

The Night at the End of the World



BY ALAN CAMERON
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Something's missing from the summer lineup of blockbuster movies, the disasters, apocalypses, invasions and superhero dust-ups that we've come to rely on for worldview. And try as it might, the U.S. presidential campaign just can't fill the gap. So I flew down to Hollywood and raised \$617 million in a fast set of power lunches. By lucky coincidence, several favorite actors were available. We did a quick wrap, and the film's now slated for late-summer release. The special effects are, if I may say so, spectacular. Here's the preview for "The Night GPS Failed"

Matt Damon (as Mr. Suburban America, entering front door): Honey? I couldn't get any money. The ATM's on the fritz.

Lake Bell (off-screen): Are you —ing kidding me?! I need cash right now! (enters carrying cell phone and credit card) The delivery service won't take my credit card, and I can't get customer support because the phone doesn't work! You'll have to drive to the store.

Damon: I don't know. Pretty dangerous out there. Traffic lights aren't working.

Bell: What is going on? I need money! (throws cell phone).

Damon (ducks and shrugs): What do you want me to do, write our Congressman?

Don Cheadle (on short-wave radio, seated at control panel in room of huge display screens): The grid's down! (stands and turns to each screen in turn). Cincinnati, Chicago, Tulsa, San Diego, they're all down! (repeatedly bangs control panel buttons with radio). —!! Everything's down! The whole damn country!

Patricia Clarkson (as U.S. President): I'm told it will take 30 days to fully restore the national power grid and financial markets. Colonel, what has happened to the constellation?

J.K. Simmons (as Air Force Space Command chief scientist): Ma'am, we're not sure yet. Solar particle damage or a bad upload, probably not, but not ruled out. We suspect widespread jamming. It could be mixed with spoofing.

Albert Finney (as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff): Heh, heh. At least the Russkies aren't doing any better. The Chinese and Europeans are having trouble, too. Military security is not at risk. We don't think.

Clarkson: What's your contingency plan, General?

Finney (spreads his arms): We have one-tenth of a backup system almost halfway built. Funding is an issue . . .

Clarkson: Funding my ass! The whole global economy just went to hell in a handbasket, General! I don't have any money! (throws Red Telephone).

Finney (ducks and shrugs): What do you want me to do, write my Congressman?

Bob Dylan: (singing on soundtrack): That long black cloud is comin' down . . .

Based on a true story: "What Happens If GPS Fails," by Dan Glass, *The Atlantic* magazine, June 2016.

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🔒 Nobody knows exactly what would happen if GPS failed. 🔒

— scientist at National Institute of Time and Standards