

BLACKOUT

"Pilot"

An Audio Drama

Written by

Scott Conroy

COLD OPEN

SOUND UP:

EXT. HIGH ABOVE NORTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE - DAY

A FIGHTER JET rips through the clouds at supersonic speed.

INT. COCKPIT (FIGHTER JET) - CONTINUOUS

The PILOT talks to his combat CONTROLLER through his headset.

CONTROLLER

Inspector 12 maintain at 6400.

PILOT

Copy that.

CONTROLLER

Inspector 12, what's your RPM?

PILOT

RPM 64. I have a visual of the White Mountains now. I'm going to start to maneuver in.

CONTROLLER

Copy. Should be some nice fall foliage right down around there. Inspector 12, you're about four minutes from the border.

PILOT

I'm not interested in going to Canada. Just one last sweep here.

CONTROLLER

Inspector 12, what is your altitude?

PILOT

I'm on the 340 radio. The terrain is mountainous. Lifting to 13,000. Don't see anything out of the ordinary here. Now wait a second. I'm gonna have to circle back. This is not safe territory. This territory is not safe.

CONTROLLER

Inspector 12, is the fuel engage--

PILOT
I'm gonna change frequencies here.

CONTROLLER
Roger.

The pilot CHANGES frequencies. An alarm BLARES.

PILOT
I don't have any power on the right side of the panel here. The panel is down.

CONTROLLER
Inspector 12, what is your position?

PILOT
The panel is down here.

CONTROLLER
What is your position?

PILOT
Yeah, I should be burning pretty steady here, but it says I'm actually--

CONTROLLER
Inspector 12--

PILOT
Yeah, actually, I don't have any ... shit, what's going on here?

CONTROLLER
Inspector 12, we cannot hear you.

PILOT
Something's wrong here. Something's very wrong here.

CONTROLLER
Inspector 12, we cannot hear you.

PILOT
I'm holding steady.

CONTROLLER
We cannot hear--

Something EXPLODES inside the cockpit.

CONTROLLER (CONT'D)
Please advise your frequency. Abort
the--

PILOT
Bigfoot, do you copy? I have no
power. There's a mountain up ahead
and I can't throw my air flaps
down.

The pilot's audio starts to CUT IN and out.

PILOT (CONT'D)
Mayday, I'm going down, I'm going
down!

The plane CRASHES.

ACT 1

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAWN

The BEEP of a tape recorder and then a deep BREATH signals
the start of SIMON's confessional.

SIMON (V.O.)
(slightly out of breath)
My name is Simon Itani. I'm 39
years old, and I'm currently--well,
I don't know where I am exactly.
Somewhere on the border between New
Hampshire and Massachusetts, I
think. It's 103 days since the
blackout began, and like everyone
else, I guess I'm just looking for
signs of life. I'm not sure if
anyone will ever hear this, but I
guess I feel like I should document
what has happened here these past
few months. That way, if someone
does get a hold of this recording,
you'll know the truth, and you can
act accordingly. My family and I,
we come from a small little town in
New Hampshire--northern New
Hampshire. It's not far from the
Canadian border. You've never heard
of this place, I promise you. It's
called Berlin. And yeah, that's how
you pronounce it.

(MORE)

SIMON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Pretty much everyone in town used to work at the paper mill, but that shut down years ago. As for me, I was, no I still am actually, an aspiring author. Emphasis on the "aspiring" part. Because my real job was as a radio DJ at 87.6 The Moose. That's the North Country's only independent rock.

INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

We hear final notes of an original DREAM POP song.

SIMON
That was the latest track from the Danish dream pop band, FØNHAUS, off their self-titled debut EP.

87.6 The Moose's cheesy THEME MUSIC plays.

SIMON (CONT'D)
I hope you enjoyed this latest edition of Morning Buzz Berlin here on 87.6 The Moose. I know I did. I am, as always, your humble DJ Simon Itani. Enjoy the rest of your morning, North Country boys and girls. I'm off to Madeline's General Store for a very well deserved cup of coffee. Maybe I'll see you around town. Until next time, alright? And look out for each other.

EXT. MADELINE'S GENERAL STORE - DAY

The low HUM of a pickup truck's engine and the grinding CRACKLE of moving tires crunch against a gravel road.

Simon ENTERS the store.

INT. MADELINE'S GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

Simon GRABS a Styrofoam cup and goes to work at the self-serve coffee station.

MADELINE BOUCHARD (67), the store's gruff owner, manager, and cashier, acknowledges him brightly as she lays out the day's pastries.

SIMON
Good morning, Madeline.

MADELINE
I'm trying out the dark roast this week. Let me know how ya like it.

SIMON
Are the beans fair trade?

MADELINE
Fair who?

SIMON
Nothing.

Simon AMBLES over to the counter. She RINGS him up on her antique sales register.

MADELINE
Dollar, thirty.

SIMON
You know, they make cash registers now with computer screens and everything.

MADELINE
This one works just fine. Newer technology isn't always better.

Simon FISHES some change out of his pocket and PLACES the coins on the counter, one by one.

SIMON
Sox win last night?

MADELINE
Who cares? Expos are going all the way this year.

SIMON
The Expos moved to D.C. like fifteen years ago. They're the Nationals now.

MADELINE
If your son or daughter moved away and changed their name, would you disown them?

Madeline CLOSES the cash register.

SIMON
Depends. Do I still have to pay
their cell phone bills?

MADELINE
(chuckles)
Tell Carla and the twins I said hi.

He RETREATS back toward the door.

SIMON
Will do. See ya soon.

Simon OPENS the rickety porch door and EXITS the store.

EXT. MADELINE'S GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

As he WALKS back to his truck, Simon BLOWS ON HIS COFFEE to
cool it down and then takes a careful SIP.

Suddenly, a distant GUNSHOT rings out and reverberates around
the surrounding mountainside. Simon STOPS in his tracks.

POP! Pop, pop, pop!

There's a sharp CRACKLE that sounds like sparks FLYING out of
some malfunctioning electronic equipment.

SIMON
(under his breath)
What the ... What was that?

Simon DUCKS back into the store.

INT. GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

Simon REENTERS the store quickly.

SIMON
You hear that?

MADELINE
What?

SIMON
Gunshots. I think near the cell
phone tower up the hill.

MADELINE
(quick to downplay it)
I know you're a city boy, but how
long have you lived up here now?

SIMON

18 years.

MADELINE

And after 18 years in the North
Country, you still don't know when
it's hunting season?

A beat.

SIMON

No, that definitely did not sound
like a hunting rifle.

Madeline continues to go about her work, laying out pastries.

MADELINE

Oh, you're the expert. Clearly.

SIMON

I am. And I'm gonna check it out.

Simon OPENS the rickety door again and heads back outside.

MADELINE

(calling after him)

You are the dumbest smart guy I
know, Simon.

EXT. CELL PHONE TOWER - MINUTES LATER

Simon PULLS his truck onto the side of the gravel road, STEPS
OUT, and APPROACHES the cell phone tower on foot, his boots
CRUNCHING against the leaves on the ground.

SIMON (V.O.)

I've gone through it in my head so
many times since. First, it was the
details I missed, like what the gun-
-no, the guy actually looked like.
He was wearing all black. I
remember that. I know that. When I
replay that morning, I can't help
but ask myself how the Hell didn't
I see it. Right? It was right there
in front of my face. I mean, how
often do you see a man trying to
shoot down a cell tower?

A loud ELECTRONIC BLAST shoots out of the tower's antenna and
then a SIZZLE and a POP.

An UNKNOWN MAN emerges from behind some shrubs and stops in his tracks when he sees Simon.

SIMON
Hey, who is that?

Instead of answering, the unknown man suddenly TAKES OFF in a sprint.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Hey, stop! Stop!

Simon begins to JOG after the unknown man.

He only makes it a couple of steps. And then--

CRACK!

The gunshot rings out abruptly.

CRACK!

CRACK!

Simon emits a deep, guttural MOAN. He's been hit.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Oh, God.

He FUMBLES with his keys and DASHES back toward his truck.

CRACK!

CRACK!

CRACK!

INT. SIMON'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Simon manages to open the driver's side door and THROW himself into the seat.

SIMON
Oh, God. Shit. My shoulder!

He SLAMS the door shut and TURNS the key into the ignition.

CRACK!

A window SHATTERS, as the wheels SPIN and propel the truck forward with a sudden lurch.

Simon's BREATHING picks up. As he tries to STEADY the wheel, he takes his cell phone out of his pocket and DIALS 9-1-1.

Instead of being greeted on the other line by the voice of an emergency dispatcher, he's instead met with the excruciatingly familiar lament of an AUTOMATED OPERATOR.

AUTOMATED OPERATOR
Your call could not be completed as dialed.

SIMON
Shit. Shit, shit shit.

Simon GRIMACES in pain and then dials 9-1-1 again, as he continues to drive.

AUTOMATED OPERATOR
Your call could not be completed as dialed.

Simon SLAMS his fist against the steering wheel in frustration.

Then he LAYS ON THE HORN, honking like a mad man as he swerves all over the road.

Simon ROLLS DOWN the window.

SIMON
Help! Somebody help me! Help. I've been shot.

ACT 2

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

The familiar BUZZ of a family's morning routine. Eggs CRACKLE on a skillet. A chipper MORNING NEWS HOST runs through the day's headlines on a small TV that's kept at a low volume.

MORNING NEWS HOST
(earnest)
Troubling news coming out of Gorham this morning, where a local teen was mauled by a black bear after taking part in the maple syrup bath challenge, a dangerous new craze that has north country parents concerned...

IZZY (perceptive and hard to impress) OPENS a box of cereal and POURS the contents into a bowl.

CARLA (39, purposeful with a commanding presence) SHOVES a couple of books into Izzy's backpack.

CARLA
C'mon, Izz. Let's go. Chop chop.
Where's Hunter?

Izzy FIDDLES with her phone.

IZZY
I don't know, mom. We're twins, but
we're not joined at the hip.

Izzy continues to PLAY with her phone.

IZZY (CONT'D)
This is so annoying.

CARLA
What?

IZZY
My phone's messed up.

CARLA
What's wrong with it?

IZZY
It says, "no service" and none of
my texts are going through.

CARLA
(sarcastically)
Oh my God, no texts?! Alright,
well, you might not survive it, but
--

Izzy starts to EAT her cereal.

IZZY
Hilarious.

HUNTER (a jock who's smarter than he lets on) comes BOUNDING down the rickety staircase and joins his mom and sister in the kitchen. He's in a hurry.

HUNTER
Fruity Squares. Nice.

He POURS himself a bowl.

CARLA
You gonna need a ride over to
Lincoln's?

HUNTER
What I need is my own car.

Izzy LAUGHS.

IZZY
Did they forget to put you through
the concussion protocol again, or
did someone in this family win the
lottery and not tell me?

HUNTER
(ignoring her)
Lincoln's picking me up. We want to
get to Montreal before the other
prospects.

CARLA
Good. But, you know, McGill isn't
the only hockey program.

HUNTER
I know, mom.

CARLA
We just want you to explore your
options.

HUNTER
What do you think I'm doing? I'm
sorry we can't all assume we're all
getting into Yale.

IZZY
Leave me out of this.

HONK HONK HONK. Lincoln lays on the horn in the driveway.

IZZY (CONT'D)
Ugh, once would have sufficed.

HUNTER
Gotta go.

CARLA
Can you guys drop your sister off?

Hunter puts his cereal bowl down and GATHERS his backpack.

HUNTER
Sorry, car's full.

He KISSES his mom on the cheek.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
See ya Sunday night. Love you.

CARLA
OK, be careful please. Montreal's a big city, and Lincoln's a magnet for trouble. Don't get drunk, arrested, or a girl pregnant.

HUNTER
I'll do my best.

CARLA
And call me when you get there.

HUNTER
OK. But for some reason, my phone's not working right now. It's wicked annoying.

He EXITS. The door SLAMS shut behind him.

CARLA
(calling after him)
Find a land line! You know what that is?

HUNTER
Yes.

CARLA
Alright.

Carla looks out the window, as Hunter gets in the car.

IZZY
I can't believe you let him skip school for that.

CARLA
They really should've given you a lift.

IZZY
Have you ever been inside Lincoln's car with their sweaty hockey bags? I'd rather take the maple syrup bath challenge.

The car PULLS out of the driveway. Izzy continues to EAT her cereal, as Carla gets ready for the day.

CARLA

What do you have after school today?

IZZY

Just some canvassing for a couple of City Council and School Board candidates at the old folks home.

CARLA

You know, those "old folks" were part of the generation that defeated Communism, Izz. You think they're really gonna want to return to it?

IZZY

No, I think they want a dignified retirement and economic security, like everyone else.

CARLA

When you get older, you'll realize--

IZZY

Oh, please, mother. It's too early for this.

On the TV SCREEN, the Morning News Host cuts off a taped news package in mid-stream.

MORNING NEWS HOST (O.S.)

I apologize for cutting off that report, but we're now getting some breaking news here out of Washington.

The anchor SHUFFLES some papers around, as a producer SPEAKS into her ear.

IZZY

Mom, turn it up.

Carla TURNS UP the TV and the volume goes up.

MORNING NEWS HOST (O.S.)

We're learning that this does appear to be a major situation with national security implications.

(MORE)

MORNING NEWS HOST (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'm being told that the President
is moments away from addressing the
nation from the White House. So
we'll go right now--

The TV suddenly SHUTS OFF. So do all of the lights and
appliances in the kitchen.

CARLA
(flipping light switch)
That's weird. The power's out.

SILENCE hangs in the air for a long beat.

Suddenly, a car comes SPEEDING toward them and screeches into
the driveway.

CARLA (CONT'D)
What the--

IZZY
(looking out the window)
It's a cop car.

A SIREN goes off in their driveway. A car door OPENS and
SHUTS.

INT. CAR - DAY

An UPBEAT EDM SONG plays from the car stereo as Hunter rides
shotgun with his friend LINCOLN (18, dirty hockey player,
full of bravado) behind the wheel.

HUNTER
You sure they have cell service at
the camp site?

LINCOLN
Settle down, guy.

HUNTER
If I don't check in, my parents are
gonna call McGill.

LINCOLN
Have I ever steered you wrong?

HUNTER
Consistently since the third grade.

LINCOLN

Yeah, and I don't want you to forget it, asshole because we are getting laid this weekend!

HUNTER

You brought two tents, right?

LINCOLN

Jade and I get the big one. You and Kira get the little one.

HUNTER

Whatever. As long as I'm not in yours.

Hunter FIDDLES with his iPhone.

HUNTER (CONT'D)

Now GPS isn't working. This is so annoying.

LINCOLN

GPS? Look at it: "Jericho Mountain State Park. Next exit."

HUNTER

You're right. I don't even notice street signs anymore.

LINCOLN

See, this is the problem with technology. It's rotting our brains.

HUNTER

Jesus, dude. You sound like my dad.

Lincoln gives him a SHOVE to the shoulder.

LINCOLN

Whatever, it's going to be nice to have a weekend off the grid for once.

He CRACKS a beer open.

HUNTER

Dude, are you drinking a beer right now? It's 9am.

LINCOLN

Oh, shut up.

He SWERVES.

HUNTER

Lincoln, eyes on the road! You are such a fucking meathead, dude.

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Simon is lying on a gurney, as a DOCTOR (female) treats him. We hear a HEART MONITOR.

DOCTOR

Alright, Simon. Can you lift your arm for me?

He does as he's told and LIFTS his arm. The doctor SCRIBBLES into her chart.

SIMON

It hurts, Doc.

DOCTOR

Yes, it does tend to smart when a .30 caliber bullet rips across your flesh.

SIMON

I'd laugh, but I just got shot.

DOCTOR

More like grazed. You're very fortunate. After a few days of rest, your shoulder will be good as new.

The lights and electronic equipment in the ER FLICKER on and off. And then back on again.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Uh-oh.

SIMON

Uh-oh? Aren't you on a generator here?

DOCTOR

Yeah, but I can't remember the last time we had to use it. Things might get interesting real fast, if they don't get the power back on soon.

SIMON

Is there any word on what happened?
The guy who shot me was up near the
cell tower. Maybe that had
something to do with it.

The doctor TAKES OFF her latex gloves and THROWS them away.

DOCTOR

I don't think the power outage is
confined to Berlin.

SIMON

What do you mean?

DOCTOR

All I know is the President was
about to come on national TV to
make some big announcement and then
the power went off.

SIMON

Jesus.

Suddenly the metal curtain WHIPS BACK--

Izzy, Carla and a POLICE OFFICER enter.

POLICE OFFICER

Excuse me. Mr. Itani?

IZZY

Oh my God. Dad!

SIMON

I'm fine, Izz. I'm fine.

CARLA

Who did this?

SIMON

I'd love to know.

(beat)

Thanks for bringing them here,
officer.

POLICE OFFICER

You got it.

SIMON

Did you find the guy?

POLICE OFFICER

Not yet.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry, but all of you can't be back here. Hospital policy. If you and your daughter could head to the waiting room--?

CARLA

We're not going anywhere. My husband's been shot.

DOCTOR

Grazed.

IZZY

This is attempted murder.

POLICE OFFICER

Hang on there. I hate to be a wet blanket, but sounds to me like your dad was wandering around the woods during hunting season.

SIMON

So you're not even going to even look for the guy?

POLICE OFFICER

Of course we are. But we're spread a little thin right now. All the traffic lights are out.

CARLA

So what should we do?

POLICE OFFICER

I'd suggest going about your day.

EXT. CAMP SITE - DAY

Footsteps CRACKLE against the leaves, as four teenagers SET UP a camp site.

Music PLAYS from a battery-powered portable stereo. Hunter OPENS a beer can and hands it to Lincoln.

LINCOLN

IPA? When did you put on your fancy pants?

HUNTER

We're celebrating.
(then)
Head's up, Kira.

Hunter ROSSES a beer can to KIRA, and she CATCHES it.

KIRA

Thanks, babe. What're we celebrating?

HUNTER

A long weekend in the woods together without the tyranny of social media to distract us. Right, Jade?

JADE APPROACHES the group.

JADE

Sounds a little more like a nightmare to me.

Hunter CRACKS open another beer can and hands it to Jade.

LINCOLN

No way. There's no beer in nightmares, babe.

Lincoln and Jade CLINK beer cans.

HUNTER

Still don't have service, though.

JADE

Shit, my parents are gonna be pissed if I don't check in at some point.

HUNTER

Yeah. Mine, too. We might have to drive back into civilization tomorrow and check in.

LINCOLN

Pussy.

HUNTER

(to Jade)

Where do your folks think you are, Jade?

JADE

My cousin's place in Manchester.

LINCOLN

How 'bout you, Kira?

KIRA

My mom's too hopped up to give a
shit. I just told her I was "going
out."

LINCOLN

OK, I--

KIRA

No worries. The way I see it, just
about every adult in the North
Country's either an admitted drug
addict or a liar. At least she's
upfront about it.

A low, rumbling ENGINE approaches from somewhere off in the
distance.

JADE

What the fuck's that?

The engine grows progressively LOUDER.

HUNTER

Holy shit. It's a fighter plane.
Guys, look!

JADE

What the Hell's it doing all the
way out here?

The jet SCREAMS directly overhead.

KIRA

Whoa!

HUNTER

Whoa!

The jet's engine grows progressively QUIETER as it streaks
away from them.

LINCOLN

Is it me, or is that thing flying
really--

HUNTER

Low.

ACT 3

EXT. RADIO STATION - DAY

Simon PULLS into the lot and parks his car.

He AMBLES toward the small one-bedroom apartment/local radio station on foot, WINCING as he tries to ignore the pain in his shoulder.

SIMON (V.O.)

The radio station was a couple of miles north of the hospital. It was right on the river. I call it a "radio station," but we're not talking NPR here. It was more like a barn with a studio on the ground floor and a little one-bedroom apartment up top.

Simon ENTERS the station.

INT. RADIO STATION - STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Simon WALKS IN and is greeted by BILL STARKY.

SIMON (V.O.)

My only colleague at the station was Bill Starky. He owned the place and lived there, too. To paraphrase Churchill, Bill's a modest man with much to be modest about. Perfectly suitable for running a station with a listenership of a couple thousand on a good day. But I'll say this about Bill: that man could really surprise you.

BILL

Hey, Simon.

SIMON

Good, good, good. The station's still got power.

BILL

Well, yeah. I got that generator.

SIMON

Yeah, well this is good.

BILL

What the Hell happened to your
shoulder?

SIMON

I got shot. Are we up and running?

BILL

(befuddled)

Yeah, the "classic rock hour"
started a half hour ago. I thought
I'd just play Led Zeppelin II all
the way through until you got here.

SIMON

Bill, you know I can never get
enough Zeppelin, but do you think
we should address the blackout?

BILL

What can we do?

SIMON

I don't know, inform people about
what's going on? Maybe we activate
the Emergency Alert System?

BILL

Only FEMA or the FCC can order
that. We haven't gotten any--

SIMON

All the phone lines are down.
There's no news coming in, no
information at all.

BILL

OK, but it's really against
regulations--

SIMON

C'mon, man, it's been a crazy
morning. Let's be useful for once.

BILL

OK, OK. Give me a second. Your mic
will be hot in about 15 seconds.

SIMON

Let's cut that in half.

BILL
(hesitantly)
I ... guess. But we're right in the
middle of--

SIMON
Bill.

BILL
(trailing off)
That epic Jimmy solo is just about
to--

SIMON
Bill!

BILL
OK, OK.

INT. RADIO STATION - STUDIO - DAY

We hear the familiar sequence of BEEPS and STATIC of the
Emergency Alert System, only this time, there is no
reassuring voice at the end to tell us this is "only a test."

After the alert finishes, Simon SITS UP at the microphone,
which he TAPS twice.

SIMON
Helloooooooooooooo, North Country.
It's Simon Itani, and usually at
this time, I'd be introducing a new
track in our Classic Rock Hour. But
as anyone who's within range of
this broadcast knows by now, we
appear to be facing a major
blackout. Here are the facts that
I'm aware of at this point. There
is no electricity, cell phone
service, landline phone access in
the area, and the problem does not
appear to be confined to the North
Count--

Outside the radio station, the fighter jet can be heard
DESCENDING rapidly.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Hold on, just a minute.

Simon THROWS off his headphones, RUSHES to the window, and
PULLS open the curtains.

He watches as the fighter jet SLAMS into a nearby mountainside, EXPLODING into a massive conflagration.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Oh my God. Oh my God.

He SITS back down at the microphone and PUTS ON his headphones.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, you'll have to excuse me. I don't want to alarm anyone, but I'm clearly a bit rattled here. I just watched what appeared to be an Air Force fighter jet crashing and exploding into Jericho Mountain. So clearly, we're dealing with some kind of national crisis here, and I--

Simon PRESSES the "mute" button and turns to Bill.

SIMON (CONT'D)

(loud whisper)

Bill. Bill. What the Hell do I do?

BILL

Uh. I guess, keep talking.

Simon LEANS BACK into the microphone.

SIMON

Well, um, let's keep it here at 87.6, The Moose, and we are gonna do everything we can--we'll do our best to keep you apprised about what's happening, but we have limited information at the moment. And, uh, I was actually shot this morning, so this is really quite a lot for me to take in. Let's--why don't we go to a very quick musical break, as I gather my thoughts for a moment. But in the mean time, I think the most important thing everyone can do right now is just make sure you have enough food and water at home, maybe you stockpile some batteries, and just prepare for nightfall because we just don't know what might come after this. We have no idea. And well, OK, OK,, here's a new single from Berlin's own, Stella and the Couches.

(MORE)

SIMON (CONT'D)

Please stay tuned. And look out for
each other.

CUT TO:

The original song, CANDLELIGHT, from "Stella and the Couches"
(a local New Hampshire band) takes us into the closing
CREDITS.

THE END