burned to the ground.

She looks up abruptly at George.

SUSAN

Hi George.

GEORGE

Hi Susan. Good morning, Dennis.

DENNIS

Not for those poor bastards.

Dennis gestures toward the smoke.

SUSAN

Like you care.

SHIRLEY

I was afraid something like this was going to happen. Just not this soon.

She turns and hugs George. The three couples quietly separate and slowly walk back to their respective houses holding each other closely.

INT. HOUSE #2 KITCHEN-LATER

Alex and Harriet enter the back door. Alex sits at a kitchen table while Harriet pours coffee and toasts a couple of gluten-free Non-GMO bagels which she butters with Non-GMO artificial cream cheese-like spread.

ALEX

(disgustedly)

Jesus Christ! I don't need this.

HARRIETT

(mildly)

Need what, honey?

ALEX

You saw what happened!

HARRIETT

Actually I just got there when it was pretty much over. Strawberry flavor or Papaya?

ALEX

Papaya. Everyone knows I'm working my butt off to help keep this place going and what do I get for it? More bills and a slower internet. Now with this little incident, our area will probably be declared abandoned, all the services will cost more, we'll probably lose our insurance and who knows what else.

HARRIETT

More coffee? Do you really think it's that bad?

ALEX

Yes to both. I'm the only one around here actually working a real job and pulling in an honest wage. If I lose my job, it will be curtains for us and probably all the rest of our cul-de-sac.

Harriett pours more coffee for him and her, sets the two bagels on a plate next to each coffee mug, and sits down at the table facing Alex.

HARRIETT

Let's see now, Dennis tutors online and Susan sells her tie-dyed yoga sweatpants, online. And doesn't Shirley do some kind of podcast or something, online, with advertisers paying her pretty good? Everybody else is retired or living on their parents' trust fund. It doesn't seem like we're that bad off.

ALEX

And then there's the kids, wasting huge amounts of bandwidth on MY internet connection which MY job pays for. In a way, MY job supplies Larry and the kids with unlimited time-wasting entertainment. Maybe we should be charging them rent for our basement carnival.

HARRIETT

Now Alex. They're our friends and cul-du-sac neighbors. They chip in for the lights and water and most everything else. 'Amaz-Zingly' does all our deliveries with their big drones and catapult trucks. We don't even use our cars anymore. I think we're doing pretty well considering how some people are having a bad time, like those unfortunate neighbors. It's just the way things are now. Which reminds me, did you try on your newly required, fully isolating airtight face mask yet? If it doesn't fit right, nobody's going to care but you.

She points her finger at him accusingly.

ALEX

If this is the way it is now, I'm afraid we're headed in the wrong effing direction for sure. And speaking of the wrong direction, where are those ungrateful brats we all put through college and now can't or won't find a job.

HARRIETT

They're still downstairs playing games. I don't understand why they have to paint themselves up with all that makeup and outlandish costumes when they're assuming a virtual computer graphic character. What's the costume supposed to do?

ALEX

I think they call it, 'soul identity' or something like that. It makes them feel they are someone else.

(MORE)

ALEX (cont'd)
Who that might be, makes me worry
about our kid's future.

Harriet gets up and walks to the basement door.

ALEX
Would you tell them to get off the
internet? I need to take a shower and
go to work. Tell them they should go
home and take a shower too.

INT. HOUSE #2 BASEMENT--SAME TIME

Suzie, 22, stands on a bench looking out a high window. She is wearing a purple and green costume with exaggerated shoulder pads and skin-tight leotards. LARRY, 22, and DAVID, 22, are sitting at a table loaded with computer controllers, joy sticks, exotic plastic weapons and fanciful swords all connected to a large gaming computer. Both of them have on similar Anime' costumes and exaggerated face makeup. Each person also has a laptop station for his character and a primary interface for the internet. The two boys are wearing their virtual viewing face masks and playing a game as they talk. Suzie's mask is pushed up on her head revealing her black and white makeup resembles a broken zebra.

SUZIE
I don't see any more smoke. Whatever
it was, it's over now.

LARRY
See? I told you nobody was attacking
us. Look out, David! There's one
behind you.

David dodges his head and violently swings around a plastic sword he's holding.

DAVID
Got 'em. Let's go through that door.

LARRY
OK. We're not worth anything to
anybody who can blow things up. It's
just logical.

SUZIE
But what if your dad pissed off a
local gangster or government
official? They go after everybody.
And they have explosives.

LARRY

He's just an accountant. For a bank even. Who gets pissed off at those people?

DAVID

There's a gargoye on the ceiling!

Larry pulls out a plastic laser gun and points it up, firing like a madman.

LARRY

Hey, Suzie, it's not that important. Jump back in here. We need you.

She shrugs, pulls down her face mask and picks up a giant plastic sword which accidentally touches David.

DAVID

Hey! You just cut my hand off.

SUZIE

Sorry!

DAVID

It's going to cost me half my credits to get a new one. Watch where you point that thing!

HARRIETT (O.C.)

Alex needs the internet in twenty minutes. Wrap it up and go to bed!

SUZIE, LARRY, DAVID

(simultaneously)

A-w-h-h-h-h!

INT. HOUSE #3-SAME DAY

George is sitting at Shirley's kitchen table slowly sipping on a big steaming mug. She sits facing him on his lap while she puts lox and cream cheese on a bagel. She waves her butter knife around while talking for emphasis.

SHIRLEY

Can you imagine what's going to happen to them?

GEORGE

Don't worry my little chickadee. I'll guard you like the queen that you are.

George leans over and kisses her but then lingers as she responds. They make out for a short time until the toaster flings out a bagel. She stops the kissing, leans back a little, and looks down. She still has the knife in her hand while massaging his crotch.

SHIRLEY

Watch where you put that thing!

George grabs her by the wrist and lifts the knife up.

GEORGE

Watch where you're pointing! You don't want to scare your best friend now, do you?

SHIRLEY

(demurely)

No.

She gives him a wicked smile that melts his heart.

GEORGE

Has anybody accused you of being too cute for your own good?

They kiss quickly. She gets up to retrieve the just-toasted bagel.

SHIRLEY

But I'm seriously worried about us, especially David. I don't know what he's going to do for a career. I sent him to the best online state university with his friends and there they are, still hiding out at Larry's house all night, just like they did in online high school. To them, virtual reality is the only reality they know.

GEORGE

They're good kids. It's just bad times right now. They'll figure something out just like every generation before them. Different times, different problems, different solutions. They're adaptable.

David enters through the back door, passes through the kitchen, grabs one of the bagels, and kisses his mom on the cheek. He turns and acknowledges George while taking a big bite out of the bagel.

DAVID

Was' up G?

GEORGE

Not me. You holdin'?

SHIRLEY

George!? Stop that. They might think you're serious.

GEORGE

I am serious. I bet they got much better stuff than what they give out down at that new private drug clinic. Those bastards would charge ten bucks for an aspirin. How's the job hunting?

DAVID

Job? Oh, that. The only sane jobs are the ones online but they only want experienced people. We gave up looking for local jobs a long time ago. Can't handle all the face masks, inspection stations and other hygienic shit.

GEORGE

Don't you want to go out in the world and find a nice girl, settle down in a nice suburban neighborhood, and raise a family?

David walks out of the room.

DAVID (O.C.)

Nope!

George yells after him.

GEORGE

(jokingly)

If you can't get a job with that fancy degree, how about saving the world?!

DAVID (O.C.)

I did!

INT. HOUSE #1 KITCHEN-SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Shirley and Harriett are sitting at Susan's kitchen table. Susan is fixing a plate of exotic chocolates and grinding coffee for the espresso machine.

SUSAN

Isn't it a wonderful Sunday? Sunshine outside and all the men locked up in the garage. I love a nice peaceful Sunday. Reminds me of when I was a kid and my family always did something special on Sundays.

SHIRLEY

Yeah, back in the times when we had the freedom of travel. Now with all these storms, virus quarantines, and high gas prices, I can't even afford to drive to the mailbox, if we had one.

HARRIETT

I'm worried about my Larry. He and the rest of our kids don't seem to have the drive that we had. They didn't even ask what the explosion was all about. I think that living online, playing role games and all the violence, my god, have you seen what they do in those virtual headsets?

SUSAN

I agree. Our kids are getting a great deal. No responsibilities, no pressure to produce. We've given birth to tape worms!

HARRIETT

Susan! Really!

SHIRLEY

That's a little harsh.

SUSAN

I'm kidding! But you know what I mean. Suzie barely talks to me anymore. We used to do lots of things together and now... Well, just look at all those costumes and painted faces. I mean, what are they trying to say? I don't get it.

(MORE)

SUSAN (cont'd)

I think they're just spoiled. We're obviously too good at parenting.

HARRIETT

My Larry is getting worse. He keeps telling me he's looking for work but all I see is a lot of time in our basement wrapped up in their costumes and headsets. We need to find something useful for them to do so they'll stop wasting so much time.

SHIRLEY

Why don't they help out by using their computer degrees and create jobs for themselves on the internet?

SUSAN

That's the kind of ideas they need.

HARRIETT

We've pretty much already tried that. What are we going to do now? Withhold their food until they bring home the bacon?

SUSAN

How about we have an intervention and sit them all down in a small room where we tell them it's work or... what?

Susan looks back and forth at the other two women with a questioning look.

SHIRLEY

We pay for their credit cards, don't we? Why not give them a stop date when all credit cards are canceled and we shut down their internet connection? Maybe they just need a little pressure.

SUSAN

Who's going to lead the intervention?

They all look back and forth at each other.

SUSAN

Right then, it'll be Alex.

HARRIETT

Why Alex? He always caves and lets Larry off the hook, all the time! How about Dennis? Everybody likes him and he'll be nice about it. After all, it's going to include Suzie.

SHIRLEY

Relax girls. I'll have George do it, but you all have to be there and back him up. The kids like him and they'll listen to him. Maybe. I'll make sure David understands, this is not optional.

SUSAN

Sounds like a plan. Anybody want a little kicker for their coffee?

Susan holds up a small bottle of Amaz-Zingly generic bourbon, shaking it to entice participation. They both hold their cups up.

EXT. HOUSE #2 STORM CELLAR DOOR--EVENING

The kids are running across the Cul-Du-Sac and approaching the outside door to the storm cellar in Wang's basement, where they normally spend their nights using Alex's broadband internet connection. Suzie is in the lead and runs up to the cellar door first.

SUZIE

I beat you! I told you all you're getting out of shape. You should do yoga with me.

David and Larry arrive huffing and puffing. She tries the door and discovers it's locked.

SUZIE

What the fuck! Did one of you lock it last night?

She looks at them both accusingly. They shake their heads and shrug their shoulders indicating they're as mystified as she is.

LARRY

Something's wrong. Let's sneak through the garage.

EXT. HOUSE #2 FRONT GARAGE DOOR-CONTINUOUS

Larry leads them to the garage door in front of the house. He enters the code in the opener keypad and the door opens. Just as they begin to enter, they notice all their parents plus George are sitting in lawn chairs staring back at them. Three vacant lawn chairs face the group.

LARRY
Oh oh! What's this?

GEORGE
Come on in kids. Sit down. I've got a proposition for you.

The kids look at each other questioningly and enter the garage timidly.

INT. HOUSE #2 BASEMENT-NIGHT

The kids file into the basement where their online gaming equipment resides including virtual headsets, gaming controllers, and computers. They are unusually subdued. They all sit on the couch along one wall and Larry takes a bong out of a drawer in the facing coffee table.

DAVID
Can they do that legally? Isn't slavery banned or something?

SUZIE
I don't think that applies to children. But we're over 21, we can just leave! They can't force us to stay here.

LARRY
Are you serious? We already tried to find jobs. You want to go back to that shit world, only this time without a home?

Larry stuffs a big wad of pot in the bong and lights it up with a tiny blow torch.

DAVID
O-o-o-o! We may have no choice.

Larry hands the bong to David.

SUZIE

You can't win, you can't break even,
and you can't even quit the game.
Sounds like a giant cluster fuck is
heading our way.

David coughs out a big cloud of smoke as he breaks up laughing. He hands the bong to Suzie.

LARRY

So, just for grins and giggles, what
do you think we could do to make
money on the internet?

DAVID

The most successful businesses on the
internet are porn and Amaz-Zingly
warehouses. Actually, they sell porn,
so technically it's just Amaz-Zingly.
Maybe we could start a porn website
that sells subscriptions to future
porn we don't provide? Like snuff
films?

Larry takes the bong from Suzie while they both are staring wide-eyed at David. They finish passing the bong still not looking away from David. Then Larry and Suzie start laughing uncontrollably.

LARRY

Are you kidding? We might as well be
drug dealing. You'd just piss off the
fruits who might be crazy enough to
hunt your ass down, kill and eat you.
Besides, do you really want to go
into ~~video~~-recording naked bodies all
greased up with pig's blood and hog-
tied just for the teaser? It's just
not our thing.

SUZIE

Yeah. And it better never be our
thing. I like *our thing* just the way
it is.

Larry and David look at each with some astonishment.

SUZIE

Anyway, I guess this means we're
going to get serious. We're really
going to do this?

She looks questioningly at each of her friends.

DAVID

My mom looked awful mad and George did say we owe them something for all the fish or whatever. Or was that dolphins? I sure don't want to lose my credit card. It's all I have for all the necessary entertaining diversions and sensual treats one needs to survive a sick world.

LARRY

Don't forget the internet. We're going to lose that for sure because my dad is probably going to lose his job soon. He keeps talking about it with Mom but he doesn't know that I know.

DAVID

We could use my mom's connection.

Suzie suddenly chokes and coughs out smoke in his direction and Larry sits dumbfounded.

DAVID

I know. She just uses it to surf and do her podcasts. It's a lot slower than your dad's fiber.

SUZIE

A shit load slower. You can't play decent games with her connection. It's for serious stuff that's supposed to make a difference. B-o-r-r-i-n-g!

She holds her thumb and forefinger in an 'L' shape to her forehead.

SUZIE

That goes double for that thing they call a connection my mom and dad use at home.

She takes another drag on the bong and hands it to David.

DAVID

Maybe we just put in a good showing and they'll forget all about this in a month or two.

SUZIE

I've never seen my parents agree on anything like this, ever!

LARRY

I know my dad and he is usually pretty lenient. Not this time! He means what he means and means what he says, even when he doesn't mean it. It's a Chinese thing, I think.

DAVID

Man, it's starting to look like we're screwed, glued, and tattooed.

The big computer in the middle of the table starts beeping.

LARRY

Looks like our gamers are calling for us. What do you want to do?

They look at each other and Larry gets up slowly, goes to the computer doing the beeping, and turns it off. He turns with a sober look and they just stare at each other for a few seconds.

DAVID

Okay, how about this. Let's take our laptops home and each of us spend the next day or two, research this problem and then see where we are.

SUZIE

You don't want to do it together?

LARRY

If we work together, you know what will happen. But apart, we have no choice but to accomplish something.

SUZIE

Are you saying I have no willpower when I'm around you two galoots?

LARRY

That sounds right.

DAVID

Yeah, petty much.

SUZIE

You bastards! Okay! If I have to spend a day in my bedroom working online, then I'm going to need a lot more encouragement.

DAVID

Me too!

LARRY

Looks like I'm going to have to order more. This is looking to be a full ounce week for sure.

INT. HOUSE #2 GARAGE-NIGHT

Alex is hosting a beer gathering of the guys in the Cul-Du-Sac to watch the soccer playoffs on his big screen fed by his broadband connection. There is the sound of a soccer game on the TV they are watching throughout this scene. George, Rocky, and Dennis join him by entering through the partially open garage door.

ALEX

Hi guys! Beers in the fridge. Chips are on the table. I get the big easy chair. You all get the couch. I'm giving a two-point spread for the Baltimore Pigeons, so get your cash ready.

Alex sits in the big lounge chair. The rest get their beers and sit on the couch one at a time.

DENNIS

I'll take a hundred on that. As usual, you know nothing about sports, or winning.

ROCKY

Burn baby! Burn!

ALEX

That's okay. I take money from anyone, even wise-ass children.

GEORGE

Not me. If I don't understand the probabilities then there's no sense betting on it.

ROCKY

What's the fun in that? It's all entertainment. Gambling, sports, economics, politics, music, religion and sex. But mostly sex. Outside of eating, everything else we do is probably related somehow to sex. I read that somewhere on the internet.

DENNIS

What about internet TV? There's so much mindless shit out there, it wastes a colossal amount of time just finding anything decent to waste time watching. People get addicted to the most inane bullshit ever, especially all those reality docu-drama shows that go on forever but get nowhere fast.

GEORGE

It's ironic that they could be living their own lives instead of watching someone else live their lives, virtually. The so-called reality show is not reality. There's always a camera and an audience, two things most people don't have following them around.

TV (V.O.)

G_O_O_O_A_L!!

DENNIS

Yeah! That's what Daddy likes!

Dennis leans over facing Alex.

DENNIS

You want to pay up now or wait for the inevitable shame later.

ALEX

It's just the first quarter. I can wait. For your apology when you lose!

ROCKY

See? Entertainment! And I need some more entertaining beer.

The game is on hold so nobody is watching the TV. Rocky gets up to get another beer. George leaves the room momentarily. Alex stands up to stretch.

ALEX

So, Dennis, have you been watching Suzie lately? Are they taking our intervention seriously?

DENNIS

I don't know. All I know is she's been locked up in her room for two days. They're either plotting some revenge or maybe some elaborate escape.

ALEX

I doubt that. My Larry is stubborn. He's probably plotting some kind of unpredictable takeover right now.

Alex and Rocky sit back down.

ROCKY

Takeover what? Are you forgetting what happened last week? We're under attack from the rest of the world and most people are too busy ducking and don't even know why. It just hasn't gotten to us yet. Like the pandemic, it'll find you eventually if you don't keep dodging.

George walks in.

GEORGE

Attack by who? Be specific. It's hard for me to keep up with all your conspiracy theories.

George sits back down on the couch.

ROCKY

It's like back in the teens when the Russians hacked into our internet programs helping that Dumpf get elected and then he almost destroys the world with his astounding stupidity.

GEORGE

And yet, we haven't been the same since. There's almost been a pandemic *du jour* since then, making normal public life almost impossible.

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

So now we're all isolated behind fences and walls trying to survive in a world where everything depends on virtual communication. I'd say we don't need any more rumors and conspiracies. We've got way more than we need, already.

ALEX

Have you seen what the kids are up to? Have they confided anything to you?

GEORGE

I haven't seen them in days. David spends all his time in the basement working on his laptop. I think they're taking us seriously and are going to do it.

DENNIS

Do what? We need to know if they're going to save our ass or not. Alex here may lose his job any day and then what do we do?

ROCKY

Lose your job! When did that happen?

GEORGE

I didn't know that. That's why you and Harriett were so adamant about getting them jobs. How much time do we have left?

ALEX

Actually, they fired me last night.

DENNIS

Oh no! Damn. I'm really sorry for you.

GEORGE

That's a nice kettle of fish. I suppose the fiber connection goes away too.

ALEX

It's paid up for the month so if we can come up with the payment next month, we might be able to keep it.

GEORGE

That's going to severely limit what the kids can do. Without speed and low latency, it's going to be hard to make money, as you well know. Bandwidth costs money but speed makes money. How fast do you want to go?

DENNIS

Maybe they could find something that doesn't need bandwidth. Maybe online gambling? Maybe they could apply their math skills and work out a winning algorithm.

GEORGE

You forget. Gamblers are supposed to lose. What do you think will happen when they don't?

DENNIS

Oh, yeah, the downside to winning.

ALEX

The thing is, guys. I haven't told Harriett yet, or Larry, so please, don't say anything about me losing my job. I don't want anybody to be more unhappy or get desperate. Let's see what they can come up with first.

ROCKY

How about they send out emails from a Nigerian Prince asking for help in recouping his millions?

Everyone looks at him with a stink-eye.

TV (V.O.)

G-O-O-O-O-O-A-L

Dennis is clapping along with Rocky.

ALEX

Oh shit!

INT. TREE HOUSE-DAY

The tree house is buried in the woods behind Wang's house and close to the creek that runs behind the Cul-Du-Sac. It is a one-room fully enclosed plain-looking cabin high up in a giant maple tree.

Access is by a counter-weighted rope loop that lifts people up and down by adding or subtracting water from a counter weight bucket. All three kids are sitting in a circle inside the cabin cross-legged as Suzie stokes up the bong. Larry types on his laptop and David is doing the same on his. Suzie's is still closed as she lights up the bong, takes a big hit, and passes it, with a big smile, to David. David looks at her quizzically and takes a quick hit.

LARRY

Okay, what did we find out this week?

DAVID

You were right. There are really no good jobs on the internet that aren't already taken. So, scratch that.

LARRY

I looked into Rockies idea about a Nigerian Prince and found out that's the oldest internet scam, ever! Where does he get his ideas? Books?

DAVID

In my research, the three most lucrative activities on the internet are porn, ransom-ware, and stolen identities. Also pyramid schemes and phony website scams. I tried doing a simple tearjerker site. I almost made about a thousand dollars in the first day when someone found out my little kittens in the picture can't all get a terminal case of Trichobezoar at the same time. I found it in a list of the most common cat diseases. It didn't say anything about it being freakin' hair balls.

SUZIE

I told you. It's too easy to use the same internet to check out any internet scams. All web scams will eventually fail. Usually by someone going to jail. But look at this.

She passes the bong she was holding to David while she turns her laptop around for them to see.

SUZIE

Have you ever heard of this book?

The screen shows a book cover with the title, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* by Stieg Larsson.

DAVID

Was it made into a movie?

SUZIE

Well, yes, but the book is better. The main character is a motorcycle-riding punk-rocker Swedish girl who also is a computer-hacking genius.

LARRY

That's nice for the movies but we're not hacking geniuses.

SUZIE

That's not important. What is important, is the idea of only hacking those who deserve it. Criminals, needing a little random justice. If we control the target, then think about it. By hitting only the criminal, as long as we're not traceable, they won't go to the cops any more than we will.

David hands the bong to Larry who absentmindedly takes a hit while still staring at the book website.

DAVID

You realize that the only way to find hacking software is to go to the dark net? That's the cesspool where raging viruses live. You'd need a cast-iron firewall to even venture close.

LARRY

I think she's got something here. We could take one of our super gaming computers and turn it into a stand-alone super-fast firewall. We set it up as a proxy and then we can all have access simultaneously while we find what we need, download it, scrub it, and try to put it all together as hopefully an automated hacking machine.

SUZIE

But we still need to be able to identify suitable targets.

(MORE)

SUZIE (cont'd)

All the super hacking gear in the world is worthless unless you can find the right target like I described.

DAVID

You know, I think someone said sometime that if you want to steal money, go where the money is, the banks.

SUZIE

That gives me an idea. Don't these banks do all their business on the internet when they send money back and forth every night balancing world-wide accounts?

LARRY

I could ask my dad but I think you're right. There might even be a type of transfer that we can use to identify any criminality on the part of our clients.

DAVID

Clients. That's good! What are we going to do for our clients?

SUZIE

Teach them humility?

MONTAGE - SUZIE, DAVID AND LARRY MAKE A FIREWALL FOR THE DARKNET

-- HOUSE #2 BASEMENT-NIGHT --

--Pirate old computers for parts--Suzie brings in a box of computer parts through the cellar door. She dumps its' contents on the table and Larry hands her a screwdriver which she looks over carefully, not sure what it's for.

--Table full of parts--David, with Suzie and Larry looking on, carefully looks over the pile and begins sorting it into smaller piles and some go in the trash can.

--Find exotic gaming case--Larry opens a big storage cabinet in the basement and reveals a few old computer cases, one of which has a radical design. He takes it out to the table and plugs it in and lots of animated lightning bolts light up with multi-colored LEDs.

--Ext. Drone Delivery--Big Amaz-Zingly drone drops a bunch of boxes in the backyard near the storm cellar door. The kids scoop up the boxes and take them into the basement.

--Putting in the parts--All three begin installing boards, cards, and then a bunch of cables they pick out of a box full of old cables of every color and size and shape. Suzie is seen with a bunch of cables in one hand staring at the open computer case. She's interrupted by a bong being handed to her from a hand O.C.

--Fire it up--David is seen putting the last cable into the system they have assembled on the table to one of three laptops. He stands back to admire their work. The table has the big gaming box at one end and a lot of boxes and cables connecting from it to the three laptops spaced along one side of the table, all facing a large screen display on the wall behind.

--Laptop screen accessing the Dark Web--The room is dark, lit only by the screens and all the blinking LEDs on the various boxes. The big screen display is shown in the background as the kids begin typing on their laptops. The screen splits into four pictures, three of which are following the individual laptop screens and the last screen shows incoming traffic and the load on the firewall.

--Firewall computer case flashes wildly--Close-up of computer case with out-of-focus display screen in the background. The lights flash slowly and regularly. Shift focus to the big screen where the firewall window starts showing swift messages flashing on and off and the load bar graph keeps bouncing up toward the 100% level. The screen flashes red each time the bar hits the top. Focus back to case and the lights are going crazy with big lightning bolts flashing faster and faster.

--Threatening icons declare they're hacked--The laptop screens start displaying hacker icons of all shapes and sizes. Most are just animated masks mocking the viewer. As soon as they flash up, the firewall goes crazy and the icon shatters and falls off the screen in little black boxes. Larry is typing furiously as he runs through websites with dark net downloads. He refers to a paper list often as he checks which files he wants.

--Download Complete--The screen is flashing red and the case is responding with the lightning bolts flashing. The three laptop screens in turn flash up the message "DOWNLOAD STARTED." Each one sits back in their seats when they get the message on their laptop screen. David holds up both hands with his fingers crossed. Suzie looks questioningly at Larry and he just shrugs and smiles.

Each laptop in turn display the message, "DOWNLOAD COMPLETED." David starts to type on his computer but Larry holds his hand up, waves off David, and points to the firewall case which is still flashing wildly and the bar graph shows 80% and bouncing. David stops typing. Suddenly a hacking icon appears on David's laptop announcing they have been hacked by the Grand Wizards who announce "you must pay to have your computer unlocked." The case is flashing madly and the cooling fans inside switch to high speed. The screen is permanently red and the bar graph shows a solid 100%. David looks up at Larry and Suzie who are both looking worried. Then the icon slowly starts to melt, flowing off the screen, and the voice slows down until it is just garbling, leaving the screen clean and displaying a message, "Incoming traffic wiped."

--Success Celebration--All three do a selfie of themselves holding up the laptop and the screen message, "DOWNLOAD SUCCESSFUL." Suzie holds up a smoking bong.

END MONTAGE

INT. HOUSE #1 KITCHEN-DAY

Shirley and Harriett are sitting at the table while Susan is standing, staring at the automatic espresso machine, which is making little beeps and swooshing sounds until a carafe appears from behind a hidden door. Susan takes it and fills three cups.

SUSAN
Anyone for latte'?

HARRIETT
Lots of latte', please.

SHIRLEY
You know me, black and strong.

Susan goes about foaming two cups with steamed foamy cream substitute.

SUSAN
(subtle mocking)
Is that a reference to my husband?

SHIRLEY
Not really, but I gotchya, didn't I.
You still love him, don't ya?

Harriett gets uncomfortable with their talking about Dennis. Susan brings the three cups to the table on a little tray. She sits down and deals out the cups.

SUSAN

Of course I love the big guy. We've been together for twenty-five years, so obviously we love each other.

Shirley just stares blankly at Susan while she takes a sip of her espresso.

SHIRLEY

Are you sure? I know all about your little night-time trysts. So does everyone else in the cul-du-sac, including your daughter.

SUSAN

(disgustedly)

Oh shit! I knew this day was coming. I was fooling myself all along that you all can't mind your own business.

SHIRLEY

Here we are in a fenced compound with a small population of intelligent people. It's like a family. You can't hide from family OR mother nature.

Harriett becomes more anguished.

HARRIETT

I don't care who knows. I'm happy with the way things are and don't plan to change. Why can't you see that?

SHIRLEY

I'm just saying, this situation is not usually a stable condition. It requires four people to agree to something that they may not agree to in private. It's an emotional thing and getting four people's emotions lined up and all working in sync with each other, is, well, rare. Four people are almost a cult and if the leader is lost, the whole thing comes apart.