

adrift

SAINI and NOAH, both 19, are on the phone flirting. They're in the middle of a game. (All characters appear as V.O. only.)

SAINI
Okay, nicknames for the river. You first.

NOAH
Old Blue.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER

We're riding along the Mississippi, watching the palm trees sway in the wind.

NOAH
The Big Muddy.

SAINI
The Gathering of Waters.

NOAH
Ol' Man River.

SAINI
Father of Waters.

NOAH
Big River.

SAINI
You said that one!

NOAH
(laughing)
No, I didn't.

As they giggle, their conversation fades away.

EXT. NEW NANUMEA

Aerial view of New Nanumea, a self-contained megastructure housing the remaining population of the Tuvaluan community. They are the world's first climate refugees. Relocated to the American Midwest, south of St. Louis on the Mississippi River.

SAINI
We brought the tropics. We brought the salt.

INT. NEW NANUMEA

Detail of salt corrosion. First-person point of view as Saini wanders the desolate concrete island.

NOAH
What building are you in?

SAINI
Tower three, #709. There's only a few families left on our floor though. There's a lady, Mrs. Tevali, across here. Then my cousin Meleta and her husband Tuau.

NOAH
Were you born there?

SAINI
My parents moved to New Nanumea around March or April of '64 and I was born in May.

NOAH
What's your family like?

SAINI
My father works hard, he's got three jobs. My mom works in the data center with me.
(thinking)
They lost everything during relocation. I guess they're pretty happy, considering.

NOAH
I'd be happy if I was with you too.

Saini gets quiet.

SAINI
Why so many questions?

NOAH
You're fascinating.

They stay on the line, silent. Saini continues walking around as she chats.

SAINI
(to herself)
More people moving out. This place is dead.

NOAH
Do you want to leave?

Saini pretends not to hear his question.

NOAH
Bring the next shipment. You can stay with me.

She spots a resident in the corridor.

SAINI
(changing the subject)
Her bag is cute, but she needs to do something with that hair.

Saini walks to the courtyard, inspecting the buckets collecting leaks.

SAINI
Is it raining in St. Louis?

NOAH
The weather is perfect, 105 and sunny, UV10. Pretty good for December.

SAINI
This place leaks. From the ground up, from the glass down. A concrete atoll.

NOAH
(pauses)
I don't know what an atoll is.

SAINI
Tuvalu was an atoll.

NOAH
Right.

SAINI
It's the aftermath of an underwater volcano.

EXT. WAVES OF THE MISSISSIPPI

The waves of the Mississippi hypnotize, crashing against the sky.

SAINI
Tiny sea creatures flock to the heat and minerals. Dead coral forms an island. My people lived on an exoskeleton.

EXT. NEW NANUMEA

We follow the camera up each floor of New Nanumea. Spores are visible on the windows of the upper levels.

NOAH
And now...?

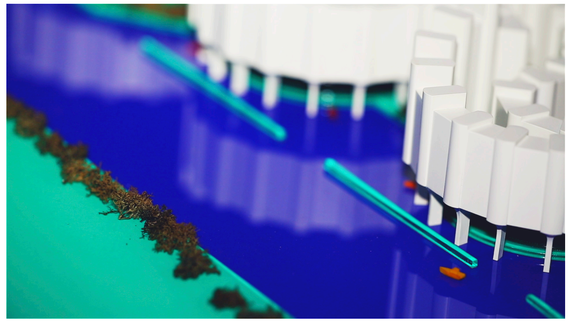
SAINI
Now, we're stuck on another carcass.

NOAH
On the news it said the top floors of New Nanumea are vacant.

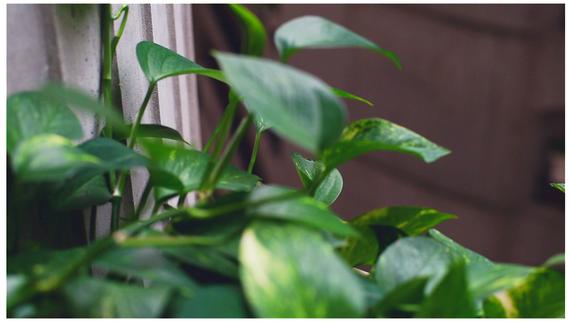
SAINI
They were evacuated. The building is "structurally unsound." They found halobacteria blooming on the windows. It was eating them.

INT. NEW NANUMEA

Saini rides the elevators to the top of her tower.







SAINI
I'm not supposed to go up here anymore. It's not going to do anything though. Things fall. Several moments go by. Saini passes through different areas of the tower.

NOAH
Live with me.

SAINI
Hmmm.

INT. WINDOW, UNIT #1002

Saini peeks through the window of an unoccupied unit.

SAINI
God, it's so empty. He only left a few days ago.

INT. SAINI'S HOUSE – VARIOUS ROOMS

Close up on details of the apartment as Saini settles in for the evening.

NOAH
I'm serious. Come to St. Louis. You can stay with me.

SAINI
I can't.

NOAH
Why not? You're all going to have to leave eventually.
SAINI
I have to think about it.

NOAH
I love you.

Their conversation ends. Saini putters around the house. Saini dials another number. We hear her phone ringing. A bot picks up.

BOT
Thank you for calling dotTV Data Services. If you know your party's three-digit extension please enter it at any time. For sales, press—

Saini enters the three-digit extension of COUSIN MELETA, 27, as she prepares a frozen burrito.

MELETA
dotTV Data Services, this is Meleta.

SAINI
(mouth full)
Noah wants me to move in with him.

MELETA
Saini?

SAINI
(eating)
I love him.

MELETA
Saini, he's your customer—your lonely, American customer.

SAINI
No.

MELETA
You barely know him. Don't throw away your life for some guy.

SAINI
What life? We're all going to have to leave eventually.

MELETA
You're being stupid.
(annoyed)
I have to go. Call me tomorrow.

SAINI
'Night, Mele. I'll miss you.

Saini hangs up.

EXT. NEW NANUMEA

Saini surveys New Nanumea one last time. She's decided to takeoff.

SAINI
Is this crazy?

NOAH
You're just nervous. I am too.

SAINI
Today I'll go to work, like normal. In the morning—

NOAH
(interrupting)
You'll steal Tuau's raft and dock near Cahokia. Hitchhike to East St. Louis—

SAINI
(interrupting)
You're sure I can cross?

NOAH
Yes. There are canoes at shore you can use to cross the river. I'll meet you at the banks tomorrow night.

SAINI
What if I don't see you?

NOAH
I'll find you.

EXT. NEW NANUMEA

Aerial view of the towers. We hear a cacophony of news media. Gradually, one report at a time becomes clear while the others remain less audible.

ANCHOR 1
House Democrats will have a select committee investigate New Nanumea, after a barrier study from Washington University raised more questions about the White House response to the spread of the Tuvaluan halobacteria. The Democrats believe that by failing to contain the halobacteria, the Tuvalese committed an act of bioterrorism, unleashing a lethal agent on American soil. The White House maintains that the bacteria is simply another invasive species.
(pause)
Regardless, the US government has turned over authority of the quarantine zone to the Tuvalese settlement authority. The US will prosecute Tuvaluan citizens who attempt to relocate prior to official policy. Further complicating matters, the Tuvaluan community currently operates private data storage for both government and corporate interests under their top-level sovereign domain name dotTV. It is still unclear how the bacteria will effect the nation.

GHAZAL KORBAN
We are in prevention mode, so all of the focus is on that.

ANCHOR 1
That was Ghazal Korban, Contamination program manager with Chicago Department of Public Works. Huge challenges ahead for the Mississippi River communities as they prepare to fight the dangerous, silica-loving halobacteria, currently destroying the Tuvaluan settlement New Nanumea. Over the past twenty years New Nanumea has grown from a 57-acre site to an unregulated colony stretching nearly 100 miles from the outskirts of Cape Girardeau up towards St. Louis, MO. Experts are worried that if this invasive species gets out it may negatively affect the country's 2.8 trillion dollar telecom industry. For now, the bacteria is contained in isolation, but it threatens to overtake the United States within the decade, permanently wreaking havoc on our infrastructure.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER / NEW NANUMEA

Aerial of the Mississippi near New Nanumea.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER / TUVALESE SETTLEMENT

Saini proceeds up the river on the stolen raft.

EXT. TUVALESE SETTLEMENT

Saini arrives at the edge of the Tuvalu settlement. Phone rings.

NOAH'S VOICEMAIL
Hey.

SAINI
I made it.

NOAH'S VOICEMAIL
This is Noah Thomas. Leave me a message and I'll call you back.

SAINI
(as soon as she realizes it's a message)
Ugh.
(to machine)
I'm close. Another atoll, cement blocks wash up like fish bones. Call me when you can. I miss you. Bye.

EXT. QUARANTINE CITY
MONTAGE as Saini rides through the Tuvalu settlement. She passes the port, livestock, homesteaders, and swimmers on her journey.

Phone rings.

MELETA
Hello?

SAINI
It's me.

MELETA
Where are you?

SAINI
Quarantine city.

MELETA
Saini, you have to come home. It's not safe for you.

SAINI
There's nothing but pigs, coconuts, and data. These peasants are richer than us.

MELETA
Listen to me!

SAINI
It used to be an American suburb.

Meleta gives up.

SAINI
Remember, after the Americans left, they tried to get us to move here. It was all free-for-the-taking-do-what-you-want-with-it land. I something falls, leave it. The fallen soldiers of technology. Our government doesn't care.

MELETA
People like it out there. You can raise your own food without depending on NGOs and you don't have to work in the data center.

SAINI
I like the data center.

MELETA
Are you okay?

EXT. BLUE HOUSE

Two men lay in the shade, preparing meat in a solar cooker.

SAINI
I'm hungry.
(inhales)
I wonder what they're cooking. It smells good.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE

Saini stares at an abandoned American building.

MELETA
We're worried about you.

SAINI
I'm fine. Tell everyone I'm okay.
(incredulous)
There's a house on top of an American property. With satellite TV!

MELETA
I'm praying for God's protection.

SAINI
I have to go.

Saini watches men frame out a wall with plywood.

INT. MAKE-SHIFT DATA CENTER

Saini enters a data storage facility. The radio is playing.

ANCHOR 2
dotTV Data Services, the private Tuvaluan hosting provider, was charged with trafficking stolen government property by the US Justice Department. According to an indictment filed yesterday in federal court, dotTV helped distribute classified information from the US Army. The case is part of an ongoing crackdown on offshore data havens. There is debate about whether the US has jurisdiction over the company. dotTV plans to fight the charges, arguing that their privacy practices are legal under Tuvaluan law. Although technically American soil, the halobacteria crisis is blurring the lines between US and Tuvaluan territory.

Saini continues through the center. Ribbons and cat posters contrast with the hard drives and discs strewn about.

NOAH
I'm sorry about earlier.

SAINI
It's okay. I'm just happy to hear your voice.

NOAH
I love you so much.

SAINI
I love you too.

NOAH
Were you able to get the drive?

SAINI
I can't wait to see you.

NOAH
Tonight.

EXT. ABANDONED AIRPORT RUNWAY

Children play in runoff water. A paramilitary unit marches in formation.

SAINI
We fake this newly found independence, barely maintaining easy traditions.

The whole community begins marching. A family sits on the tarmac.

SAINI
Don't they see the irony of celebrating The Queen's birthday? Leftover heritage from our last colonial power.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Kids splash and swim in the river.

SAINI
We've been abandoned again...but maybe we're the colonizers this time.

EXT. RIVER BANKS

Montage of corroded cement, metal, and equipment.

SAINI
The bacteria grows our territory. The salt does the rest.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER

We're at sea level, before plunging underwater.

SAINI
It's in the water. It's all around us.

INT. ABANDONED LABORATORY

Montage of lab instruments, salt-encrusted shells, and other details.

Voiceover from a BBC-style documentary.

DOCUMENTARY HOST
Originally developed as a desalination process by Tuvaluan scientists, the halobacteria now jeopardizes the future of New Nanumea, and the United States. It was first developed by the Tuvalans to counter the elevated salinity of the Mississippi River, a result of the flow reversal caused by global warming in the early 21st century. The Tuvalese were the first victims of climate change.
(pause)
The virus recently mutated from a salt dependency towards a reliance on silicon dioxide, making it even more of a risk. Silicon dioxide, better known as silica, is a chemical compound that we use every day. Silica is typically found in glass, including windows, television screens, cookware, and fiber optics. Earth's outer crust contains 59% of this material.
(pause)
The halobacteria is transmitted by humans. State and federal agencies are actively monitoring New Nanumea and the surrounding Tuvaluan colony for carriers. D-CP, a consortium with representatives from tech, agriculture, and manufacturing is also studying barrier technologies that would prevent further contamination.

EXT. TUVALESE SETTLEMENT

Saini rides alongside the river. She stops at the banks.

SAINI
The halobacteria wasn't a mistake..

NOAH
How do you know?

SAINI
Think about it. We did this on purpose.

NOAH
D-C-P's going to find a solution. It'll be fine.

SAINI
No, it won't. Our culture is the virus.

NOAH
Where are you?

SAINI
You don't get it! It's a kind of suicidal revenge. Whoever did this didn't give a shit. We're so fucked. Where can we go?

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Saini bobs in the water. Waves crash against her.

SAINI
Noah!

NOAH
I'm here.

SAINI
Can you hear me?

Her phone reception comes in and out.

NOAH
I'll be at the banks.

SAINI
I'm almost there!

NOAH
I can't hear you.

SAINI
I'm at the border.

NOAH
Saini? Saini! I'm losing you.

FADE OUT

FIN







DAVID HARTT

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Martine Syms

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Saini - N.K. Gutiérrez
Noah - Matt Griffo
Meleta - Nicole Sachs
Anchor 1 - Matt Witkovsky
Anchor 2 - Ben Chaffee
Ghazal Korban - Catherine Hartt
Documentary Narrator - James Goggin

Score
Tape (Andreas Berthling, Johan Berthling & Tomas Hallonsten)
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