

Earth Sim 6492: a radio play
(a tribute to Philip K. Dick's *Exhibit Piece*)
by
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Synopsis:

What would you do if you found out the world you loved wasn't real – would you live in it anyway? It's 2118 A.D. and in a climate-controlled compound in the far northern hemisphere, multiple simulations of planet earth are running on computers in a Lab. They're being used to create energy to power the Cloud, where the remaining humans in post-apocalyptic 2118 are uploading their consciousnesses as fast as there is enough power to do so. Interspersed with the future is a vision of life in 2018, where climate catastrophe is impending, the humans are just having trouble accepting it. When a programmer from the Lab in 2118 becomes enamored with one of his Simulations, he must decide between worlds.

A science fiction premise that grapples with the possible origins of our reality – incorporating current theories as to whether planet earth could actually be a simulation – and incorporates a family drama, while highlighting the soundscapes of the planet's last wild places.

Production note:

Ants, insect larvae, sea anemones and viruses create a sound signature. And so does every wild habitat on the planet – each producing a vibrant animal orchestra, that instantaneous and organized expression of insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals. And every soundscape that springs from a wild habitat generates its own unique signature, one that contains incredible amounts of information. Not only can you see how an ecosystem changes over time, but you can hear it, too. These animal recordings are an audio argument for conservation.

An important element of this radio play is the soundscapes of the natural world that we don't get to hear very often, and which are rapidly disappearing. When we hear Sam adjusting sounds in the natural world the focus should be on stunning, evocative soundscapes – such as those collected by Bernie Krause – to let the audience enjoy and perhaps reflect on the subtlety and importance of wild places.

CHARACTERS:

SAM TAYLOR – 30's

SUPERVISOR – 40's

JUAN – 20's

ALISON – 30's

DAVID TAYLOR – 17, senior in high school

MELISSA TAYLOR – his twin

HELEN TAYLOR – 40's. Sam's wife

DR. ROTHSCHILD – 40's. Psychiatrist.

HENDERSONS – friends of the Taylors, who have signed on to Silicon Valley optimism

SETTINGS:

Lab, 2118

Dorm, 2118

Central Park

A psychiatrist's office,

The Taylor household, 2018

SCENE ONE:

Int. Computer Lab, 2118 A.D. We hear the sounds coming from a Simulation running on a computer in the Lab, which Sam, a Lab programmer, is adjusting – Day

SOUND: A FOREST LAKE IN WYOMING AT DUSK. WATER LAPPING ON THE SHORE, LOONS CALLING AS THEY DIVE FOR FISH, A CHORUS OF CICADAS

MAN: Peaceful, isn't it?

WOMAN: Yeah. I love the sound of loons. Where I grew up you would hear them all summer, calling to each other.

MAN: Let's walk out to the edge before it's dark, see if we can spot them diving for fish. Where's that flashlight...

SOUND: TENT BEING UNZIPPED, THEN COUPLE WALKING THROUGH UNDERGROWTH, TALKING IN LOW VOICES, THE LOON CALLS GETTING LOUDER AS THEY APPROACH THE SHORE

SAM: (IN A LOUDER, CLOSER VOICE, CUTTING OVER THEM) That's not right. The loons should sound higher. Their calls should be just a little bit higher.

SOUND: THE COUPLE CONTINUE TALKING ON THE LAKE'S EDGE, OBVIOUSLY NOT ABLE TO HEAR SAM'S VOICE. ANOTHER LOON CALL

SAM: That's better.

WOMAN: See that one! It's got a fish in its beak!

MAN: There it goes...

SOUND: A LOON TAKING OFF FROM THE WATER'S SURFACE, THEN MOSQUITO BUZZING AND HAND SLAPPING IT. BUZZING STOPS

WOMAN: Let's go for a dip, come on. I'm getting bitten.

SUPERVISOR: (IN A LOUDER, CLOSER VOICE, CUTTING OVER THEM) How's it going with this Simulation, Sam?

SAM: Good, good. Just adjusting the soundscape. Loons fishing at dusk... a couple camping in Yellowstone. Big park, used to be, down there in the northern United States. Nice to watch... the sun was just setting, you could see the spires of the trees, Douglas fir and white bark pine... their reflections on the glasslike surface of a lake. A host of rough-winged swallows were scooping gnats from the air above the water and three great blue herons stood still as sentries on the shore.

A raccoon hauled itself onto the bank, shedding a shower of water drops, and a pair of fledgling barred owls were calling to be fed. But the loons, the calls weren't quite right. I don't think the Avatars noticed but...

SUPERVISOR: You're new to the Lab, aren't you. I admire your attention to detail but these artistic touches? Definitely not necessary. Let me see the notes on this one before you waste any more time... Earth Simulation 6492... currently in year 2018... global population 7.6 billion... primary energy source fossil fuels and nuclear... some renewables coming in but global temperatures already 2.2 degrees above average. Sea levels rising, abnormal weather fluctuations, Arctic ice melt well underway, on the verge of mass species extinction... Doesn't look promising, but could still turn around I guess. What do you think, pull the plug?

SAM: I'd like to give it a bit more time, we've seen some less stable Simulations manage to up their energy output and keep going for a while.

SUPERVISOR: Are we Extracting power?

SAM: Yeah, not much but we've siphoned two, almost three terawatts since they got to fossil fuel stage and that will increase soon if they get the developing continents producing power without the whole thing self-destructing. They seem to be slow learners, this batch. Not worried at all about the rising temperatures from what I've seen.

SUPERVISOR: Run it for another week. Then punch in the Terminate code if we're not Extracting five terawatts per cycle. We can't afford to keep Simulations running that don't give us 20% more than they take to run, minimum.

SAM: Dope.

SUPERVISOR: What's 'dope'.

SAM: Something the younger Avatars in the Simulation say. In 2018. Been hearing it all day.

SUPERVISOR: Is that what's informing your dress sense as well? These sweaters you wear with a hood attached. Very strange, especially in our climate. And blue pants every day, always the blue pants. There's something... different about you.

SAM: A hoodie and jeans, that's all. Made of cotton. A plant that used to grow... I found them and some other old stuff.

SUPERVISOR: Where? Where did you find them?

SAM: I got permission to do some research out in the dumps past the Border Wall. Helps me get the details right in the Simulation to have some artifacts to work from. Pretty dope.

SUPERVISOR: You haven't been interacting with the Avatars have you, in the Simulations? You know that's grounds for Expulsion.

SAM: I thought interaction wasn't possible.

SUPERVISOR: Well no, but theoretically... that's why you programmers wear your Tethers when you're in a Simulation, just in case you go losing touch with reality in there. It's fun to play God but don't get obsessed with them, it's not healthy.

SAM: Nothing around here is healthy.

SUPERVISOR: Even so... And stop wasting so much time on details! Bird calls... how would you even know if they're accurate, you've never heard a real bird!

SCENE TWO:
Ext. Cloud Complex – Night

SECURITY SYSTEM: Please show ID to exit. (SOUND OF ID BEING SCANNED) Thank you, Sam Brenner. Destination?

SAM: Dorm 21, East Wing.

SOUND: DOOR SLIDING OPEN AND SAM WALKING OUTSIDE WHERE THERE'S THE CONSTANT HUM OF POWER RUNNING UP TO THE CLOUD IN THE BACKGROUND. WE HEAR HIS FOOTSTEPS TO HIS DORM DOOR, BEEP OF HIS ID OPENING IT. HE CLOSES THE DOOR AND THE HUM FADES AWAY.

SECURITY SYSTEM: Welcome home, Sam Brenner. It's currently 104 degrees at 6:09pm, July 9th, 2118. You have... 13 of 20 power units left for today. You have... 7 of 10 water units left for today. You have... unlimited food powder and... two protein packs left for today. The Cloud thanks you for your contribution.

SAM: And I thank the Cloud for creating all things.

JUAN: 20 power units, the Cloud must love you! Want a beer?

SAM: Juan, right? Thanks. Ha, no currently I'm responsible for running a Simulation that's burning more power than it's creating. Hey, this beer is actually cold!

JUAN: 50 power units a day. I can afford to run a little fridge in my room. I'm an Uploader so... there are some perks.

SAM: Oh right, you said. Wow, so you've met our overlords.

JUAN: A few. Not too many being uploaded these days.

SAM: Yeah. I guess the Cloud's getting crowded.

SOUND: ONE OF THE OTHER DORM RESIDENTS RETURNING FROM WORK

SECURITY SYSTEM: Welcome home, Alison Garver. It's currently 104 degrees at 6:12pm on July 9th, 2118. You have... four of ten power units left for today. You have... four of ten water units left for today. You have unlimited food powder and two protein packs left for today. The Cloud thanks you for your contribution.

ALISON: And I thank the Cloud for creating all things. How are you Juan.

JUAN: Hot. But I've got some cold beers here. Want one?

ALISON: Sure, thanks. And you must be the new guy.

SAM: Yeh I transferred in last week. Sam. Hi.

ALISON: Alison. I just switched over from night shifts.

SAM: Programmer?

ALISON: No, maintenance. Cooling towers. Been dangling 600 feet above ground all day.

SAM: What can you see from up there?

ALISON: Over the Wall.

JUAN: Whoa. And what exactly is out there?

ALISON: It's protected information but... not much. No people of course. Methane explosions in the distance over Greenland... clouds of mosquitoes... all our solar panels... some starving coyotes trying to dig their way in...

JUAN: Damn. If they could taste this food powder I don't think they'd waste their time.

ALISON: Food powder's better than no food powder.

JUAN: I mixed mine into a paste this morning, with water and made these little statues. This one looks just like the Uploader, see his big eyes.

ALISON: Weird. But impressive.

JUAN: That's some serious artistry right there!

SAM: Play Doh.

JUAN: Play what?

SAM: Those look like what kids make sometimes in my Simulation. With this colored clay stuff that doesn't dry out. They make little statues out of it like that.

ALISON: Something that doesn't dry out, that must be from a long time ago.

SAM: 2018.

JUAN: Have you seen his room Alison? He's got all this weird stuff from the time period he's researching, like these super old books printed on thin sheets of fabric...

SAM: Paper.

JUAN: ...and on the walls these photos of cities that used to be above water. Lots of this one that looked amazing, really tall buildings, way taller than our cooling towers, with green mountains behind them...

SAM: Hong Kong.

JUAN: ...or another with these colorful round roofs...

SAM: St. Petersburg.

JUAN: ...and a city where all the buildings are pink...

SAM: Jaipur.

JUAN: Jaipur. Crazy. I'd love to have seen that. And he has photos of this park he's crazy about...

SAM: Central Park. It was in a city called New York. Many many miles south of here. A man-made park, but beautiful. I watched it being created in the Simulation, some Avatars named Olmsted and Vaux designed it... dredged a swamp and planted 25,000 trees...

JUAN: ...he has like 20 of these ancient photos of it. And these relics! An old computer, with all the letters of the alphabet printed on it that you have to press one by one to make words, man that is ridiculous. And what are those little things all over your floor...

SAM: Styrofoam packing peanuts. I found lots of those out there. I guess they don't biodegrade.

JUAN: ...they look edible but they're not.

ALISON: Where'd you get all that stuff?

SAM: The dumps, out past the Wall. I have a research pass so... lot of stuff piled up out there to dig through.

JUAN: Oh man! Will you take me out some time? I've never been outside the Cloud Compound.

ALISON: Shhhh!

SAM: (LOWER VOICE) Maybe you can borrow my pass sometime.

JUAN: And your weird clothes so I look like you? Wow, thanks. I'll think about it. Don't want to risk not getting Uploaded but it would be pretty cool.

ALISON: Risky. No one's survived for long outside the Compound. If you don't get back in...

JUAN: I know.

SECURITY SYSTEM: Power units low. Please switch account to avoid power cut-off.

SAM: I'll use mine.

SOUND: SAM INSERTING HIS ID CARD INTO CARD READER

SECURITY SYSTEM: Sam Brenner. Accessing 13 power units.

ALISON: While we still have some light let me show you guys something I found in the cooling tank yesterday. Be right back...

JUAN: Tell me what else is out there, in the dumps.

SAM: Basically everything people were carrying with them, on the Northward Migration all those years ago. Plus whatever's blown up here in the tornadoes. People's most treasured possessions. Suitcases of photo albums, clothes, lots of cell phones, seems like people were really attached to their phones. Almost obsessed with. Useful for research though, the ones that haven't melted still work when I power them up. People would photograph themselves many times a day, putting tons of digital photos of themselves on a primitive kind of Cloud called Facebook, "selfies" they called them. Some of the phones even have these sticks with them, I think to take a picture of yourself when you were alone, no one to take it for you.

Strange. Anyway there's plenty of great reference material out there. Some solar cars managed to make it up this far, they're loaded with stuff to look through.

JUAN: Cars, damn.

SAM: Yeah, and then of course the tanks that mowed everyone down are still scattered around, rusting. There are markers, for the mass graves.

JUAN: My grandparents are out there somewhere. Buried. Just my parents were let in, they had experience making processor chips already, in a factory... They were both Uploaded a few years ago after 30 years of powering the Cloud. I'll be seeing them again one of these days.

SAM: I'm surprised you haven't been Uploaded yet.

JUAN: I'm near the top of the list, I think. But it's slow, you know... someone's got to stay out here to keep the power flowing up there.

SAM: Until we can get production where it needs to be.

JUAN: We'll get there. Definitely in time for us to live forever. Pure consciousness in a Cloud.

ALISON: (reentering) Cheers to that.

SAM: What's in the box?

ALISON: Take a look at this creature. Pretty strange looking.

SOUND: A BOX PLACED ON THE TABLE AND THE LID PULLED BACK

JUAN: What the hell?!

SOUND: A SCARED FROG CROAKING

SAM: Let me see!

ALISON: What is it?

SAM: It's a frog. And look at those feet.

JUAN: What's a frog?

SAM: Something dope that there used to be many of. Many different kinds.

ALISON: What kind is this one?

SAM: Well, amazingly, let me see... it looks to be a Costa Rican Gliding Tree Frog. I don't know how it could've gotten here though, thousands of miles north... it soars from branch to branch by spreading out the webbing between its toes, but there are no branches left.

JUAN: A flying frog. How did it get in here? What a dopey color.

SAM: *Dope. Green!* It's a color we could use more of around here. The frog's skin changes at nightfall from pale green to dark green. Amazing creature.

ALISON: I've been putting food powder in the box but it won't eat.

JUAN: See? If it's not good enough for frog I'm not eating it either.

SOUND: THE POOR FROG CROAKS SOME MORE

SAM: You know what? Can I borrow our little friend for a couple hours? I think I have the frog sounds slightly wrong in the Simulation I'm running.

JUAN: There's frogs in there?

SAM: Of course. There's everything in there.

ALISON: Sure.

SAM: I'll bring him back. Come on Kermit.

JUAN: What's Kermit?

SAM: Never mind. See you guys later!

SCENE THREE:

Int. Computer Lab – Night

SOUND: SAM SETTling DOWN TO WORK ON HIS SIMULATION, PUTTING KERMIT IN HIS BOX ON THE TABLE

SAM: Okay Kermit, here we are... meet Earth Simulation 6492. E.S. 6492, meet a real live frog. Let me get strapped in here Kermie, and your voice is going to be cloned into a million Gliding Tree Frogs all over Costa Rica. You're going to live forever. Well as long as this thing is running anyway.

SOUND: KERMIT CROAKS APPRECIATIVELY

Sam: Wish I had some of that coffee the Avatars drink. Okay don't go anywhere Kermie, I'm going in.

SOUND: SAM ENTERING THE SIMULATION: LOTS OF BLENDED SOUNDS OF THE EARTH IN 2018 AS IF HE'S HOVERING ABOVE – SNATCHES OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGES, MAYBE HINDU CHANTING THEN ITALIAN THEN TIBETAN THROAT SINGING THEN TRAFFIC THEN PORTUGUESE THEN CHURCH BELLS THEN CONSTRUCTION WORK THEN HE LOCATES HIS DESTINATION, THE COSTA RICAN RAINFOREST. THE SOUNDS OF THE RAINFOREST GET LOUDER, THEN WE GET A GOOD CHUNK OF LOVELY RAINFOREST SOUNDS, INCLUDING A FROG CHORUS. LET'S REALLY ENJOY THE FOREST SOUNDS FOR A MINUTE. FINALLY OVER THEM, CLOSER, SAM'S VOICE CUTS IN

SAM: That's amazing. There used to be so much life... now let's just get these tree frogs properly tuned.

SOUND: THE TREE FROG CHORUS MODULATES IN SOME WAY

SAM: There we go. That's beautiful. What's that? A Three-Toed Sloth! Just hanging out in a tree. Wow, to have your life buddy...

SOUND: CHAIN SAWS IN THE DISTANCE. THE FOREST ANIMALS GO QUIET. MEN SHOUTING

Sam: Shame they can't see what wealth they already have. Wish I could buy this thing some time. Or program some smarter Avatars.

SOUND: CHAIN SAWS GET MUCH CLOSER AND GRATINGLY LOUD. THEN ALL THE RAINFOREST SOUNDS GET FURTHER AWAY AS SAM TAKES OFF FOR SOMEWHERE TO THINK. BLENDED SOUNDS OF THE PLANET AGAIN AND THEN WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF NEW YORK CITY GETTING CLOSER: TRAFFIC, HONKING AND SIRENS, MAYBE A STREET PERFORMER WITH A NEW YORK ACCENT OR SOMEONE YELLING SOMETHING COLORFUL SO WE KNOW WHERE WE ARE, A BASKETBALL GAME, AS IF HE'S DRIFTING OVER MANHATTAN. THEN WE HEAR JUST THE SOUNDS FROM THE GREAT LAWN IN CENTRAL PARK – A BASEBALL GLANCING OFF A BAT, BIRDS, KIDS PLAYING. SAM MAKES SOME SOUNDS OVER TO CONVEY HE'S JUST WATCHING AND ENJOYING IT, MURMURING "LOOK AT THAT", ETC.

DAVID: Dad. Dad! What're you doing? Dad? Why are you just standing there?

SAM: What?

DAVID: Did you find the Frisbee?

SAM: No, I... I... Can you see me?

SOUND: BRANCHES CRACKING, FOOTSTEPS IN UNDERGROWTH

DAVID: Well you're wearing a red shirt, so that helps.

SAM: No I mean how are you able to see me at all.

DAVID: What? 'Cause I have eyes dad. It's time for lunch, let's look for the frisbee after.

SAM: I... frisbee? There's a Frisbee on my desk in the Lab. Is that the one?

DAVID: Why are you being a weirdo. Come on, aren't you hungry? We've been calling for you. Mom made my favorite, buffalo wings! And Mel's eating them all.

SAM: Interaction... This isn't supposed to be possible. Wait, buffalos have wings? I got that very wrong then. I'd like to see that.

SOUND: THE TWO OF THEM WALK OUT OF THE WOODS AND ACROSS THE GRASS

SAM: What about bison, were they supposed to have wings too?

DAVID: Haha dad. Found him! Move over Mel you're hogging the blanket. There better be some wings left. Dad's calling them bison wings now. Give me some bison wings you hog.

MELISSA: Only dad knows the difference between a buffalo and a bison.

DAVID: Only dad cares.

HELEN: Don't be rude to your dad, David. Melissa leave some wings for your brother!

SAM: Can I see these wings? They're so small. How can a buffalo...

HELEN: Sure honey, I thought you were going vegetarian again. I made you an avocado salad.

SAM: Avocado... and look at all these green leaves! Spinach! God this looks amazing.

HELEN: Nice to have you so appreciative!

SAM: It's so alive! Mmmm. I feel like He-Man eating this vitality.

DAVID: Popeye dad. He's the spinach guy.

HELEN: You can start taking salads to work again then. That reminds me, should we pick up some salmon on the way home? David don't make those faces at your sister.

DAVID: I'm not!

HELEN: I saw you. The Hendersons are coming for dinner tomorrow. Would you like to do your grilled salmon? What time will you be home, you've been working later and later.

SAM: Work... That's right!

HELEN: I know conservation is important but do you think the wetlands can survive without you working overtime tomorrow? I need your help with the Hendersons, you know what a handful they were last time. They're coming at 7:30.

MELISSA: Are you a workaholic dad?

SAM: I don't think so, I...

HELEN: What about talking to Richard. About the insane hours lately.

SAM: Richard. Oh my god. Of course. How strange... the Chesapeake Bay wetlands proposal...

HELEN: What's strange?

SAM: Richard... and the office... I'd forgotten it all.

HELEN: Good! It's nice to have you more present. Twins, have you looked at Turtle Pond today? I think I saw some egrets on the island. You two used to race down as kids and see who could spot the most birds out there.

MELISSA: I think we're a little old for that?

DAVID: I am anyway.

MELISSA: Yeah yeah, three minutes older. But way more immature.

SAM: Kids! Let's enjoy the day. It's gorgeous out here, there's life all around us. Who knows for how long? I don't want to miss a minute.

HELEN: Sam! How nice.

SOUND: SAM KISSING HELEN

MELISSA: Ew! Dad's kissing mom. Disgusting.

SAM: You're wonderful, Helen. Your mom's wonderful kids. Helen! Your mom. Be good to her. Let's go look at the lake.

DAVID: Dope!

SAM: Who's going to get there first?

DAVID: Me!

MELISSA: Me!

SOUND: THEY TAKE OFF LAUGHING, SAM AND HELEN WALKING BEHIND

HELEN: Mel you left your sandals! Never mind. It'll be nice this summer to take them to the house on the island, my parents don't get out there much anymore. It's probably falling apart now but...there's so much more to Greece than Athens and I think they're at the age now where they can really appreciate it. Meeting the cousins they don't know yet. Practicing their Greek I hope.

SAM: This summer. That will be amazing. I so want that to happen.

HELEN: Well it is happening hon, it's all been booked. Don't tell me something's come up with work.

SAM: No no, I was just remembering about the trip. It'll be great to see your family.

HELEN: Ha! Haven't heard that one before. No I love the enthusiasm. Just doesn't sound like the Sam I know.

SAM: *Am I the Sam you know?*

SOUND: VOICE OF THE LAB OPERATING SYSTEM CUTS IN OVER THE PARK SCENE, SOUNDING LOUDER AND CLOSER

OPERATING SYSTEM: Commencing power siphon from Simulation 6492. Siphoning 26,400 megawatts.

SAM: Did you hear that?

HELEN: Hear what. Hon, what is going on.

SAM: Helen I'm sorry, I thought I heard something. I've been having these weird thoughts. I'm scaring myself.

HELEN: What kind of weird thoughts? Is this like before? I thought the disturbing thoughts had leveled out!

SAM: It's... I just have this weird feeling like... like I'm somebody else, or have another life somewhere else. Like maybe this is a Simulation we're in, or...

HELEN: A simulation? What does that even mean. Like a... computer program?

SAM: Yes, maybe. I don't know. Probably not. I just am remembering things like I left a frog in a box on my desk...

HELEN: Richard has frogs in the office now?

SAM: ...and it was nighttime... I don't know. Maybe I've just been working too much.

HELEN: Or listening to the Hendersons too much. Computer simulations. They're spending too much time on the West coast. He's becoming one of those "tech bros". Ruining a great city like San Francisco... why don't people realize culture isn't a commodity, you can't say "oh show me the quirky nightlife, let me rent a cute place in the Mission", when you yourself are a baseball hat-wearing frat-boy manchild and actually take away from the character of the place just by being there.

SAM: These people know about computer simulations? Maybe they can help me...

HELEN: Hah.

SAM: If you don't like these people then why are we feeding them salmon tomorrow?

HELEN: Because they didn't used to be like that! When they lived on 8th Street before his startup and the venture capital... and, because Liz is on the Board of the Performing Arts Academy and I want to pick her brain about getting David in. It's all he talks about.

SAM: Really? Acting?

HELEN: Where've you been, you know that! He's so talented... you missed his last play, when you had your breakdown... but he was quite something. Takes after my brother. What about getting an appointment to see Dr. Rothschild in the morning. Before work. Tell her about the disturbing thoughts, see if you should get back on the meds for a while...

SAM: Yeah, okay.

HELEN: Just while you're working so hard on the proposal. It's a lot of pressure you're under.

SAM: Yeah, I will. I'll call her on the way home.
Thanks Helen.

HELEN: Love you sweetie. Now who's found some tadpoles?

DAVID: Me! Come look what else I found! Baby turtles with red stripes! And a horn growing from their forehead!

SAM: Red-Eared Slider turtles I bet. That's their egg tooth! They must be just born. Let me see. This is amazing. Come see this Mel, see this little yolk sac they're born with? It gets absorbed into their bodies as they grow.

DAVID: Dope.

MELISSA: Adorbs!

SAM: It is dope. And... adorbs? Come see this too Helen, let me tell you what happens to them in the winter when this pond freezes...

SOUND: FADE OUT ON THE HAPPY SCENE

SCENE FOUR:

Int. Psychiatrist's office – Day

SOUND: FADE IN ON SAM AND HIS PSYCHIATRIST IN MID-CONVERSATION THE NEXT MORNING. SOUND OF A FISH TANK GURGLING IN THE BACKGROUND MAYBE, AND THE DR. SCRIBBLING NOTES

DR ROTHSCHILD: ...so you have a general feeling that everything around you is unreal. A Simulation you call it. And in addition to this feeling of insubstantiality, you have specific memories of people and places beyond this world.

SAM: Yes, people and places I need to get back to. I came in here to tweak some details, some sound in a rain forest, took a quick look at Central Park... my favorite... and suddenly I was interacting with Simulations! That's not supposed to be possible. Simulations that seemed to know me, and who I had memories of, like when a dream comes back to you in little pieces... So strange. Of course, this is why programmers are required to wear a Tether whenever we're working on a Simulation. It plugs into a little socket implanted in the neocortex, so if the stimulus, the things you're seeing and hearing in one of these things starts to seem too real, it shows on the monitors and you can be yanked out, disconnected immediately. I don't

know why that's not happening. Why doesn't the Supervisor pull me out? I don't know how to get out of here.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: What you're telling me... all of what we're saying right now, this office, is simply part of a Simulation running on a computer 100 years in the future. Those flowers on the windowsill, the box of tissues next to you, the couch you're sitting on, all of this. Created on a computer.

SAM: That's right. At least I think it is.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: And the Simulation is being run by, basically, our future selves. Humans in the future.

SAM: What's left of them, yes.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: But this Simulation was programmed by you, specifically. So you created me. I guess I should thank you. Is more than one Simulation running at any given time?

SAM: Oh yes, what we're in now is just one Simulation of many. Many many worlds, all running out of one Lab, in the year 2118. All modeled on Earth's actual history – Big Bang all the way to single-celled bacteria in prehistoric oceans to species evolution, all of that. With the purpose of generating oxygen, which is in short supply in the real world, let me tell you. But over time the Simulations develop differently. Inevitably life becomes more complex, humanoid creatures evolve, and then without exception, so far anyway, they end up wiping out life on the planet and with it the oxygen we're siphoning off.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: That's a sad concept Sam. Possibly stemming from frustrations you're facing in your conservation work?

SAM: No, it's a not a concept. It's real. Please hear me. What I'm trying to figure out is, am I from this Simulation but going to work every day in the future in order to keep this Simulation going maybe, or am I from the future imagining I'm from a Simulation, or what.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: But hold on a minute. A Simulation would be temporal (?) and we've been around for 250k years, homo sapiens. Longer probably.

SAM: For all you know Dr., you could have been created last week, complete with all your memories and everything you see and interact with and understand about the universe. In fact you were. Not you specifically, but this whole Simulation we're in right now.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: Well my notes here – whether they were created last week or not – my notes indicate that your brain must still be in a very fragile state. You were only discharged from my care six months ago. You're under a lot of tension currently at work, yes? You feel like the natural world, the environment, is in your hands. It must feel like a lot of responsibility...

SAM: Come on it's *obvious* this is a Simulation, can't you see? Look around! Weird isn't it, how this earth is perfectly created to support life? Of course it is! It was created in a lab!

DR. ROTHSCHILD: That's a very weak argument. Of course life on this planet is well suited for it, it would have to be to have developed in the first place.

SAM: Okay yes it's a little weak but I mean think about it. Where *is* everybody? Where are all the other intelligent civilizations which should logically by now be populating our galaxy, along with us? Why are we on planet earth the only ones *here*, why is there no other life around in this galaxy or any other we've spotted? It's too unlikely. This must be a computer program.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: Is this future you feel you come from different? A different planet, universe, all that?

SAM: Oh no, it's the same thing! It's the model for this one.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: Then it must be a Simulation too, no?

SAM: Well... possibly. Possibly. But if it is, we need it cause it's keeping this one and many many others going.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: Have you ever heard of *The Truman Show* delusion Sam, or Truman Syndrome it's sometimes called?

SAM: No.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: It's a type of grandiose delusion in which a patient believes that everything they see, their world, is actually... *created*. Just for them. Like an imaginary reality show. And they are the *star* of that show. An unwilling star perhaps, but the center of the action nonetheless. Everyone else is basically an extra. Does that feel like a description that matches your current mental state?

SAM: No, I'm not the star.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: Well you're positing yourself as, essentially, the creator of this universe. Since, from what you're saying, *you* created this Simulation. So that does seem like a starring role.

SAM: No, no, that's not what this is about. Look, either this is a Simulation running in a computer lab in 2118 or I'm a biologist obsessed with what the future might be like if we let climate change continue. I can't decide which world is real. Maybe they both are.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: Sam, I think you'll find that only one of them can be real, and it's the one you're sitting in now. Look, you seem to be functioning fine, I don't see any need to admit you again. But getting back on the anti-psychotics would help with the delusions.

SAM: I don't think I need meds this time.

DR. ROTHSCHILD: Let's check in again later this week. Get some good sleep in the meantime.

SAM: I don't know how long I'll be around.

SCENE FIVE:

Int. – Dorm 21, East Wing – Day

SOUND: FADE IN ON SAM WALKING TO HIS DORM DOOR, BEEP OF HIS ID OPENING IT. HE CLOSES THE DOOR AND THE HUM OF THE OUTSIDE FADES AWAY.

SECURITY SYSTEM: Welcome home, Sam Brenner. It's currently 102 degrees at 6AM, July 10th, 2118. You have... 20 of 20 power units left for today. You have... 10 of 10 water units left for today. You have... unlimited food powder and... four protein packs left for today.

SOUND: SAM OPENING THE FROG'S BOX, THE FROG CROAKING

SAM: Want some breakfast little guy?

JUAN: I made a little home for frog.

SAM: Juan! What are you doing up? You look terrible!

JUAN: Thanks. I couldn't sleep, so I made a place to keep frog, a little pond out of some containers, with an island in the middle like the pond you have in some of the photos on your wall. I made trees for the island. Out of forks and food powder.

SAM: Adorbs! Like Turtle Pond in Central Park. Sort of. Kermit should be happy in there for a while.

SOUND: SPLASH OF FROG INTO THE POND AND HAPPY CROAK

SAM: Seems to like it.

JUAN: Did you fix the problem in your Simulation? I hope they give you extra power units for the overtime, or upload you faster or something.

SAM: I uh, yeah... yeah. I fixed the problem. Well almost fixed. I'll head back there after a little rest. What's keeping you up all night?

JUAN: What you said about what's out there, beyond the Wall. The piles of stuff, from the Migration. The cars and everything... just thinking about my grandparents, my parents making their way up here... what I could find out there that belonged to them maybe. And just, you know, what's beyond, kind of thing. I know nothing can survive out there for long.

SAM: Hang on a minute, I have something you might want to see.

SOUND: HIS FOOTSTEPS DYING OUT THEN RETURNING

SAM: This might interest you, an old relic I found it out in the Dumps. Binoculars. This side is shattered, but this side you can still use. And if you look through here, you can see things far away. Get Alison to take you up on the cooling towers and see what you can see over the Wall with this. Don't let anyone see this or I'll get my research pass taken away.

JUAN: Whoa thanks man, I'll be real careful.

SAM: I'm going to shower, have to be back in the Lab. Good luck up there!

JUAN: You're going back in already?

SAM: Yeah I have some salmon to cook. See you!

SCENE SIX:

The Taylor apartment – Afternoon

SOUND: MELISSA PRACTICING A SPEECH

MELISSA: You can spend your whole life worrying about the future, but all there will ever be is what's happening here, and...

SOUND: FRONT DOOR OPENING

MELISSA: Dad! Why are you home?

SAM: I wasn't feeling great at work today so I decided to come home a little early. And I promised your mom I'd cook up some salmon to take to the Henderson's tonight. I'm looking forward to it!

MELISSA: That was last week I thought. With the Henderson's.

SAM: Uh oh. Is there that much of a time differentiation?

MELISSA: Are you okay? You were acting weird this morning. Why were you staring at the bird feeder for so long?

SAM: I just wondered if I made a mistake with the goldfinches, if they're supposed to have black and white wings like that, or be all yellow. *Goldfinches*. It's confusing.

MELISSA: They looked normal to me. Anyway why are the birds your mistake.

SAM: Oh I don't know. What are you working on?

MELISSA: My speech for graduation. I'm stuck on what to say about the future.

SAM: The future, that's a big one Melinda.

MELISSA: Melinda?? Who is Melinda.

SAM: I thought...

MELISSA: Melissa is my name dad. Wow, just... wow.

SAM: Oh no, I know that. Melissa. Melissa. I was thinking of someone at work for a second. Obviously I know your name. Can I help you with your speech?

MELISSA: Here's what I have so far: You can spend your whole life worrying about the future, but all there will ever be is what's happening here, and the decisions we make in this moment, which are based in either love or fear. So many of us choose our path out of fear disguised as practicality. What we really want seems impossibly out of reach and ridiculous to expect, so we never dare to ask the universe for it. But the future relies on us having the courage now, as we leave high school, to ask for what we truly want from life, not what society says is important. A bright future depends on this. A future where... and then I'm not sure what to envision for our future.

SAM: It's interesting you say that. Because the future for this Simul... this planet is not looking good. Someone could pull the plug at any moment. Because it's looking like this thing is going to self destruct. The ecosystem is totally out of wack, which means massive die off, end of human civilization, no more power to extract...

MELISSA: Well that's depressing, and no one wants a depressing graduation speech. No one wants to hear about the ecosystem.

SAM: I don't understand why everyone isn't talking about this. It's the only thing worth working on, I would think. There won't be any future to prepare for if no one's taking ecological destruction seriously.

MELISSA: I don't think anyone knows what to do about it. It's like, too big of a problem to think about, so everyone ignores it.

SAM: Maybe people aren't aware of just how bad it is. You know what would motivate people? To hear about the current extinction rate. 150-200 species, a mixture of plant, insect, bird, mammal, become extinct *every 24 hours* in this... on this planet. Put that in your speech, that'll get people's attention for sure. You won't be able to keep them in their seats, they'll be running out to stop the logging, the over-fishing, switch to renewables, replant the forests, everyone will become vegetarian overnight...

MELISSA: We know the extinction rate, facts like that. Reports come out all the time. But growth, growth, growth, no one wants to stop making money, plus I think technology is going to fix most of the problems.

SAM: It's not going to. We've run hundreds of these things, the humans always think they can outwit the logical outcomes of their behavior. Not possible. Often the temperature ends up increasing 10 degrees celsius in a decade once there's a certain CO2 threshold passed. Trust me, it becomes extremely unpleasant at those temperatures. We've got to get the renewables going, carbon sequestration, all this needs to be rolled out tomorrow.

SOUND: FRONT DOOR OPENING, DAVID IS HOME

DAVID: Whoa, dad's home it's a miracle.

SAM: David! David, right? Great to see you again.

DAVID: We live together, remember? You're not going crazy again are you. Mom said to tell her anything weird you say.

SAM: I'm fine! It's just nice to see my family, that's all.

DAVID: Okay... well my improv group is on the way over so we're going to need the kitchen pretty soon.

MELISSA: Why do you have to hog the kitchen? Take your dorky theatre friends upstairs to your room.

DAVID: We need space, dumbass. To move around.

SAM: Can I stay and watch you rehearse? I'll be really quiet. What's the group?

DAVID: The longform improv group I told you about. We're called *Almost Ibsen*. We improv Ibsen tragedies based around a suggestion from the audience.

MELISSA: Weirdo.

SAM: You two are special, you know that? I'm going to go get some more bird feeders. See you kids later!

SCENE SEVEN:

SOUND: SAM IS PULLED OUT OF THE SIMULATION BY HIS SUPERVISOR – WE HEAR HIM HURTLING AWAY FROM EARTH, THE PLANET'S SOUNDS BLENDING TOGETHER INTO ONE CHAOTIC SOUND, SIMILAR TO THE CLIMAX IN THE BEATLES' "A DAY IN THE LIFE", RATHER THAN SEPARATING INTO SEPARATE SOUNDS AS THEY DO WHEN HE ENTERS THE SIMULATION

SUPERVISOR: What is going on exactly? You've been deep in this Simulation all morning, not responding to any general alerts, not updating the system tags, completely unresponsive.

SAM: Oh, I uh... there was an issue with the Power Siphoning, that's all. I was just doing a careful check to see where the problem might be.

SUPERVISOR: And?

SAM: Turns out it's fine, actually. Everything is absolutely fine. I was just being over careful.

SUPERVISOR: What are we siphoning now from this one? Any improvement?

SAM: Oh yeah, plenty of improvement. Let's see, last week it was at 2.2 terrawatts, now we're a... three terawatts.

SUPERVISOR: Three?

SAM: Four. Excuse me. Four. And increasing quickly.

SUPERVISOR: Well you look terrible and no Simulation should need that much attention once it's up and running. Don't be sucked in Sam, nothing in there is real. It's all a Simulation, remember? Nothing but zeros and ones.

SAM: Sure, but worth maintaining don't you think? Now that it's so productive?

SUPERVISOR: Four terawatts isn't something to brag about. Why don't you go for a walk, get some perspective. In fact I want you to take the rest of the day off.

SAM: Good idea. I've got some research stuff to take care of, I'll head out the the Dumps. I'll see you later.

SUPERVISOR: I'll be watching you Sam.

SAM: No need, I'm absolutely fine. I just take my work seriously is all. Got to keep the Cloud powered up. See you later!

SCENE EIGHT:

Int. Dorm 21, East Wing – Night

SOUND: FADE IN ON SAM WALKING TO HIS DORM DOOR, BEEP OF HIS ID OPENING IT. HE CLOSES THE DOOR AND THE HUM OF THE OUTSIDE FADES AWAY.

SECURITY SYSTEM: Welcome home, Sam Brenner. It's currently 104 degrees at 8PM, July 11th, 2118. You have... 20 of 20 power units left for today. You have... 10 of 10 water units left for today. You have... unlimited food powder and... four protein packs left for today.

JUAN: Where you been man? Sounds like you've haven't been home at all. Or maybe someone else is feeding you.

SAM: No, I'm starving. Been out past the Wall since I left work earlier. Gonna cook up some protein packs. Why are you guys staring at me?

ALISON: We went up on the cooling tower, with those binoculars.

SAM: I guess that accounts for your dazed expressions.

JUAN: Why didn't you tell us? I almost fell off the damn tower.

SAM: How many did you see?

ALISON: Ten or so, way off in the distance.

SAM: Yeah, they never come close, but I don't think they're unfriendly. The Complex must look pretty intimidating from outside.

ALISON: I'll say. But it's not supposed to be possible to survive out there, we all know that.

SAM: That's what they say.

JUAN: I'm kind of tempted now, tell you the truth. To go see what else there is. Except then no chance to be Uploaded and live forever so...

SAM: Taking a chance might be better than a lifetime in this jail.

JUAN: Even if we could survive out there we'd still be screwed. This is all just a Simulation too, that's the rumor anyway. The consciousnesses already uploaded claim that they're the Supreme Intelligence that created everything, including this world, the worlds running in your Lab, everything is a Simulation within a Simulation except them. Without it there would be nothing.

ALISON: If someone kicks out the cord, stops the power flow, everything goes down. This Simulation. The Simulations within this Simulation running in your Lab Sam. Everything.

SAM: Test that theory. I don't think it's true. Turn them off. Serves them right. They've been turning off all these other worlds. All the Sim worlds they use and throw away.

JUAN: I'd eat food powder than give up being Uploaded. I want to see my parents again. And we have to keep the Cloud powered up or I'll lose my folks. They're sitting up there on a circuit board.

TO BE CONTINUED! A WORK IN PROGRESS

