

# Solstice

I stretch comfortably. I managed to wake up again while it was still dark, so maybe I have an hour to think and read before my morning routine. I look at the clock, it's ten minutes past two in the morning. That doesn't feel right.

The mobile is faintly glowing. Shit. REM phase wake-up. It's not that urgent that I get a "wrong call", I have a few hours until they can wake me up at the right time, without interrupting my sleep cycle - but I'm going to need all my brains in the next few hours. I wander into the bathroom. More unpleasant news, five butterflies chasing each other on the screen - I have five minutes to collect myself, then a quick game of skill on the phone, then the precise instructions regarding stimulants.

*I don't like them, but that's beside the point: nowhere is the Human Resources Department more literal than at the Organization. They know exactly who to contact, when, and how. They only ask questions they know the answer to will be yes.*

*Will you join the Organization after seeing the analyses and understanding what they mean for you, your loved ones, and the future? Yes (I would like to live). No one will ever find out from you what you really do? Never (they wouldn't believe me anyway). Will you not use any mind-altering drugs, alcohol; will you strictly adhere to the maximum doses? Yes (it wasn't typical before, and who needs that week when they set up my drug profile again?)*

*They know that I accept all conditions, and I even consider it an honor to be chosen. Perhaps I would do the same without any pressure, and I was just given the opportunity by them. They know my motivations, which make me a useful, reliable resource for them. That is why they sought me out.*

One blue and half a yellow? I wasn't that bad... The pressure in my stomach doesn't ease, something nasty is coming. Deep breaths, arm circles... it's not in vain, the physical reactions can be kept under control. The "yellow effect" slowly arrives, warmth floods the back of my neck.

I can go to the machine.

There is a simple USB cable between the phone and the computer, like anyone else's. The program that starts is a bit unusual, if I were to decode it, the strange thing about it would be that it downloads another program to my computer via the external device and then launches it. Of course, this only happens if I hold the phone in my hand and enter the appropriate code.

*Designer*

*This is my classification at the Organization. The tasks sometimes take a toll on me, but I'm glad I got here. It can't be any other way: mistakes are very rare in the Human Resources department.*

*And never something that would be detrimental to the Organization in the long term, and this is true even if it means any disadvantage to anyone else.*

I've been involved in creating many scenarios over the years, I can handle the pressure, I'm smart. I don't know how many people the data set that appears means as much to me as it does to me - since I don't personally know any of my real colleagues. I don't know how many of them are staring at the screen in the same amazement as I am at this moment, how many are realizing the effect of the blue pill that suppresses nausea. But to me, it tells everything about the past few hours, and then about the history of humanity that is just beginning.

The SOHO satellites registered the solar flare a few hours ago, analyzing the composition, speed, and direction of the particle beam. The incoming data was refined with new measurements and then fed into powerful computers, and the answer was clear. It is interesting to imagine how scientists lie down and get up on the rotating planet Earth, there is always work time somewhere, experts process the news. At universities, research institutes, governments – and of course at the Organization. Well, here were some immediate alerts, because the analysis and decision cannot be delayed for a second. They can sleep on afterwards, but of course they can't: the "Solstice" scenario has entered its launch phase, so a lot of my colleagues have lined up with me by now.

From here, of course, everything can be canceled, there have been examples of this both as a practice and in a live version, the scenarios can change according to the radius, but everyone must be at their best until the withdrawal. Mistakes and delays have serious consequences.

### *Consequences*

*I'm loyal to the Organization. Everyone is. Do they pay well for it? Well, not really, it's more of a coincidence. The reason for our unquestioning loyalty lies in personnel quotas.*

*Each member of the Organization receives comprehensive information appropriate to their own expertise, and with this their previous life ends in some respects. They receive precise numbers on resources, danger situations, factors that could lead to civilization-level collapse.*

*You will receive analyses of how inflexible our current society and thinking are, to what extent it is unable to accept the necessity and urgency of change. Statements of the consequences and self-reinforcing processes triggered by a random break that can occur at any moment.*

*A person basically seeks security, tries to exclude from consciousness the increasing signals. Well, the Human Resources Department understands the way to tear open closed eyes; it knows who to try and when. It presents the prospective situation and the role offered in it. It knows that the person it has interviewed will be accepted. It knows that afterwards it will serve with loyalty, because a person will receive a quota. Plus one person, plus two people. Wife. Child. Priority.*

*I know the scenarios. During the collapse, the Security Department will search for the designated individuals according to a priority list, and this ranking is weighted by individual performance. If I'm good enough, maybe all my children will fit in. If not...*

*I am a loyal and diligent member. Everyone is. Everyone knows the list and this rule.*

The eruption occurred with enormous energy, with less than twenty hours left until arrival. According to preliminary calculations, it will knock out electrical systems on almost the entire surface of the planet, every continent will be affected. Communication systems will be down, central power supply will be shut down.

Emergency scenarios are being launched, a state of emergency is being declared, curfews are being imposed, and mobilization is being implemented.

Still, I can't maintain order. I know. I've been involved in writing several scripts for the Sales and Market Research departments.

*Sales and Market Research - the winning duo.*

*Salespeople are the same as in any other company, they advertise and distribute goods to the masses - only the goods are a little unusual: thoughts, opinions, habits, visions. Or rather, the lack of the latter. Man is a strange structure. Despite being a biological being, despite his primary goal of survival, he is capable of self-sacrificing behavior for the sake of higher goals. Like any of us in the Organization, for example, because we know that our efforts clearly benefit our loved ones.*

*Trust, vision, faith – without these, a person is just a selfish, easily controlled individual, a micro-community of a few people at most. Easily crushed, easily grasped with any hope.*

*Market Research is an even wilder group. They probe the crowd, place ideas in unexpected places, write "investigative reports," fabricate or debunk conspiracy theories – and they listen, analyze reactions, the time of their demise, the buzzwords. They involve someone, lead someone, leave someone, clean up someone. They search for new opportunities, scenario variants, because in a crisis situation, big changes can depend on small things. And the Organization must master the change, whatever the moment and for whatever reason.*

*The masses will not believe in the solutions announced by the managers, they have lost the habit of trusting official leaders. They will involuntarily trust people who suddenly rise, unknown, smart, calm, and possess surprising organizing powers.*

*Within us.*

There's something funny about all this. The biggest problem with scenarios is the first step: temporarily disrupting the infrastructure, while preserving the necessary elements, over the largest possible area. Partial disruptions, revolutions, local disasters always preserve larger, coherent network elements (large families, business circles, army, mafia), which then cause a lot of confusion, local concentration of power, with difficult to predict consequences, and bargaining. The most important task is to simultaneously shut down all communication networks and make them controllable.

That's when Mother Nature comes in and takes action. She knocks out the fuses, knocks out the communication systems.

The alarm has not yet been lifted, the scenarios are being activated. My task is relatively simple now, I have started downloading the necessary data at this moment. For the first time I will see names, addresses, codes suitable for personal contact. Of course, I will have to print all this out, on properly prepared sheets, which I will...

That's why Personal Affairs has humor. According to my profile, I am a believer, although I don't go to church, so no one should be surprised by a worn Bible that I carry with me and even cling to very fiercely. This is natural, since the inserts that are currently being printed contain (in a way that is readable only to me) everything that I can use to perform my task later.

*Personal matter*

*The great wizard. I think everyone in the Organization is equally given the opportunity to have two lives. One is probably created by experienced soap opera writers, usually without any special twists, from boring templates. I am an IT specialist for a subcontracting company, not a very diligent but acceptable coder. Every day I have to spend an hour reviewing my "work" for the day, my correspondence, my documentation - which of course was done by someone else. Recently I got into writing the manual... maybe there are fewer resources? I read through my opinions on various things, expected conversations. Sometimes I have to make phone calls, there are also personal meetings, but fortunately very few. I also have some illness, so they don't like to meet me, they hire me out of goodwill. Or something like that. I don't particularly care.*

As soon as I finished, I have nothing more to do, I live my usual life. I can't do anything for my loved ones, I would be helpless alone in the expected chaos. I know exactly, because I know the analyses, I wrote some of them myself, I thought them through carefully. I just hope that my classification and my available quota rank them high enough. The lousy Customers always demand more and more quota piles from us.

### *Quotas and customers*

*These are probably the two things that everyone hates in the Organization. We live off of the Clients, they provide the source for all our activities. They are not smart enough to do our jobs – but they are smart enough to deal with people who hate them and are smarter than them. We don't know each other, so we can't trust our colleagues. We can never give out any revealing, personal information about ourselves. The warning is serious, and one time is enough for everyone. My "mobile" didn't work for more than two weeks, and I know enough to despair about it – but if it's noticeable on me, they never take it back.*

*The Orderers know that they don't have much time to be on top according to today's power system - but they also know that even a fraction of the resources wasted by the vast masses today are enough if only they can use them in the way they do today. And a good part of the energy can be replaced with a mass of obedient servants who just need to be kept alive. The country's resources are outstandingly good: climate, water, agriculture - the rest doesn't matter so much for now. They are asking for a lot of quotas here, which is also a good thing, since they will need a lot of ants, the change will "require" fewer victims.*

*It makes me angry that I and my descendants will most likely serve them, but at least they will be able to learn, write, and decide on certain things - unlike the future ants.*

When I'm done, I'll shut down my systems and carefully shield them. Not that I can make them work, I can't do much with them without a cell phone or satellites, but that's the rule. The Organization doesn't throw anything away: it either takes care of it or destroys it immediately and completely.

But I will have my Bible with me, and I will know where to go for new tools.

### *The Development Department*

*It has achieved serious results, and we have high hopes for it. I can practically run their low-power radios, computers, and e-paper displays with a generator that looks like a forearm amplifier or a solar panel the size of a drawing pad. Supposedly. And they also guarantee that satellite communications will be restored after the solar flare has passed. Some old missile silos are not hiding nuclear bombs, but are home to communications satellites. The real weapons of the new age: power over information instead of muscle that has grown beyond critical mass and crushed everything.*

*I will be able to start trying to establish contact 13 hours after the shutdown, using disposable devices, of which there are a handful. Then the Organization will be restored to normal operation according to the specified protocols. The Security Department will try to find the outage points, depending on the level of resources.*

*Even so, I am alarmed by the brief silence when the electronic buzzing we are used to today stops and we can only hear our own heartbeat. And the screams, panting, and wailing of the startled human-animals, when the dream images painted on the wall disappear, only the cage remains, and the caretakers do not appear with dinner.*

I know only a small fraction of the scenarios that follow. I know that the first days, especially in the big cities, will be catastrophic. The acute patients in the hospitals, those who need continuous care... well, yes, they will die. There is no other solution, and the thousands of personal tragedies will break those who could be of use to us. We will sacrifice those whom we will not have the strength to support anyway.

I'm sure we would all like to find a better solution, but unfortunately there isn't one.

This is the critical period. The weak will die, some crazy person would organize a small kingdom, but realize too late that they are not prepared for the lack of communication. No Google, no maps, no Facebook, no cell phones, no TV, no radio. Radio amateurs are easy targets and can only communicate openly, there is no time to figure out codes.

*The Public Relations department comes into play*

*Friendly, warm-voiced, tall but not ostentatious men, determined, motherly women. The eternal callsign of "family" is encoded in us, with our communication network in the background, our well-prepared, thorough plans. After our system is set up, they appear on the scene and begin the harvest.*

*People frightened by the harsh reality, broken by tragedies, come like moths to a lamplight and get exactly what they want. Better prepared, more organized people who finally tell them what to do. Together with some experts from the Security Department, they set up safe temporary shelters in places that have been pre-stocked with the necessary supplies for survival until they can be taken to their destination.*

*There will certainly be riots, but organized, connected, trusting cells of people will be quite resilient. And we have over-planned their numbers to a sufficient extent. The members of Public Relations took on the task with this in mind.*

*They are really good people. That's why they were chosen.*

The stronger groups, relying only on themselves, emerge into the countryside. Weapons, supplies, possibly pre-prepared shelters, groups of 5-25 people. This is the number of people who can trust each other even in such circumstances, and can be effectively controlled even in the absence of communication tools. And it is this latter quality that makes them not an obstacle for the Organization.

They take care of each other's problems thoroughly in the first round. Some of the rest specialize in settlement, the other half in raiding. It soon becomes clear that in the age of long-range firearms, no community is large enough to effectively defend an area large enough to sustain itself. There simply aren't enough people to constantly protect the borders against those who want to rob.

Their loss hurts less. They had choices, the resources to think about peaceful, communal solutions, not follow stupid Wild West patterns.

We have planned enough time for ourselves, and winter is coming. This is an especially good time for night thermal imaging reconnaissance with drones.

*The Security Department is cleaning up.*

*The key people in the law enforcement and security companies are probably members of the Organization, and perhaps they are the ones who may have known each other personally before. After all, the Security Department has already interfered in the lives of employees like me. They won't have a hard time. Vehicles, communication devices, thousands, maybe tens of thousands of personnel, mobilizable based on common plans, capable of constant covert communication, aerial reconnaissance if necessary. Overwhelming force.*

*They go to the address. It wasn't too difficult to compile the contents of the "survival basket" in addition to the "consumer basket" used to measure inflation. I don't know the exact tracking method, but I'm guessing a relatively low-activity, gamma-emitting homogeneous isotope, which was mixed as a tracer with the appropriate products (ammunition, canned goods, technical equipment). The small amount of these is uninteresting, the owners have been storing them hidden until now. Now, however, they are emerging from closets and basements and starting to move. You just have to read the signs, direct them a little, and provoke them against each other.*

*They use bait. The radio announces that tankers are heading towards the nuclear power plant. For a while, there will be those who don't think about where the country's strategic oil reserves actually could be, and why would they be anywhere other than where they are needed most?*

*Of course, the Security Department people are sitting in the armored cabins of the trucks, in relative safety, because the attackers only want to divert them, shoot them with rifles; not to fire rockets or explode them. And they die, because that's all the Security Department wants.*

My main task was to plan an agricultural production zone, where the Security Service would take me at the right time. There are many side tasks involved in a project that requires minimal external resources.

establishment of a settlement. Underground, human-made, almost completely insulated community accommodation.

Heating is provided by human body heat and compost bins when needed.

We placed the building material a long time ago, the work will be done by the ants.

*Okay, of course, people. We care about them, we find their families, we bring them together.*

*We are concerned with making them feel good, with considering the area they receive from us as a little paradise. They should feel grateful to us for saving them, for giving them a new, much more peaceful life. They don't have to think more than before. If they don't want to, they don't have to decide anything, and they won't be pushed around by those who are more intelligent than them. After all, from now on, they are also directly interested in making themselves feel good and working hard.*

*They won't learn either. They never loved it either. Writing is limited to a simple system of symbols, music to an easy-to-understand, danceable rhythm, thinking and worldview to a few well-matched clichés. They won't have ambitious desires, they won't want to see the world, because in their opinion, perhaps all that's left of the world is our garden, and they won't feel like leaving the nest. If they do, they won't return, and that will further dampen their curiosity. They don't stand a chance against the Safe Ones.*

*Ants. But they are not dead. They help save the global human race from the consequences of its own stupidity. We will do everything we can to survive the deadly consequences of climate change, pollution, and the resource crisis in the current world order as a unified species. The engine of this will be provided, instead of the extremely overused and wasted resources, by the very people who have so far scattered them with both hands: the masses of people in the "consumer society". Simple, manual labor.*

*They will even be healthy and happy. We will do everything for them.*

I think it's true for all of my colleagues that they dreamed of something different. I'm sure it's crossed our minds: these plans would still be usable if they didn't have to break the stubbornly repeated thought patterns by sacrificing countless people.

If we didn't have to herd our own kind like sheep, eventually shrinking them into ants. If we could somehow convince a sufficient number of people that we could start now.

*Maybe this is more than wishful thinking. Sometimes very strange writings have appeared on the Internet, on blogs, on forums – they are so easy to come across if you know what you are looking for. Especially if properly parameterized search algorithms sift through the garbage in front of you... Dissident members, or experiments of the Market Research Department? The experiments always died out, drowning in shooting range practice and homemade windmill construction... Is the darkness really that deep, or did Sales intervene?*

We will never know. T-6 p.m., the Sun has taken the first step. The last weekday of my life begins.