

o, possum!

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SETTING

a desert during the longest government shut down in US history, so far

CHARACTERS

All characters (besides park ranger) can be played by folks of any gender; feel free to change pronouns as needed.

PARK RANGER - a deputy park ranger at an underfunded community park who wishes she was doing more to help the environment; Opossum's bff

OPOSSUM - a marsupial who has recently migrated from West Philly to Tucson; the o is silent but, in the face of injustice, opossum is anything but

CACTUS - a Saguaro cactus, which our enlightened cactus would like you to know is not the only type of cactus in the diverse ecosystem that is the desert; guitarist/banjoist for Ecosystem of a Down

RATTLESNAKE - a snake that shakes when you get too near because boundaries are important; percussionist for Ecosystem of a Down

TUMBLEWEED - our opinionated, omniscient narrator; lead vocalist for Ecosystem of a Down

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN

a punk-stomp-and-holler band whose biggest strength is political conviction

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE ECOSYSTEM

as played by tumbleweed, cactus, and rattlesnake respectively & disrespectfully

played by **TUMBLEWEED**: bossman, bored president, tourist couple

played by **CACTUS**: cactus tourist, prickly white lady, nps ranger

played by **RATTLESNAKE**: cold-blooded mansplainer, bake-sale tourist, tourist couple

DUH

The actors you cast should be of many races, abilities, sizes, etc — because the strongest ecosystems are diverse!

WAIT? IS THIS A MUSICAL?

This is not a musical. This isn't really a play with music. It's more like a play with punk lyrics. So don't let Ecosystem of a Down dissuade you from producing this play. Like they have to be earnest but they don't have to be good. They probably don't even have to have real instruments.

Prologue

Work lights on a sparse set that looks like a gifted but unmotivated middle schooler's desert diorama. Your usual desert trappings: cactus, rattlesnake, and tumbleweed.

Utterly without fanfare, Park Ranger walks onstage. We might expect her to give a curtain speech and ask us for money, that's how boring her entrance is. She holds a diorama of the desert. It's an exact miniature of the set. She props her cellphone up against a rock and begins to film herself.

PARK RANGER

(brightly) This is the desert.

It's full of harsh conditions that may seem uninhabitable by your standards.

A habitat is a place where something lives.

So if we say a place is uninhabitable, we're saying that nothing can live there.

But many creatures and plants do live in the desert!

Raise your hand if you came to the desert to see a cactus.

Or, right, *(dub, it's a video)* say so in the comments below.

Yeah, cacti are pretty cool! The big ones, the ones that look like this *(a Saguaro Cactus pose)*, some of them are 150 years old! And it's only after they turn about 100 years old that they start to produce their first arm! And they can hold more than 200 gallons of water!

Cacti are covered in pointy needles to keep predators from eating them.

But they still produce flowers.

I think that's a reminder that beauty can happen anywhere.

A red blaze of desert sun illuminates Ecosystem of a Down as a guitar screeches like a red-tailed hawk. Cactus, Rattlesnake, and Tumbleweed turn around and suddenly there's a punk-stomp-and-holler band on stage. What an exciting reveal!

Tumbleweed's vocal quality is part Janis Joplin, part Tom Waits, aspiring (and falling short) of Leonard Cohen's lyricism. Tumbleweed's personality is all Tumbleweed's. We might get the sense that offstage, Tumbleweed is a bit meek and unassuming. But onstage, Tumbleweed is a godless god/dess of desert geology, meaning rock.

TUMBLEWEED

Everything in the desert's built mean.

The Scorpion will sting you

The Rattlesnake will ring you

The Drought she will dry you

And the tears you will cry you

will never see the gosh darn like again

'Cause everything in the desert's built mean.

Go on now, try and find a shady patch of green!

The flowers all is prickly and your sunburn will turn itchy.

'Cause everything in the desert's built mean.

TUMBLEWEED

Hola. Elcome-Way. Welcome, ladies and — ah, forget it.
I'm a tumbleweed. I don't have a freakin' gender.
My pronouns are Tumbleweed / Tumbleweed's.
And if you gotta problem with that, sucks to suck.
'Cause I'm gonna outlast all of y'all mortal climate-changeable motherfathers.
I'm taking over for Park Ranger from here on out. Hope you don't mind.
See, I wanna tell y'all a little story, little allegory, if you will,
'bout the end of civilization as we know it.

CACTUS

Aww, shoot! The end of civilization?

TUMBLEWEED

Human civilization, Prickly. You should be fine.
Rattles, you'll only live to be about 20 anyway, so shouldn't bother you none.

RATTLESNAKE

I dunno, Tumbles. Still sounds pretty bleak.

TUMBLEWEED

Now I'm sorry, but this is the desert.
That's one S not two.
Ain't no time to sugarcoat things.
Stuff's getting *dark*.

CACTUS

But, but, Tumbles? In the dark times? Will there also be singing?

TUMBLEWEED

Hell yeah there will also be singing! About the dark times!
Sung to you by a singing Tumbleweed!
This here's ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN!
We're your opinionated omniscients for this evening's festivities.
We've got Cactus on the strings.

Cactus wails on the guitar.

TUMBLEWEED

Rattlesnake keepin' the beats.

Rattlesnake beats the drums.

TUMBLEWEED

And, as aforementioned, I'm Tumbleweed.

And we're bringing you the freshest
freak-folk-punk-stomp-and-holler jams this desert's ever seen.

Yes! Everything in the desert's built mean!

The Cactus will poke you

The Vastness will smote you

or render you irrelevant

and the Tumbleweed, well I DON'T GIVE A— (the sound of a hawk cry)

And Hawk she will swoop you

And Trains they go choo-choo

just before they spread consumer capitalism all across the wild wild west thus destroying this here sacred Apache land with their dirty ole copper mines, extracting all the earth's dag nab resources, right before leaving a now poisoned community to fend for itself... Yeah, gonna let that sink in. Pretend that this is your community. I know that might be confusing because this here play takes place in a made-up park near a made-up nowhere town in Arizona, little ways out from Tucson. But just pretend this is your community, your ecosystem. Don't that make you care just a little bit more? Yeah? No? Yeah? Look, if you don't care, don't pretend to care. And don't pretend like the first syllable of Manifest Destiny isn't synonymous with oppression. Where was I? Oh yeah:

Everything in the desert's built mean!

The wild wild west ain't all that it may seem.

*Cause when indigenous populations
are pushed off to form white nations*

all that's left is dust, blood, and green.

RATTLESNAKE & CACTUS

Green! Means! Money!

TUMBLEWEED

Yup, that there's me-ton-y-my,

which sounds like au-ton-o-my

but in this case and in this place

the land of the free ain't freeeeeeee for all.

RATTLESNAKE & CACTUS

Free! For! All!

Musical stomp & holler hoedown interlude.

TUMBLEWEED

Grab your partner, grab your partners, monogamy is dead!

RATTLESNAKE & CACTUS

Mahogany is red!

TUMBLEWEED

Yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeehaw!

RATTLESNAKE & CACTUS

Y'all means all!

It's the gosh darn gender-neutral hoedown of your dreams.

TUMBLEWEED

If you like what you hear here—

CACTUS & RATTLESNAKE

Hear here!

TUMBLEWEED

—catch us Tuesdays in Tucson, moonlighting
in the moonlight as “Wait, Waits, Don’t Tell Me”:
Arizona’s premiere Tom Waits cover band.
But for now you can call me a colonizer,
cause I’m gonna take the chorus one more time: *Yes!*
Everything in the desert’s built mean.
Go on now, try and find a shady patch of green!
The flowers all is prickly and your sunburn will turn itchy.
‘Cause everything in the desert’s built mean.

A final clangin’ and howlin’ from the band, which stirs up a mighty cloud of dust.

Scene 1

Fluorescent lights buzz on as the dust clears, illuminating Park Ranger's desk.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED
Observe: a Park Ranger's natural habitat.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS
A den of good intentions...

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE
...and procrastination.

A Windows 98. Several coffee mugs. Piles of papers. Elsewhere in this tiny space there's a file cabinet that needs reorganizing on top of which rests a tiny TV that needs fixing on top of which rests a coffee maker that needs cleaning on top of which rests a plant that needs watering. An Indigo Girls/Mary Chapin Carpenter Red Rocks Canyon concert poster. A Smokey the Bear Babes in the Woods poster. And behind all of this: a pulldown map of the United States.

Park Ranger enters, talking to Bossman on the walkie talkie. She tosses the desert diorama onto the crowded desk.

PARK RANGER

But they're literally here, so that means they are part of our environment.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) If there's not an information placard for them, they are *not* a part of this environment.

PARK RANGER

That's not how ecosystems work!

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) This is not an "eco-system". This is a park. A *community* park. An underfunded community park. It's just a place where teachers bring their students when they don't feel like teaching.

PARK RANGER

I don't think that's—
We have the opportunity to educate future generations!

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Listen, Deputy.
Put the pellets back.
Or you're gonna give me no choice but to call the Exterminator.

PARK RANGER

But it's a toxic chemical!

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Exactly.

What this park needs now is more toxic chemicals.

And less rodents.

Less rodents. More chemicals.

And more money. Over.

PARK RANGER

I'll find us more money. I'll—

A cactus dressed as a tourist barges in.

CACTUS TOURIST

(pure melodrama) I would like a refund.

PARK RANGER

Um. Can I help you?

CACTUS TOURIST

I don't know... *can* you?

PARK RANGER

Well the park is technically closed for the day?

CACTUS TOURIST

(pure melodrama) I would like a refund.

A stare-down.

PARK RANGER

Admission was free.

CACTUS TOURIST

I made a donation.

PARK RANGER

...you want a refund ...on your donation?

CACTUS TOURIST

I want a refund on my donation.

PARK RANGER

Oh.

CACTUS TOURIST

I came here to see the cactuses and *only* the cactuses.
When you come to the desert, you come to see the cactuses.

PARK RANGER

Oh. Well. (*exciting, a teaching moment!*) Actually, this is one of the most ecologically diverse regions in the entire —

CACTUS TOURIST

When I go to the Rocky Mountains, I go to see the Mountains that are Rocky.
When I go to the Pine Barrens, I go to see the Pines and the Barrens.
And when I go to the desert, I go to see the / cactuses.

PARK RANGER

I'm sorry you're upset.

CACTUS TOURIST

(*a lot of cactus buffing and puffing*) Upset? Upset? You think I'm —
Oh no, no, no. I'm not upset. I'm indignant.
I am righteously indignant.
My daughter was *accosted* by an Oh-possum / who was pan —

PARK RANGER

The "O" is silent.

CACTUS TOURIST

—*accosted* by an Oh-possum who was panhandling for snacks.
It was not my daughter's fault that that *creature* didn't have food.
It's not my fault. I shouldn't have to be confronted by animals begging for food.
Besides, it was not an *authentic* experience for my daughter to encounter an Oh-possum in the desert. Everyone knows they live in trashcans. Not deserts.

PARK RANGER

Uh... actually, they live in many areas such as —

CACTUS TOURIST

But they're not native to this area.
And they give me the creeps.
They're so... so... dirty.

PARK RANGER

I'm going to stop you right there because that's a / myth.

CACTUS TOURIST

Ugh! Probably came here on a caravan of garbage trucks.

PARK RANGER

Hey! You can't talk about my friend that way.

CACTUS TOURIST

Ha! Your friend? *Friend?*

What kind of *loser* calls an *Oh-possum* her *friend?*

PARK RANGER

Hey! I'm not a loser.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) One more thing Deputy, / I need you to do the raptor pens.
Last time I checked there was a big slimy poop on the information placard.

CACTUS TOURIST

Hah! Deputy! Hah!

PARK RANGER

(to Bossman) Taking care of a visitor right now. Over.

(to Cactus) Look, it doesn't matter how she got here. She's here.

So she's part of the ecosystem.

So. So. 'Like it or leave it' right back at you.

CACTUS TOURIST

Well your ecosystem is inaccurate, and I would like a refund.

PARK RANGER

I can't give you a—

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) People can't read the information placard if it's covered in a big slimy / poop.

PARK RANGER

I can give you a tax deductible form.

CACTUS TOURIST

Look, *(reading the name tag)* Miss Park Ranger.

PARK RANGER

Just Park Ranger is fine.

CACTUS TOURIST

Look, Miss Park Ranger. I'm about to leave a nasty review if you don't refund my—

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) To be honest I'm not sure which end it came out of, but it's definitely from one of your dang 'rescue raptors'—

Park Ranger goes to mute Bossman but instead broadcasts the following conversation to him.

PARK RANGER

I'm sorry the ecological diversity was upsetting to you.
But the park is severely underfunded /and every dollar counts towards —

CACTUS TOURIST

Well *that's* pretty obvious.

PARK RANGER

What's that supposed to mean?!

CACTUS TOURIST

Look, you want my advice? / If you want to save some money around this *this* 'park'.

PARK RANGER

No, not especially.

CACTUS TOURIST

Get rid of that appalling mammal exhibit.

PARK RANGER

...but the Mammalian Exhibit is the best part.

CACTUS TOURIST

Actually. It's the *worst* part.

A silent standoff. Cactus Tourist seems extra prickly.

PARK RANGER

How much was your donation?

CACTUS TOURIST

Twenty dollars.

PARK RANGER

Fifteen.

CACTUS TOURIST

Twenty-five.

Park Ranger pulls out her wallet. She forks over a couple crumbled bills and then has to root through her pockets and count out change to make enough. Cactus Tourist leaves.

PARK RANGER

Thank you for visiting Jumping Cholla Community Park. Please come again soon!

Park Ranger bangs her head against the desk.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

Park Ranger takes a moment to wonder if that was a sign to leave before this place can take anything else from her.

PARK RANGER

I wonder if that was a sign to leave before this place can take anything else from me.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

Park Ranger takes a moment to wonder if her work at a non-profit is inherently futile in a for profit world.

PARK RANGER

I wonder if my work at a non-profit is inherently futile in—

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Stop feeling sorry for yourself and draft an email to the Board.

PARK RANGER

...sorry, didn't copy.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) I want to propose that tourist's suggestion as an agenda item for Monday's meeting.

PARK RANGER

What? No! How did you—

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Push-to-talk. Double click. C'mon. That's Park Ranger 101.

PARK RANGER

(under her breath) Shit.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) It'd save us a lot of money.

PARK RANGER

I'll find us more money. I'll—
I'll ask my mom for another contribution!

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Look. *(a sigh)* I appreciate Ms. Karen as much as the next Tucsonan.
But you and I both know your mom works in Aisle 12 at the discount craft store.
And you know what Aisle 12 is.

PARK RANGER

Scrapbooking Supplies.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Scrapbooking Supplies.
If she ever gets moved to Framing, then we can talk.
But until then, it's gonna take a lot more than Ms. Karen's well-meaning but nevertheless
paltry donation to save this park.
Draft that email to the Board and quit wasting my time.

PARK RANGER

But the Mammalian Exhibit is— hello? Hello?
Urgh.

Park Ranger opens her emails. Her body goes kind of slack.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

Park Ranger stares at her screen as one might stare into the abyss.
An endless white void, glowing, pulsing, entrancing.
Park Ranger does not draft the email.
She opens up the 'gram, clicks on her favorite drug, and scrolls.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

'Would I have more followers if I used different filters?' our Park Ranger
wonders. 'What would I do if I had more followers? Would I change the world? Is
it foolhardy to think I can change the world?'

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

Park Ranger continues to not change the world.

Park Ranger reviews a video on her phone. We hear, from before:

PARK RANGER

This is the desert.
It's full of harsh conditions that may seem uninhabitable by your standards.
A habitat is a place where something lives.
So if we say a place is uninhabitable, we're saying that nothing can live there.

But many creatures and plants do live in the desert!

Opossum pops out of the garbage can.

OPOSSUM

Hey!

PARK RANGER

Jesus Rachel Carson!

I asked you not to sleep in the—

OPOSSUM

Uh-uh. Pawshake first.

Sorry. I don't make the rules.

Park Ranger & Opossum do an elaborate friendship handshake.

PARK RANGER

You scared me!

OPOSSUM

You scared me!

PARK RANGER

Have you been in there the whole time?

OPOSSUM

Just because your Park Ranger fragility makes you feel uncomfortable about me sleeping in trash cans doesn't mean I can't sleep in trash cans.

(yawning) What was all that shouting about?

PARK RANGER

Oh. Uh. Nothing.

OPOSSUM

Really? Sure sounded like / something.

PARK RANGER

As in 'nothing to concern yourself with'....

OPOSSUM

Hmm. Are you okay?

PARK RANGER

I'm fine. Just need some more caffeine.

OPOSSUM

You missed game night with Woodrat and Cottontail.

PARK RANGER

...No I didn't?

OPOSSUM

It was bocce night and we found some really good rocks to play with.

PARK RANGER

What? I didn't... that wasn't.

No... (*checks calendar*) Shoot.

Look, I guess I messed up the dates and—

OPOSSUM

You can just say sorry and I'll forgive you.

PARK RANGER

Oh. Right. Um, I'm sorry.

OPOSSUM

Thanks, apology accepted.

(*looking at the screen*) Ooooooh.

PARK RANGER

Ack! No stop. You're embarrassing / me.

OPOSSUM

I'm not trying to embarrass you.

Just want to know about your life!

Is this that Other Park Ranger again?

PARK RANGER

Thorn prefers the term *fire-watcher*.

OPOSSUM

Thorn?

PARK RANGER

Yeah.

OPOSSUM

She watches fires?

PARK RANGER

(*dreamily*) Yeah...

OPOSSUM

Okay but... if she's watching them, shouldn't she do something about them?

PARK RANGER

No. She doesn't. Ugh. You don't get it.

She doesn't watch the fires. She watches *for* fires. Ugh. Nobody understands her.

Not like I do...

Ah damn, she's so hot.

Joshua Tree's uniforms are so much hotter than ours.

Watching for fires is so much hotter than cleaning up raptor / poop.

OPOSSUM

They look pretty much / the same?

PARK RANGER

No... look at the pleating on her khakis.

OPOSSUM

You have a crush.

PARK RANGER

No I don't!

OPOSSUM

You're in love!

PARK RANGER

Opossum, stop it!

I'm not—

OPOSSUM

Thorn and Park Ranger sitting in a tree.

(spelling in Opossum language) hsss ksss ksss hsss hck sck sss.

First comes love then comes—

PARK RANGER

I'm not in love!

I just. I really admire her? You know?

Like... how is it possible to be such a good activist and so hot at the same time?

OPOSSUM

Do you have to be both?

PARK RANGER

Well it seems like being hot helps her have a lot of followers.

And maybe if I had a lot of followers I could... I dunno... change the world?
Or? I dunno... It's dumb.

OPOSSUM
I don't think it's dumb.

PARK RANGER
No?

OPOSSUM
(it's kind of dumb) No!

PARK RANGER
Yeah? *(no response)*
I filmed the nature program. To grow our "online presence"? To reach more people?
Do you think you could tell me which filter / I should use?

OPOSSUM
So this is fun and all but...
Want to go have a picnic in a shady spot?
I found all these awesome crudités in the trashcan by the gift shop.

PARK RANGER
That sounds great!

OPOSSUM
Cool!

PARK RANGER
Ah wait, shoot.
I forgot, I have this one to one with Gopher.

OPOSSUM
Oh right. *(trying not to be bummed out)* Totally. Do what you have to do.

PARK RANGER
(doesn't want to disappoint anyone, especially not the animal in front of her) But I'll just cancel that.

OPOSSUM
Uh, are you sure?
Isn't he going through some sort of / crisis?

PARK RANGER
I'm sure he's fine.
You know how melodramatic he is.

OPOSSUM

Yeah but, you know. A promise is a promise.

PARK RANGER

Buddy! It's fine. Sometimes you got to put yourself first!

Scene 2

Ecosystem of a Down band practice, sans Tumbleweed. Cactus tunes. Rattlesnake rolls a joint. Opossum observes from behind a rock.

RATTLESNAKE

But which is it, do you think?

People not knowing or people knowing and not giving a fuck cause they don't care about anything outside of themselves?

CACTUS

I think it's a little more complicated than that.

Why do we have to create sides / where no sides exist?

RATTLESNAKE

Cactus, just because you don't want there to be enemies doesn't mean / there aren't enemies.

CACTUS

Imperialism is so toxic.

Opossum 'just happens' to 'wander by'.

OPOSSUM

Oh hi friends!

An awkward moment.

CACTUS

Hi!

Friend!

RATTLESNAKE

...do we know you?

OPOSSUM

Yeah! We met at Wait Waits last month.

This isn't ringing a bell.

OPOSSUM

I did that crazy dance.

And then somebody called Animal Control?

And then you got on the mic and screamed:

YOU CAN'T CONTROL ANIMALS.

WE CONTROL YOU.

RATTLESNAKE

(dawning) Ooooooh. Right.

You're the marsupial who's always hanging out with that human.

OPOSSUM

Yeah! That's my friend Park Ranger!

Another awkward pause.

CACTUS

Neat. So...

OPOSSUM

Yeah. So.

CACTUS

So... Yeah.

RATTLESNAKE

We're sort of in the middle of band practice...

OPOSSUM

Cool!

Opossum doesn't get the hint. Rattlesnake and Cactus exchange looks. Cactus shrugs.

CACTUS

We were just trying to figure out why the environmental movement isn't working.

OPOSSUM

Oh. It's not?

RATTLESNAKE

Of course it's not working.

OPOSSUM

Oh shit.

That sucks.

CACTUS

Yeah, it's a big bummer.

OPOSSUM

Huh. I guess I sort of believed in the power of the people.

RATTLESNAKE

Psh. First problem right there.

OPOSSUM

(quietly) Oh.

Cactus and Rattlesnake pass the joint throughout. Opossum always seems to miss it.

CACTUS

If you're gonna keep insisting on this false binary, I guess I'd like to think it's people not knowing. So like those of us who know gotta tell those of us who don't know, you know?

RATTLESNAKE

I mean, fair. Like I'm not trying to get stepped on, right?
But some people don't watch where they're walking so I gotta rattle,
and then they know, so they give me space. Basic communication.

CACTUS

Exactly, that's the power of music for you.

RATTLESNAKE

Yeah! It lets people *know* what they *didn't know* they *didn't know*.

OPOSSUM

Woah.

CACTUS

Mm, yeah. True.

RATTLESNAKE

There's a lot of crazy stuff out there. I mean like shit, even the Agricultural Revolution.

CACTUS

Psh yeah. Totally.

OPOSSUM

Yeah. Duh.

I mean *obviously*.

CACTUS

You just don't know how things are gonna play out.
Agricultural Revolution. Perfect example.

OPOSSUM

Yeah.

Um.

Maybe I'm missing something...?

CACTUS

Like humans tend to think of the Agricultural Revolution as a good thing, but the cultivation of grain also meant that humans could start taxing other humans on the grain surplus.

OPOSSUM

(still not getting it) (pretending to get it) Oh.

RATTLESNAKE

(as if it should be totally obvious to a marsupial) ...which led to the formation of the state?

OPOSSUM

Oh my...

RATTLESNAKE

There's some pretty messed up shit to discover if you're willing to look.

OPOSSUM

Oh my god.

Oh wow, oh—

You just totally blew my mind.

CACTUS

Yup. Gluten-free is anarchy.

Opossum is *shook*.

RATTLESNAKE

But yeah so it's true that people aren't going to change if they don't know what to change.

CACTUS

Huh. That's a very attitude you got there, Rattlesnake.

For a cold-blooded creature.

RATTLESNAKE

I don't really like labels.

OPOSSUM

(a private epiphany) Gluten-free... is anarchy.

Opossum pulls out some pen and paper from her pouch, starts scribbling furiously.

CACTUS

Me neither. Attempting to use language to categorize the complexities of life is pretty futile, if you think about it.

Like what would you call me?
Not warm-blooded.
Not cold-blooded.

RATTLESNAKE
Exactly.

CACTUS
How do you identify, Opossum?
Opossum?

OPOSSUM
Oh my gosh.
You guys are are such an inspiration and you're even more inspiring in person.
Or, in desert. Sorry. Still working on dehumanizing my lang—
Inspiration has struck.
Could I, could I maybe try it, / try my song out on you?

RATTLESNAKE
Uh...

Tumbleweed rolls in.

TUMBLEWEED
Hey. Hey. Sorry I'm late.
I got caught on that giant Creosote Bush that's always gabbing about her saplings
and it was like *two hours* before the wind blew again.

RATTLESNAKE
No worries, time is an oppressor.

TUMBLEWEED
Chill, what'd I miss?

CACTUS
The marsupial was about to share a demo.

TUMBLEWEED
Oh hey. (*holding out a branch*) Tumbleweed.

OPOSSUM
O-possum. I mean. Possum.
The O is silent.
Wow. I can't believe I just mispronounced my own first name.
Oh gosh now I'm really nervous!

CACTUS

Don't be. This is a really generous creative space.

OPOSSUM

Yeah?

TUMBLEWEED

Sure, let's hear it.

OPOSSUM

Uh. Okay. Wow. Do you mean it? Okay. Cool. So. Here we go. Ahem.

(sudden punk yelling)

I'm not your warm-blooded bitch, bitch!

I'm not your cold-blooded bitch, bitch!

I am not an optimist and

I am not a pessimist.

Gluten-free is anarchy!

Gluten-free is anarchy!

Gluten-free is anarchy!

A stunned silence. Do they love it? Do they hate it?

TUMBLEWEED

Huh. Yeah. *Yeah.*

OPOSSUM

And then maybe you could do something like.

(sudden punk yelling)

I won't tell you things are great

I won't tell you what to hate

I am just a tumbleweed

I go which way the wind blows

(motioning for them to join in)

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. OPOSSUM

Gluten-free is anarchy!

Gluten-free is anarchy!

Gluten-free is anarchy!

OPOSSUM

(totally spent) Wow! That was— amazing! I feel amazing!

Maybe we *can* change the world... through music!

CACTUS

Duh.

Scene 3

Park Ranger's office. She brainstorms 'how to save the Mam Exhib' on a giant sticky note affixed to the wall.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED

Observe: a Park Ranger using a lot of sticky notes in her attempts to single-handedly save the world. Or at least the Mammalian Exhibit at Jumping Cholla Community Park.

We see Park Ranger trying hard but consistently being stumped and frazzled and tired.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

It's not going well.

Park Ranger drinks some coffee. She drinks some more coffee. She looks around then pulls out a secret energy drink. Nothing is working and we get the sense that she has been pulling some all nighters trying to figure this out.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

On the verge of giving up for the day, Park Ranger asks herself:

PARK RANGER

What would Thorn do?

Opossum enters. Park Ranger frantically hides the sticky note.

OPOSSUM

(on top of the world, trying and failing to play it cool) So... I might be in Ecosystem of a Down.

PARK RANGER

Huh?

OPOSSUM

Yeah. I just stumbled upon their band practice, and inspiration like STRUCK.

And I gave them this demo.

And. I think they were *really* into it.

So like. I think I booked.

They do their friendship pawshake.

PARK RANGER

Hey, that's awesome!

OPOSSUM

Yeah.

PARK RANGER

That's like your dream!

OPOSSUM

Yeah.

PARK RANGER

Congrats, bud!

OPOSSUM

(beaming) Thanks.

I knew I could be good at music if I was just given some support!

Cactus even gave me this cactus.

It tastes kinda weird but I think I like it?

Opossum picks up an energy drink.

OPOSSUM

Didn't you tell me not to drink these if I found them in the trash?

PARK RANGER

Did I?

OPOSSUM

You said they were pretty much the same as drinking javelina piss.

PARK RANGER

Huh. Maybe that was a bit harsh.

OPOSSUM

Are you okay?

PARK RANGER

I'm fine.

OPOSSUM

Are you sure? You don't seem totally okie / dokie.

PARK RANGER

(snapping) I'm fine.

OPOSSUM

Ookay.

A moment.

PARK RANGER

I wish *I* was good at something.

OPOSSUM

Oh stop.

You're over-caffeinated and exhausted.

That's not the same as not being good at something.

PARK RANGER

Are you sure?

OPOSSUM

You're great at a lot of things!

PARK RANGER

Yeah?

OPOSSUM

Yeah.

PARK RANGER

Yeah?

OPOSSUM

Yeah!

(beat)

Opossum nibbles the cactus.

PARK RANGER

Um, like what?

OPOSSUM

Well. You're. You care a lot.

(beat)

(is that it?)

(guess so)

PARK RANGER

Thanks, I—

OPOSSUM

In a real way.

And you make me feel at home.

And. And I know Jackrabbit thinks you're funny!

PARK RANGER

Don't you think I'm—?

OPOSSUM

And you made that great zine about ethical succulent acquisition and care-taking.

PARK RANGER

People did seem to respond to that.

OPOSSUM

Oh! And Tarantula really appreciates the bugs you find for her.

Geeze! The fact that I even talk to Tarantula just shows what a supportive community you've helped create. Cause like, no offense, but I don't usually hang with animals that have more than four legs. But one day I tried it because I saw you doing it.

PARK RANGER

Really?

OPOSSUM

Yeah. Plus, like.

Well.

You're my best friend.

And that's chill.

I've never had a best friend before.

PARK RANGER

Me neither.

(beat)

Opossum offers Park Ranger some cactus. She takes a big bite. It tastes terrible.

OPOSSUM

I feel really great.

Wow! It's amazing, the power of an empowering jam session.

I feel like everything is suddenly really possible and that everything will be okay!

(beat)

OPOSSUM

Can you put on that song I like?

William Onyearbor's "The Moon and The Sun" plays. They go on a trip.

Scene 4

Opossum & Park Ranger take a trip to the moon & the sun.

Some things that might happen on this trip:

Probably a lot of puppetry.

Park Ranger immediately throws up.

The desert horizon becomes a mosaic of color and joy, the sun an ever-expanding arabesque giving us everything we need. A parade of pink cacti. A blue sun on a kite string.

Three trash bins roll onstage and three opossums climb out and start eating ticks off each other but it conjures notions of an opossum orgy.

Plastic bags fall from the sky.

A never-ending plastic bag.

Park Ranger and Opossum find the most amazing snacks in the trashcans.

An ICE officer with a million guns multiplies into a whole line of ICE officers with militarized weapons. Opossum waves a magic wand and they all melt like literal ice cubes and/or maybe they're all replaced by ice cubes which we watch melt and/or they all melt ice cubes on Park Ranger. It'd be sick if their guns could melt.

Opossum destroys some trashcans.

Opossum waves a flag à la "Do You Hear the People Sing."

Opossum and Park Ranger hold hands and are happy together. It seems that this moment will last forever, until it is interrupted by the grating blare of a walkie talkie.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Bossman to Deputy Park Ranger.
Bossman to Deputy Park Ranger.

Park Ranger broadcasts the song to Bossman.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Deputy. What's your twenty?

PARK RANGER

Somewhere between the moon and the sun,
on the ever-spinning, ever-giving planet we call Earth.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) I got a 10-45 at the gift shop.

PARK RANGER

Sorry, I don't communicate in numbers.
I speak the language of love and understanding.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Well understand this: I've got a 10-45 at the gift shop.

PARK RANGER

... is that the one about livestock?

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Uh... no.

Listen. No nice way to put this.

There's some kind of rodent facedown in a pile of rat poison.

Park Ranger and Opossum look at each other in horror. Gopher.

Scene 5

Park Ranger & Opossum sort recycling. Occasionally, Opossum pouches a bit of trash. A somber mood. (*Don't be afraid of silences.*)

OPOSSUM

Kind of weird, isn't it?
Like... he spent his entire life in a hole underground.
And now he's in a hole underground.
I guess that's what he'd want?

PARK RANGER

Yeah.

OPOSSUM

Guess there's no way to know now [what he'd want].

PARK RANGER

No.

OPOSSUM

Cottontail's speech was really—

PARK RANGER

Yeah.

Silence. Sorting.

OPOSSUM

It makes me think about the end of the world a lot.
I guess it'll be pretty sad.
The end of the world.
Because *this* is pretty fucking sad.
And it's just one mammal.
Not like. An entire species. Or the entire kingdom of animals.

PARK RANGER

(*trying to be hopeful*) I like to think of how the trees will take over.

OPOSSUM

Totally. I used to live on this block in West Philly where there were all these weird trees and little weeds that had pushed through the cracks in the sidewalks. And one day, I passed those trees and thought 'Oh shoot! Those weird trees used to be little weeds.' Like, anything is possible once we're gone. Like it will rain and there will be sun and there will be no cars or smog or weedkiller or fucking, fucking *rat poison* to stop it, so little by little plants will grow

all over the earth. Like. Where did we come up with the hubris to think we get to decide who lives and who dies? We all die. Everyone poops and everyone dies. That's life on this planet. Just this big rock hurtling through a void. Pooping and dying.

PARK RANGER

He had a good life you know.

OPOSSUM

Yeah, sure.

I guess.

I guess that's what we tell ourselves.

I dunno.

Like it puts it into perspective, how insignificant we all are? And how brief.

How are we supposed to make meaning. Or...

I don't blame him, you know?

Like it's sort of like...

Where do you find the guts to live in an environment that's trying to kill you?

They continue to sort recycling in silence. After like the ten millionth plastic bottle:

OPOSSUM

God this really isn't the solution.

PARK RANGER

Nope.

Scene 6

Park Ranger, mid cleaning up the raptor pen, scrolling through her phone.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED

Observe: a Park Ranger checking her phone whilst wiping up some raptor poop.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

Park Ranger numbs herself by looking at pictures of Thorn.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

Park Ranger considers messaging Thorn for advice.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED

Park Ranger goes to DM Thorn...

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

...but then realizes death isn't very sexy.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

'But why isn't it sexy?' Park Ranger asks herself. 'Surely it is natural part of life. And Thorn self-identifies as an eco-sexual. So if death is natural maybe Thorn does find it sexy.'

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED

Park Ranger DM's Thorn for advice.

PARK RANGER

(typing) How can I as an individual can make a meaningful impact to mitigate the destruction of the Mammalian Exhibit?

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED

Park Ranger waits for an answer.

Scene 7

Park Ranger comes into her office to find Opossum sulking on her desk.

PARK RANGER

What's wrong?

OPOSSUM

Nothing.

PARK RANGER

What's — oh, right.

Park Ranger & Opossum do an unenthusiastic version of their friendship handshake.

PARK RANGER

Tell me what's wrong.

OPOSSUM

Nothing!

PARK RANGER

How am I supposed to change my behavior if / you don't tell me what's wrong.

OPOSSUM

You know I don't like confrontation!

A quiet huffing.

PARK RANGER

What are you sitting on.

OPOSSUM

Nothing.

PARK RANGER

No. Literally. What are you literally sitting on.

OPOSSUM

I'm making a nest. Leave me alone.

PARK RANGER

A nest?

OPOSSUM

...yeah.

PARK RANGER

Opossums don't make / nests...

OPOSSUM

Don't tell me how to live my life.

PARK RANGER

Have you been going through my stuff?

OPOSSUM

...No.

But if I was, you wouldn't have much room to talk.

Park Ranger wrestles Opossum away from her 'nest'.

OPOSSUM

Hey! Ow! Urgh! Grrrf!

Park Ranger pulls out a crumpled up memo. It looks like an eviction notice.

PARK RANGER

Oh.

OPOSSUM

When were you going to tell me about this?

PARK RANGER

Ah geeze, this isn't how I wanted you to—

OPOSSUM

Bobcat's been whispering about this for weeks but — you know how he is — I thought he was just being paranoid!

PARK RANGER

I'm sorry, buddy.
I didn't want to—

OPOSSUM

And then Scorpion straight up asked me, and I used to think it was condescending the way he talked but I think maybe that's just his tone of voice, Scorpion straight up asked me and I looked him in the eyes and said, 'No. Of course they're not shutting down the Mammalian Exhibit.' Because if they were shutting down the Mammalian Exhibit you would have told me!

PARK RANGER

I'm sorry!

I'm sorry. Look, buddy—

OPOSSUM

Don't.

PARK RANGER

I'm sorry. I didn't want you to worry unnecessarily.

OPOSSUM

Um. It's a pretty necessary thing to worry about.

PARK RANGER

Well I told Gopher and then he went and—

OPOSSUM

Hey, hey. I'm not going to listen to that.

You can't blame yourself for...

At the end of the day, you're not the human who put out that rat poison.

PARK RANGER

I know, but... I shouldn't have skipped his one-to-one.

I should have checked in or—

OPOSSUM

We all should have—

A pause.

PARK RANGER

I was going to tell you, honestly. Just... I didn't want to worry you until I actually knew for sure that our funding was getting pulled.

OPOSSUM

Well, for future reference, you should know that shelter is my number two priority coming only after food so even when I'm not worrying about shelter I'm worrying about shelter.

PARK RANGER

Okay. Okay! I'm sorry.

OPOSSUM

What about the Pals of the Prickly Pear grant?

PARK RANGER

Uh, no, shit. Forgot to apply to...

OPOSSUM

Oh. Shoot. Sounded like we were a sure bet for that—

PARK RANGER

Actually I don't think we were / eligible.

OPOSSUM

But you just said you forgot so isn't that admitting you—

An awkward pause.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

Opossum makes a conscious effort not to guilt Park Ranger.

Park Ranger resists the urge to guilt Opossum for thinking about guiltling her.

OPOSSUM

If they shut down the Mammalian Exhibit, I'm gonna have to live in the raptor cage.

And like, Owl and Raven are... fine...

But I don't like how Hawk looks at me.

PARK RANGER

How does she look at you?

OPOSSUM

Like I'm a piece of meat!

PARK RANGER

Oh come on.

OPOSSUM

Also they poop a lot.

Like, a lot a lot.

PARK RANGER

Um yeah. I know. I just spent three hours cleaning that shithole so.

If you want to yell at someone. Look for someone else.

OPOSSUM

I'm about to lose my—

PARK RANGER

Buddy, I got you. Okay?

You're not going to live in the raptor cage.

Look. Don't — don't get upset.

You're not going to lose your— hey, hey, hey,

you know my mom would be thrilled to have you live in our back/yard.

OPOSSUM

Oh yeah? Well, is Ms. Karen going to be thrilled to have like 26 additional mammals live in her backyard? Because last time I checked there were like 26 additional mammals living / at the Mammalian Exhibit.

PARK RANGER

I know! Hey! I'm working on—

OPOSSUM

And even if your mom is willing,
and yeah, she might be; she's a pretty great human as far as humans go
— do you have any idea what kind of fiasco that would be?!
We can't all just live side by side!

PARK RANGER

I really don't think it'll come to that.

OPOSSUM

But if the Bored cuts the funding—

PARK RANGER

Buddy. I've got it under control.
I have a meeting with them tomorrow — a presentation.
I'm going to persuade them to allocate more funding to the Mammalian Exhibit.
I'm going to make everything okay.

OPOSSUM

Okay...
But can I help?
...you know, since it is *my* home that we're trying to save?

Park Ranger's phone makes an alert. Opossum grabs it out of Park Ranger's hand.

PARK RANGER

Hey! Give me my phone.

OPOSSUM

No.

PARK RANGER

You're acting like a wild animal.

OPOSSUM

No. No. You are!

PARK RANGER

I'm not—

OPOSSUM

If you had worked on the Prickly Pear grant like you had promised, instead of—

PARK RANGER

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

I've been having a tough time. Gopher is dead. And / Bossman is breathing down my—

OPOSSUM

Stop making his death about you.

PARK RANGER

I'm not making his death about—

OPOSSUM

I get it. It sucks. Like really really sucks.

But more mammals are gonna die or be displaced or separated from their families if we don't work together to make this presentation a banger. Okay? *Okay?*

PARK RANGER

Okay.

They take a moment to breathe and grumble.

PARK RANGER

Thanks for holding me accountable.

OPOSSUM

Anytime.

Now.

I am going to procure some donuts because Boreds are impressed by donuts. With any luck I will find the kind that leave lots of sprinkles in the corners of the box because I am also looking out for me. And you—

PARK RANGER

Will start the presentation.

OPOSSUM

(?!) Will finish the presentation.

An exchange of withering looks. Opossum leaves.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED

Observe: a Park Ranger under pressure.

Park Ranger sighs, cracks her knuckles, cranks up her computer.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

It takes a long ass time because it's a piece of outdated junk that's literally designed to fail so you have to buy another one.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

Creatures such as Park Ranger are uncomfortable with the stillness between moments, so she whips out her phone.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED

Park Ranger scrolls. And scrolls. And— *abb*... she has spotted her prey.

Park Ranger scans the perimeter... no sign of competition or threats of danger.

Park Ranger unzips her park-issued khakis.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

Park Ranger ponders...

PARK RANGER

Is it possible to be turned on and feel like you'll amount to nothing at the same time?

A guitar picking that mimics the sort of strumming Park Ranger might be doing.

TUMBLEWEED

This here's a ditty about our partner Park Ranger.

We call it:

“Masturbation Procrastination

Mate Me Be Me

A Lullaby for Burnt Out Activists”

Hit it!

The band — and Park Ranger — hit it.

TUMBLEWEED

Have you ever had a crush?

Bit of wanting, bit of lust?

Bit of let me imitate your every move?

In our amateur queer theory

we call this feeling mate me be me.

And *girl* is it a quandary!

It's a feeling of relentless tease,

this quirk of our biology,

enough to drive our ranger park insane.

The way Park Ranger looks at Thorn

you might just think she's watching porn
but no it's just a filtered pic:
a womyn playing activist and
getting likes for clever protest signs.
Yes, Thorn keeps cut her undercut.
She brews her own kombucha.
Fights for healthcare, fights for self-care.
So like you know that she's legit.

PARK RANGER

I'm punching way above my weight,
here at my Windows 98
tuned in to monitor Thorn's every viral move.
'Cause I am just the deputy
of Jumping Choll' Community...
Park. Just a park. An UNDERFUNDED park!

PARK RANGER feat. harmonies by CACTUS & RATTLESNAKE

*Oh I wanna be like Thorn but she has a fashion sense
I don't know if I can mate her but I'm gonna do my best
To impress her
Then caress her
And say hey come frack my face
But I am just a dyke... without a fashion sense.*

TUMBLEWEED

She thought if she could only be
a punk park ranger deputy
she wouldn't have to worry with
the kind of bullshit you might get
if you were something like say a lesbo artist
or a florist or a famous sporty starlet.
Naw, she thought that her integrity
need not be shown through fashion tees,
a tattoo sleeve and irony.

CACTUS, & RATTLESNAKE

(a whiny lesbian lament into the void) Hey where are all the dungarees?!

A brief, sick drum interlude. Park Ranger is now masturbating urgently.

PARK RANGER

(vaguely in melody, but still speaking, building up to coming)
How will I ever keep up
when the world it turns so fast
and there's pressure all around

but no body's going down
on my attempts to make this park
just a slightly better place.
I bet Thorn knows how to make this just a slightly better place!
I bet Thorn knows how to save the entire human race!
I bet Thorn knows how to say hey hey hey you come frack my face!

Park Ranger comes for the duration of the chorus. It should be queer chaos.

TUMBLEWEED, CACTUS & RATTLESNAKE

*Oh where are all the dykes without a fashion sense?
We dunno if she can keep up
but she's gonna do her best
to be vegan
to be beautiful
to say fuck your border fence
but she is just a dyyyyyyyyyke
(Park Ranger finishes coming... and promptly falls asleep.)
without a fashion sense.*

Nighttime.

Scene 8

Morning. Opossum sits behind Park Ranger's desk, typing furiously at the computer. Park Ranger asleep on the floor. Eventually, she stirs.

PARK RANGER

Ah shit! What time is it?

OPOSSUM

Go time. Thanks for joining.

I was going to make some coffee but you haven't washed the coffeemaker in a week and that was gross to me so I didn't touch it.

PARK RANGER

Good morning to you too.

OPOSSUM

Thank you.

PARK RANGER

Have you been here all night?

OPOSSUM

You fell asleep.

PARK RANGER

You don't sleep at night anyway so stop trying to make yourself sound like a martyr.

OPOSSUM

That wasn't very nice.

PARK RANGER

Well. Sorry. But I'm tired of you doing nice things for me just so I feel indebted to you.

OPOSSUM

I do nice things for you because I'm your friend.

PARK RANGER

Oh.

OPOSSUM

You could say thank you.

PARK RANGER

You could have woken me up.

OPOSSUM

I tried. You drool when you sleep. It's gross.
Do you have another vest, this one's all frumpy.
And your hair is—

PARK RANGER

Urgh. Get off me—

OPOSSUM

Get it together, Park Ranger.
You can't stand in front of the Bored with your hair looking like a tumble—

PARK RANGER

My hair is fine, get off—

OPOSSUM

No, I'm trying to help.

PARK RANGER

I don't need your help!

OPOSSUM

Um. *Yes* you—

PARK RANGER

Get off me! Urgh!

Opossum and Park Ranger wrestle to the ground. It's not sexual. It's a opossum who happens to look like a human wrestling the park ranger with whom she has a co-dependent platonic relationship.

They tussle. An unheard knock on the door. Tumbleweed, dressed as the Bored President enters just as Opossum bites Park Ranger in the face.

BORED PRESIDENT

Oh my god.

PARK RANGER

Hello! It's fine! We're just playing!

Opossum scurries away to hide under Park Ranger's desk.

BORED PRESIDENT

Oh my god. Did that *thing* have rabies?

PARK RANGER

That? Oh, you mean Opossum, no she's a sweetheart.

BORED PRESIDENT

Your face is bleeding.

PARK RANGER

Oh. Erm. Bad acne day.

BORED PRESIDENT

I see. I take it you're not ready for us?

PARK RANGER

Didn't we say 11:30?

BORED PRESIDENT

It's 11:45.

PARK RANGER

Oh. Right. So it is.

Give me 5 minutes.

Here, have some donuts.

Park Ranger hands Bored President a box of donuts that Opossum clearly scavenged from the trash. Bored President leaves.

PARK RANGER

Crap. I can't.

I can't go in front of the Board!

I'm not prepared. I don't know what I'm —

OPOSSUM

(from under the desk) Negative thinking is only going to exasperate the situation at hand.

PARK RANGER

I shouldn't have fallen asleep last night.

How am I so selfish?!

OPOSSUM

Well, yeah. You probably should have prioritized differently.

That's a given.

PARK RANGER

I can't do this.

Opossum wiggles out and starts cleaning the blood off Park Ranger's face.

OPOSSUM

Yes you can.

PARK RANGER

No, I really can't.

OPOSSUM

Well. You have to.

And I mostly believe that you can.

PARK RANGER

Thanks.

Opossum puts a thumb drive in Park Ranger's hand.

OPOSSUM

I believe in your ability to make this park a better place.

Besides. My powerpoint is dope.

Quick shift to Park Ranger in front of the first slide of her powerpoint. It looks like a opossum put it together the night before it was due, for example:



Park Ranger gives a really off the cuff presentation to the Bored. (Perhaps there is a different collection of poorly constructed ppt slides inserted each performance so that the actor playing Park Ranger genuinely has to bullshit her way through the presentation.)

PARK RANGER

—And then if you look at these figures regarding the psychological trauma of unstable home situations, you'll notice that—

COLD-BLOODED MANSPLAINER

I'm gonna stop you right there.

PARK RANGER

But I'm not finished.

BORED PRESIDENT

I think we've seen enough.

PRICKLY WHITE LADY

This whole presentation is lobbying for opossum interests.

PARK RANGER

Well, our opossum will be the most direly affected if you cut funding to the Mammalian Exhibit.

COLD-BLOODED MANSPLAINER

Opossums aren't even native to this area.

PARK RANGER

Well actually —

COLD-BLOODED MANSPLAINER

Honey, I have an MBA from U of A.
And that's — count it — five capital letters,
so you know I'm smart.

BORED PRESIDENT

And why is that porcupine / always —

PARK RANGER

Hedgehog.

BORED PRESIDENT

—rubbing itself on rocks?

PARK RANGER

Probably because it feels good, sir.

PRICKLY WHITE LADY

Ugh. Disgusting.

COLD-BLOODED MANSPLAINER

This is exactly why they are illegal / in Arizona.

PARK RANGER

It's a basic animal need!

PRICKLY WHITE LADY

It's not family friendly. The bylaws specifically say—

COLD-BLOODED MANSPLAINER

Why do we have it in the first place if it's an invasive species?

PARK RANGER

He's part of our Deserts Around the World spotlight.
Hedgehogs are actually pretty cool!
Along with dolphins, they're one of the only mammals,
aside from humans, who have sex for pleasure.

PRICKLY WHITE LADY

Again, how is that family friendly?
If we start teaching kids that sex is pleasurable,
they'll all want to do it,
and then do you know what will happen?
The breakdown of the family unit!
Do you want to be responsible for the breakdown of the family unit?

PARK RANGER

Well, yeah, sort of.

(Outrage from all!)

PARK RANGER

At least, I mean. As we currently conceive of—

(Outrage from all!)

BORED PRESIDENT

Never mind the family unit.
If you continue promoting this this this
animal sex positive
touchy feely
“all animals are welcome here”
“no hedgehog is illegal”
“rattlesnakes are actually cuddly”
kumbaya kombucha *propaganda*
you will be responsible for the breakdown of Jumping Cholla Community Park!

Bored President, Prickly White Lady, and Cold-Blooded Mansplainer leave.

Park Ranger clicks off the powerpoint, slumps back to her office where Opossum is pacing.

OPOSSUM
How'd it go?

PARK RANGER
Pretty bad.

OPOSSUM
I'm sure you're being too hard on yourself.

Park Ranger shakes her head.

OPOSSUM
You're always too hard on yourself.

Park Ranger shakes her head.

OPOSSUM
Are you sure you're not being too hard on yourself?

PARK RANGER
The Board President said I was contributing to the downfall of Jumping Cholla Community Park and then everyone left before reallocating funds to the Mammalian Exhibit.

OPOSSUM
(experiencing the opossum equivalent of Election Night 2016) Oh.

PARK RANGER
Yeah.

OPOSSUM
But... I included a pie chart.
I thought that would persuade them.

PARK RANGER
Didn't seem to.

OPOSSUM
Do you think it's because I came down too hard on lemon meringue?

PARK RANGER
I don't think that was the problem.

OPOSSUM

Okay. So like... what was the problem?

Didn't they understand how cutting funding would hurt the local population?

Maybe you needed to reemphasize that the animals living here have acclimatized to living here and would face innumerable risks if they were tossed out of their home?

Or they must not know how many mammals rely on the park's resources / to survive.

PARK RANGER

I think they know.

OPOSSUM

What?

PARK RANGER

I think they know all those things.

OPOSSUM

But... then why are they...

PARK RANGER

I don't think they care.

OPOSSUM

Oh. But. How?

PARK RANGER

Huh?

OPOSSUM

How do they not care?

PARK RANGER

I dunno.

Some humans just... don't.

Or they care about different things?

OPOSSUM

But the Mammalian Exhibit is my home!

It's where I get food and shelter.

PARK RANGER

I know, buddy.

OPOSSUM

What do humans care about if they don't care about universal access to food and shelter?!

PARK RANGER
Money?

OPOSSUM
(trying to remember what money is) Wait.
You mean those dumb ass rocks and leaves y'all are always passing back and forth?

PARK RANGER
Yep.

OPOSSUM
That's more important than me having food and shelter?!

PARK RANGER
Apparently.

Park Ranger gathers her things to leave.

OPOSSUM
Where are you going?

PARK RANGER
Home.

OPOSSUM
Wait. So are you like—

PARK RANGER
I'm exhausted.

OPOSSUM
—are you giving up?

PARK RANGER
What choice do I have?
The Board said no. The Board controls the funding.

OPOSSUM
Uh... you definitely have the choice of whether or not to give up.

PARK RANGER
That's not really how it works. / I don't have a bottomless well of energy.

OPOSSUM
Um, yes it is. I don't have a choice if the Mammalian Exhibit gets closed or not.
But you, me, we both have a choice of whether we're gonna try or not.

PARK RANGER

C'mon.

OPOSSUM

Quit being melodramatic.

Just because you gave one bad presentation doesn't mean the world is ending.

PARK RANGER

Opossum... the world is ending.

OPOSSUM

Well, yeah. But like... that's gonna happen regardless of your powerpoint skills.

PARK RANGER

You're not listening to what I'm saying.

It's not enough. Nothing is ever enough.

OPOSSUM

Yeah. I get that...

But like you feeling bad about not doing enough isn't doing anything to help...

...and you actually could really help me out right now, like really do me a fucking solid if you would just get a grip and help me save the Mammalian Exhibit.

Hey, hey. Don't cry. Ugh seriously? It's my turn to—

Park Ranger flings herself on Opossum.

OPOSSUM

Look, you're being a little pessimistic right now.

(hating herself a little but throwing her friend a bone) Hey, what would Thorn do in this situation?

Would Thorn give up?

PARK RANGER

No. *(sniffing)* Thorn says that pessimism and optimism are both just excuses for inaction.

That hope through direct action is the only way forward.

OPOSSUM

Exactly! So let's—

PARK RANGER

(sobbing) I don't even know what people mean when they say direct action.

Park Ranger cries. Opossum thinks hard.

OPOSSUM

...I think I know what they mean.

Scene 9

Lights up on a bake sale. It's the equivalent of a kid's sidewalk lemonade stand but in the desert. A banner reading "Help Save R Mam Xibit" There's a collection tin and a lot of red velvet cupcakes.

Park Ranger and Opossum sit, waiting. They wait for a long time. Like, a really long time. Is anyone going to come to their bake sale?

OPOSSUM

So is this how bake sale's usually g—

PARK RANGER

No.

OPOSSUM

Oh.

Opossum and Park Ranger wait some more. Opossum fidgets, scratches, flips the donation tin upside-down and looks really hard for a donation. Waiting.

OPOSSUM

Do you think it's possible that we'd attract more people if we had more to offer than just red velvet cupcakes?

PARK RANGER

My mom had like twenty boxes in her pantry from when they were on sale and we didn't have a line for bake-sales in the budget even though if you ask me bake sales are a pretty crucial component to the nonprofit sector.

OPOSSUM

Oh.

They wait in silence. It's almost to the point where we start thinking about Beckett when thank god a Rattlesnake dressed as a Tourist wanders in.

PARK RANGER

Hi! Would you like to buy a cupcake to support the...?

Bake-sale Tourist pauses, picks up a cupcake, takes a picture of the cupcake in front of the banner, returns the cupcake, applies a filter, uploads the picture, leaves without donating a goddamn dime.

Opossum gives Park Ranger a pointed side eye and huffs. A tense silence.

PARK RANGER

What?

OPOSSUM

Nothing.

PARK RANGER

What?

OPOSSUM

Nothing!

PARK RANGER

Are you going to spend this entire bake sale sulking or...?

OPOSSUM

(sulking) I'm not sulking. You're sulking.

PARK RANGER

You're definitely / sulking.

OPOSSUM

Maybe if you had spent more time working on the presentation in the first place instead of looking at pictures of Thorn, we wouldn't have to be raising funds for *my home* via a *bake sale*.

PARK RANGER

Why don't you project your frustration at how unsuccessful this bake-sale is onto somebody other than Thorn?

OPOSSUM

You know what your problem is?

You want recognition but not responsibility.

PARK RANGER

That is not—

A Cactus dressed as a NPS Ranger walks in.

NPS RANGER

Hi. I work up at GCNP and I heard—

PARK RANGER

(totally losing her shit at being recognized by one of her heroes) The Grand Canyon?!

NPS RANGER

Uh yeah! Haha, that's the one.

I heard you're having a bake sale for Jumping Cholla Community Park?

PARK RANGER

That's the one!

NPS RANGER

Neat. My dad used to bring me here as a kid.
Really special little place here.

PARK RANGER

Well. Gee. Thanks!

But I mean, it must be nothing compared to...

The Grand Canyon. Wow!

You're my hero. I can't believe an actual NPS Ranger
for the actual Grand Canyon came to our bake sale.

NPS RANGER

Hah. Yep. Everyone loves a cupcake.

PARK RANGER

Oh my gosh. My mom says that too. Wow!

Um. Would you like a cupcake?

NPS RANGER

That's why I'm here!

PARK RANGER

Oh right. Duh. Hah. Hahahaha.

Oh no, it'd be silly if you donated.

NPS RANGER

Mm. Tasty!

An awkward moment where Park Ranger watches NPS Ranger eat the cupcake and
Opossum looks into the empty donation tin.

NPS RANGER

Say, you look kind of worn out and earnest.

Can I give you a piece of advice?

PARK RANGER

Is it the frosting? I knew I was kind of heavy-handed with—

NPS RANGER

Look, you seem like you've got a big heart.

PARK RANGER

I care. *A lot.*

NPS RANGER

With big ideas.

PARK RANGER

Oh yep totally that's me!

NPS RANGER

Here's my advice: never let your ideology get in the way of taking care of your community.

PARK RANGER

Um. Yes. Thank you. Thank you!

Here. Take some for the road.

Opossum hands the NPS Ranger some cupcakes. NPS throws in a twenty.

NPS RANGER

Thanks. That's a talented friend you got.

PARK RANGER

Thanks, she did the banner herself.

OPOSSUM

Hsss sskkk ksss thssk.

NPS RANGER

Heh. You don't say.

Well thanks for the cupcake.

Good luck!

NPS Ranger leaves.

OPOSSUM

Well that was nice.

Hey! Here comes some more people!

Maybe this will work after all!

A tourist couple approaches. Opossum shakes the tin and tries to look welcoming, but really looks terrifying so the couple screams and runs away.

OPOSSUM

(unwrapping a cupcake) Speciesist-hss-hss-hss.

One half of the couple returns. Grabs two cupcakes, tosses in some loose

change, hurries off. Opossum hisses.

Bossman pages.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Bossman to Deputy Park Ranger.

PARK RANGER

Go ahead.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Can you explain to me why your post-presentation report isn't on my desk yet?

PARK RANGER

Uh... I was busy setting up for the bake sale to save the Mammalian Exhibit. Over.

A long pause.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) I want to make sure I'm understanding this correctly.

When you say the Mammalian Exhibit.

You're referring to the exhibit to which the Board unilaterally decided to cut funding?

PARK RANGER

Uh well, yeah. Somebody has to save the—

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) And when you say "bake sale"...

Do you mean to tell me you're asking for handouts?

PARK RANGER

We're a non-profit. We literally have to ask for / handouts.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Wrap up this cupcake fest and get back to doing your / job.

PARK RANGER

WHAT. IS. THE POINT. of working to build up a community park if we're not going to support the community who lives at our park?

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) They are not our community.

They're a bunch of troublemaking animals who rub themselves on rocks.

PARK RANGER

I am trying to keep this park alive!

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Hah! This park is dying.
Do you hear me?

PARK RANGER

I heard—

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) In the metaphorical and occasionally literal sense in the case of last month's
GOPHER INCIDENT... this park is dying.
And it's thanks to your lack of caring for this place.
Did you hear me?

(beat)

(beat)

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Deputy—

(beat)

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Look, that came off kind of harsh.
What I mean is—

PARK RANGER

I quit.

OPOSSUM

What?!

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Didn't copy.

PARK RANGER

I quit. This job is getting in the way of doing my job.
So I quit my job so I can do my job. Somewhere else.

Opossum tries to grab the walkie talkie out of Park Ranger's hands.

OPOSSUM

You can't leave!

PARK RANGER

Yes I can.

OPOSSUM

We need your help!

(into the walkie talkie) She didn't mean it.

What she meant was sssss hsgsssk scrrrf mrrr.

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) What in the sam hill?

PARK RANGER

I quit.

She yanks the walkie talkie away from Opossum and throws it into the desert.

OPOSSUM

What is wrong with you?!

PARK RANGER

I'm out.

OPOSSUM

You can't leave!

PARK RANGER

Yeah. I can. I can leave.

No one appreciates me.

So I'm gonna leave.

OPOSSUM

People are holding you accountable, that's not the same thing as not appreciating—

PARK RANGER

I'm not the one who needs to be held accountable!

OPOSSUM

Uh. Yeah. Sometimes you are.

I've been covering your ass /because you keep deciding to self-sabotage rather than—

PARK RANGER

No, you haven't. You haven't actually.

That powerpoint sucked.

I didn't think it was possible for a bake sale to suck.

But our bake sale sucked.

OPOSSUM

Can you please turn off your Park Ranger guilt for one second and *listen* to me?

Life is good here.

I have shelter, a reliable food supply, sometimes I drink water, and I have a friend.

We can't throw all that away just because we want to give up.

PARK RANGER

I'm not your friend.

I'm your park ranger.

OPOSSUM

You told me I was your friend.

PARK RANGER

Yeah?

Well.

Humans and animals can't be friends.

Not really.

At best we can be allies.

OPOSSUM

Well you're not being a very good ally.

PARK RANGER

I don't have time to be your ally, okay?

People are literally driving their ATVs across previously untouched / desert sands.

OPOSSUM

Yeah, and that's really sad and all.

But we need your help here. The Mammalian Exhibit is going to—

PARK RANGER

No one cares if the Mammalian Exhibit closes. People come here to see cacti and maybe a rattlesnake. People don't come to the desert to see mammals. Especially not mammals who aren't even native to this area.

OPOSSUM

The mammalian exhibit is my home.

PARK RANGER

Yeah. Well. Not originally.

We're at a moment of crisis, okay?

So put on your big girl pouch and stop being such a symbiotic free-loader.

OPOSSUM

Well shit. If you want to cut me like that.

Opossum begins stuffing cupcakes into her pouch.

PARK RANGER

What are you doing?

OPOSSUM

If you're not gonna stick around and figure this out with me,
I'm gonna organize a community meeting to save the Mammalian Exhibit on my own with
the other at-risk mammals.

Go be with Thorn if you're too good for your four-legged friends.

Opossum leaves.

PARK RANGER

Fine. Cool.

You were just holding me back anyway.

Park Ranger huffs in frustration. Maybe she throws a cupcake. Suddenly, a
tumbleweed who was there the whole time turns around like a devil on your
shoulder.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED

Observe: a Park Ranger failing inside the system.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

Park Ranger takes a moment to wonder if she's failing inside the system...

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

...because the system wants her to fail.

PARK RANGER

I wonder if I'm failing inside the system because the system wants me to fail.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

Park Ranger takes a moment to wonder...

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

...if maybe she doesn't need the system.

PARK RANGER

I wonder if... maybe I don't need the system.

Yeah. *Yeab.*

I can do it all on my own!

TUMBLEWEED

Woah, woah, we weren't quite saying—

PARK RANGER

Thorn does it all on her own.

She isn't part of the system. *She* has an alternative haircut!

I can get an alternative haircut. I can— I can do anything! On my own!

Park Ranger transforms herself into her vision of an eco-warrior, a costuming that should reflect previous visual descriptions of Thorn. Perhaps she tears off the sleeves of her uniform and gets Cactus to give her a stick and poke tattoo.

She takes the mic from Tumbleweed.

PARK RANGER

A lot of people think that being a park ranger means I get to spend all day hiking and having meaningful interactions with nature. That's certainly what I thought my life as a park ranger would be. Hah. False. It turns out that being a park ranger involves a lot of emails. I hate emails. I currently have about 3,582 unread emails sitting in my inbox. But occasionally I get earnest emails from earnest folks, not unlike yourselves, asking earnest questions about issues that earnestly need addressing. So as my last official act as an employed park ranger for Jumping Cholla Community Park, I am going to reply to some of those emails.

Here we go — Jamal from Santa Fe asks: "Do I have to sort my recycling?"

That's a great question, Jamal.

Everywhere has different rules about recycling, so you'll need to check a local resource.

But good question!

Ok, Ricardo is writing from Phoenix. He asks: "Is boxed water really better?"

That's an easy one! Nope, they're a capitalist scheme to make you feel better about purchasing a resource that a) should be free and clean for all and b) can be transported in a reusable bottle. But thanks for asking, Ricardo!

And here's one from Val, in Philadelphia: "Is the world fucked?"

This question leads seamlessly into the following, in the style of "Tree Hugger" by Kimya Dawson, but more punk.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN (feat. PARK RANGER)

(beat) is the world fucked?

(beat) is the world fucked?

(beat) is the world fucked?

bum bum the world is fucked!

PARK RANGER

Pam from Pima County asks: Can I recycle styrofoam?

No you dumb piece of shit, of course you can't recycle styrofoam.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN (feat. PARK RANGER)

(beat) is the world fucked?

(beat) is the world fucked?

(beat) is the world fucked?

bum bum the world is fucked!

The ping of an email coming in.

PARK RANGER

Oh! A reply!

(reading) “Yes but I heard they’re burning all the recycling anyway so does it even matter?”

(a moment, then) One more time and all together!

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN & EVERYONE

(beat) is the world fucked?

(beat) is the world fucked?

(beat) is the world fucked?

bum bum THE WORLD IS FUCKED!

A dramatic lightshift (perhaps what one calls a ‘blackout’ followed by houselights); a shift that suggests it’s time for intermission. Just when folks start to get up, check their phones, etc...

Scene 10

Opossum scurries out in a makeshift Park Ranger uniform. She has some notecards.

OPOSSUM

Uh. Friends?

Where are you going?

We don't have time to take a break.

I know it really sucks that Park Ranger left but—

if you could please find your seat? Or find a new seat? Next to a new friend?

Cool, thanks. It means a lot.

I promise this won't take longer than it has to take.

(clears throat, into the notecards) Thank you all for coming to the first ever community meeting of Jumping Cholla Community Park. As I'm sure you are all aware by now, the Mammalian Exhibit is under threat. By which I mean we're looking at the end of the Mammalian Exhibit. Like *(R.E.M.) (timidly, but determined to convey her point in the best way she knows how)* 'it's the end of the Mammalian Exhibit as we know it'. Yeah. So, uh. We gotta figure out how to save our home. Yeah. And if there's time we will also be addressing the recent vandalization of the water fountain near the gift shop which was formerly a popular bathing spot for young Cactus Wrens. Right. Thank you all for coming. Um. My friend Conifer from back home is standing in solidarity with us. They generously donated this pine cone, which I thought we could pass around, to take turns speaking? Um, I don't feel comfortable with power hierarchies or public speaking for that matter, so I want to reemphasize that we're all in this together. Um. Yeah. So. If anyone has prepared some statements or suggestions...? Uh, Woodrat? Could we start with you?

(Perhaps the attendants of the Community Meeting could be pre-picked audience members or members of the stage crew willing to read statements from notecards.)

WOODRAT

On behalf of the rodent contingent of JCCP, I would like to say that we still grieve the memory of Gopher who died too soon. This peanut butter-flavored poison is literally a trap pumped into our communities to destroy us. There is poison where we scavenge and poison where we sleep. There is poison where our pups play. I make a motion to prioritize the removal of these pellets from our neighborhood.

OPOSSUM

Thanks, Woodrat. I think we can all agree that Gopher's death remains an unhealed wound in our community and actions need to be taken to address the issue of rodenticide. But we're here to figure out how to raise the money necessary to save the— uh, yes, Cottontail?

COTTONTAIL

I know I speak for the larger cohort of horny hopping animals when I remind everyone that **all money is dirty money**. So we hares here would like to put forward a different proposal all together: burn all the money; burn down the walls, the fences, the barriers; burn down the borders; let all mammals run free; long live anarchy.

OPOSSUM

Oh. Well. Thank you for that very, um, bold proposal.

But we're not looking to destroy the park.

It's the only home we've got!

Plus it's a valuable engagement center for animal/human relations and—

Oh, Tarantula. Yes?

TARANTULA

The Arachnid contingent agrees. The human who fed us is no longer here. The human who locked up at night is no longer here. The human who held the keys... is no longer here. So it's time we save ourselves by abandoning this ridiculous notion that arachnids and mammals and reptiles and all manner of life can coexist in harmony.

FROM THE BACK

Ecosystem is a system of oppression!

Disgruntled murmuring throughout.

OPOSSUM

Um, hey guys? Guys?

Wow this pine cone thing really isn't working out.

FROM THE BACK

Why is this human sympathizer telling us what to do?!

OPOSSUM

I'm trying to facilitate a conversation about how we can save our community!

SOMEONE ELSE

Maybe this community sucks!

SOMEONE ELSE ELSE

There's no reasoning with humans!

Let's blow this popsicle stand!

SOMEONE ELSE

Yeah! Let's re-wild ourselves!

FROM THE BACK

They never gave us popsicles anyway!

A mass walkout.

OPOSSUM

Guys! Wait! No! Don't leave! Please—

If we all work together we can—

Everyone has abandoned the community meeting.

OPPOSUM

Well that was a natural disaster.

Opossum shuffles through her notecards and indulges briefly in despair, takes a breath, and steels herself to try again.

OPOSSUM

(a beat) I guess I'll have to try something else.

Cue the opening chords of "Goin' Out West" and launch with utmost conviction and no sense of irony into the following.

Scene 11

A brief (dance?) montage — I imagine makeshift cardboard puppetry — that showcases all the ways Opossum tries to save the Mammalian Exhibit at Jumping Cholla Community Park, including but not limited to:

Canvassing!

Flyering!

Phone Banking!

Phone Zapping!

Petitioning!

Protesting!

Rioting!

Mutual Aid!

Doing a Post on Social Media!

Searching Through the Trash & Donating Those Items!

Anything Else You Think A Marsupial Might Do to Help!

And last but not least.... Fundraging!

Underscoring these earnest attempts, perhaps Ecosystem of a Down performs a cover of “Going Out West” (This is a reminder to free yourself of the production-related burden that EOAD needs to be good; like if they can’t play the guitar, just play a track behind them and fake it — but let us know they are faking it so we can all be in on the joy.)

Scene 12

A fluid transition to a fundraiser. Someone puts a drink in Opossum's paws.

TUMBLEWEED

(cont. from Scene 11) Goin' out west

Goin' out west

Goin' out west

Goin' out west...

The band fades into the background. Opossum drinks heavily, cradles a donation tin filled with whatever currency animals and plants might use. When the song ends,

TUMBLEWEED

Alright, germinators and exterminators.

Welcome to this very special fundrager edition of Wait Waits Don't Tell Me.

We're broadcasting live from Jumping Cholla Community Park

where our comrade Opossum is trying to save the Mammalian Exhibit.

We're gonna go water our holes now, but if anyone has suggestions on how to conceptualize the insurmountable prospect of global mammalian destruction and the impending doom facing this park slash world and its inhabitants, the mic is live.

The band members chill offstage, rolling a joint, grabbing a beer, looking really cool. Opossum waddles over.

OPOSSUM

Thanks again for donating your gifts.

I have a feeling this is really gonna work!

The band members chose not to acknowledge this unfounded optimism.

CACTUS

Still no sign of your human friend?

OPOSSUM

Her name is Park Ranger.

RATTLESNAKE

Not if she's not a park ranger anymore it's not.

Opossum tries not to cry then tries to play it cool by offering a swig of her bottle to Tumbleweed.

TUMBLEWEED

Nah, I don't have a digestive tract.

OPOSSUM
Oh right duh.

TUMBLEWEED
You still collect cigarette butts?

Opossum roots around in her pouch, produces a handful of half-used cigarettes.
Tumbleweed selects a long one.

OPOSSUM
Isn't smoking like *especially* dangerous for you?

TUMBLEWEED
We all gotta die somehow.

OPOSSUM
(*like this is the most profound shit ever spoke*) Yeah.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED (*who maybe doesn't even bother to go over to the god mic*)
They smoke and slug their feeble time away, cognizant always that the great hurdle toward death continues.

Opossum sits in this profound punk realization for a moment, then waddles up to the mic. She's at that sweet spot of drunken desperation where it seems totally possible that we can change the world through live art.

RATTLESNAKE
Hey, what are you doing?

OPOSSUM
I have a suggestion.
Is this thing— (*a lot of mic feedback*)
Cool. Now that we're all awake. Let's get woke.
So. There's a lot of talk out there about reducing personal consumption.
And that's great and all, but we really need to take the guilt we project onto individual consumers and apply that pressure onto corporations.
Anyway that's not my suggestion, just a cultural observation.
In fact, my suggestion actually relies on the act of consumption.
I know! It sounds crazy! But hear me out!
(*to herself*) Oof. I do not like crowds.
Ok, so like most great suggestions,
my suggestion for how to save the world comes in the form of a song.
Rattles? Could I um? Could I get a 'sick' beat, please?

RATTLESNAKE

Dude. You're not part of the band.

TUMBLEWEED

Yeah... we weren't really serious about being open to suggestions.

CACTUS

Cool it, gang.

It's Opossum's fundrager.

And Opossum asked that we hear her out.

So let's hear her out!

OPOSSUM

Thanks, Cactus.

But this isn't about me! It's about all of us?

Rattles rolls his eyes, but jumps on the drums, figures out a 'sick' beat.

TUMBLEWEED

Okay. Whatever.

Give it up for Opossum!

OPOSSUM

Yeah. Yeah. Cool. That's it. Yeah.

Opossum clears her throat, then launches into this weird punk/scream-o/rap song (idk, I had Bowie's "Suffragette City" and the Ting Tings in my head whilst writing, if that helps) :

OPOSSUM

Eat your young!

Everyone's doin' it, so —

Eat your young!

Doin' it, doin' it!

Eat your young!

Chewin' it, chewin' it.

Hey, white bitch!

Yeah, in the second row.

I said, white bitch!

You in the second row.

Some sort of rhythmic, musical transition. Opossum beatboxes in opossum language.

OPOSSUM

She go to yoga and pilates.

*Damn that bitch a hottie.
A mommy with her toddies.
Strollin' with a stroller.
Girl, you think you know her.
But step into her kitchen.
That Kitchen Aid is bitchin'
But wait, she's cooking up her toddies
as they screamin' "mommy".
As they screamin' "mommy"
she cooking up her toddies.*

BECAUSE SHE EATS HER YOUNG!

*Yeah she eats her young!
Every possum's doin' it!
She eats her young.
Come on and eat your young!
Every possum's chewin' it.
We eat our young!*

Opossum punches a punk power fist to the air, waits for the lights to shift and signal the end of a dramatic, all-encompassing powerful moment of music. They don't. Instead, a stunned silence. Cactus claps once or twice, out of kindness.

TUMBLEWEED

What the frack was that?

CACTUS

Hey, hey. Cool it, guys.
It takes a lot of guts to speak truth to power.

OPOSSUM

Thanks, Cactus.

RATTLESNAKE

Yeah, chill and all.
But that's not even our sound?

OPOSSUM

Well. Yeah. I knew that.
But I was thinking you could like maybe, branch out?

TUMBLEWEED

I've actually got the branches front covered, thanks.

RATTLESNAKE

Keep 'trying', pal.

I'm sure you'll find your voice eventually.

Ecosystem of a Down turn their backs on Opossum to resume being cool.

OPOSSUM

Please! Give it another listen?

I know it's pretty raw and a lot to take in on first listen, but it's really important to me. See, Park Ranger and I wrote a draft of it one morning when I couldn't get to sleep and I was hoping maybe if I sang it here maybe there'd be a chance that Park Ranger would hear it on the radio and that maybe she'd hear it and remember all the good things she's accomplished here, like friendship, and this punk rap which — okay, I know the lyrics are really, okay like *really* subpar, but we had a lot of fun writing it — and so maybe she'd hear it and remember and come back and— (*deep into the mic*) Park Ranger, if you're listening out there, come back! I'll be pretty mad at you for like a day but then I'll forgive you. I promise, we need all the help we can—

CACTUS

Friend, hey, I think you've had a little too much cactus water, know what I'm saying?

OPOSSUM

If anyone has seen a Human of the Trying but Self-Doubting variety,
I'm looking for my best friend.

TUMBLEWEED

Hey, we want to help... but you're getting a little / carried away.

OPOSSUM

(*all the determination of a drunken marsupial*) I need to finish putting up these [flyers]—

Opossum sticks a flyer on Tumbleweed.

TUMBLEWEED

Sure, put it on whatever branch you want.

OPOSSUM

I've been flyering for days, but I don't think it's made a difference.
Nothing I do seems to make a difference.

RATTLESNAKE

Well, yeah. That's always a possibility in this line of work.

CACTUS

You can stick one on me too, if you want?

OPOSSUM

Thanks, that would be really great.

Opossum sticks a flyer on Cactus.

CACTUS

Oh shit. *This* Park Ranger.

OPOSSUM

Yeah. Park Ranger Park Ranger.

CACTUS

This is the Park Ranger you're looking for.

OPOSSUM

Yeah. I just said. Park Ranger Park Ranger.

CACTUS

Ooooooh. I thought you meant *Park Ranger* Park Ranger.

The one with the bad front tooth and the chronic oversharing problem.

OPOSSUM

...No, that's Volunteer Pam.

CACTUS

Huh. Yeah. She was here like two seconds ago.

OPOSSUM

Volunteer Pam?

CACTUS

No, Park Ranger Park Ranger.

OPOSSUM

What?! What do you mean she was just—?! Where?! Where did she— Shoot shoot shoot!

Opossum begins to scurry around in circles.

TUMBLEWEED

Where are you going?

OPOSSUM

I'm gonna find my friend.

RATTLESNAKE

What about the fundraiser?

OPOSSUM

—Maybe I can make her see that her work at the park did matter. Or maybe it didn't matter but. She was an important part of my home. And like. Well. Trying is better than not trying!

Opossum waddles off to find her best friend!

CACTUS

Huh. On second thought. Maybe that was Park Ranger *Park Ranger*.

Scene 13

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED

Opossum searches desperately for Park Ranger, wandering the outer reaches of the park for the opossum equivalent of days.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

All hope of ever finding Park Ranger seems lost when, behold! (*perhaps a return of "The Moon and the Sun"*) There! In the distance! Opossum sees a utopia, a way of experiencing humanity, that heretofore this moment was utterly unimaginable to our beloved marsupial. Opossum crawls, reinvigorated, toward this oasis of shared togetherness we call community.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

And a voice crying in the desert says: "What is community?"

OPOSSUM

What is community?

Oof. That's a tough one...

I think it can be a lot of different things.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED

Opossum crawls and crawls toward a utopia that never seems to get any closer.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

But dagnabit Opossum keeps trying!

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS

Opossum is gonna keep trying!

OPOSSUM

Scavenging a meal with friends and laughing when the wild onions make you cry.

That could be community.

Or! Offering a stranger a bite of watermelon rind as he crawls by your stoop.

Hugs. Like, the kind of hugs where you close your eyes while hugging.

Bringing soup to a sick mammal.

That seems like a really important part.

Open spaces and places where we can all hangout together for free. Like no fences or cages.

Making time to make small talk.

Respect. And, you know, willingness to say sorry. Because we all mess up.

Ooh! Oooh! Maybe there's a way we can learn that we don't need more than what is enough to get by. Like maybe if we stop our reckless pursuit of excess we'd have more time for essentials? Like taking care of the earth!

You know me. I'm a simple creature: food, water, shelter, community. I'm set.

And, I'm not saying we have to have a religion, but maybe it is useful to remember that we're a part of something bigger than the individual.

Music does that, for me. And joy! And discourse!
Geeze, even just smiling at each other over a shared experience can create community.
I don't know if it's possible for the whole world. But, but— I think we could make
community here, right here — if we work hard at it!

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

Opossum notices the meager crowd of onlookers for the first time.

OPOSSUM

Ah! Ah! You! Fellow creatures! Look at you beautiful creatures!

You could help me!

Because maybe if it's a bit ambitious to make a community of this whole town then at least
we can make a community of this room.

Maybe in this room we can create the kind of community we want to have.

And if that prospect seems daunting, maybe we start just with the creature next to us.

Wow! There is a living thing next to me!

A breathing beautiful creature who is capable of feeling excitement and pain and ennui and
confusion and love and so many other things!

Maybe this person can be the start of my — no, *our* community.

And if we start small enough, work hard enough, that community can grow and grow and—

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

It was just a mirage. It was all just a pile of trash stuck on a teddy-bear cholla.

OPOSSUM

But. No. I thought it was real.

I thought it was possible.

If we all turn to dust in the end...

If this rogue bit of plastic will outlast all human and marsupial efforts...

...what's the point of even trying?

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE

Opossum starts having a panic attack about the trauma of living in the age of
mass climate destruction. If you were living in the age of mass climate
destruction, wouldn't you? If you knew you were both extraordinarily complicit in
the destruction of your home yet utterly powerless to save it, wouldn't you? If
you had to acknowledged the futility of human existence on a daily basis, wouldn't
you?

Opossum looks around for her community, or even just one friend.

But Opossum is alone.

OPOSSUM

(frightened, alone) Tumbleweed said there would be singing.

In the dark times.

But who is going to sing with me?

I'm too scared to sing alone.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. RATTLESNAKE
You can laugh, if that's how you experience discomfort.

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. CACTUS
But I want you to put yourself in Opossum's paws for a minute. Imagine how you'd feel if you just this moment realized for the first time how hopeless the future of mammalian civilization seems and to top it all off you had lost your best friend.

Opossum writhes. (This part of the play isn't funny.)

ECOSYSTEM OF A DOWN feat. TUMBLEWEED
Opossum experiences an existential crisis, then shock, and then apparent death.

Scene 14

Park Ranger comes looking for Opossum.

PARK RANGER

Opossum? Opossum!

It's me, Park Ranger?

I'm back!

I know I left but. I came back, I—

Park Ranger finds Opossum's ostensibly dead body.

PARK RANGER

Opossum?

No. No. This can't—

No. It can't be too late.

No please no.

She searches frantically for a pulse.

PARK RANGER

Opossum? I need help! Somebody help!

Park Ranger grabs the walkie talkie off of Opossum's belt.

PARK RANGER

(walkie talkie) If anyone is out there, please, can you help me?

I don't know what to do.

The park is ending and Opossum is...

It's too late. I'm too late.

I failed Gopher and I failed the Park and I failed...

Please! My friend is... my friend is...

I think my friend is dead and this time it's actually all my fault.

After a moment of sobbing, the walkie talkie speaks:

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) What kind of Park Ranger are you?

PARK RANGER

Well, technically I'm no longer a par—

BOSSMAN

(walkie talkie) Opossums play dead.

PARK RANGER

Oh.

Right.

Duh.

Hah! Maybe...

Maybe it's never too late to...

Buddy? Hey, buddy. Wake up!

Park Ranger sort of does their pawshake on Opossum. Opossum slowly wakes up.

OPOSSUM

(dazed) Park Ranger?

Park Ranger hugs Opossum tightly.

OPOSSUM

You came back?

PARK RANGER

Yeah. I heard our song on the radio.

OPOSSUM

Wow. I knew music was powerful.

(sniffing) What's that smell—

PARK RANGER

Direct action.

OPOSSUM

Huh. Smells like cow manure and french fries.

(a beat, then quietly) Are you going to leave again?

PARK RANGER

No.

Opossum is trembling.

PARK RANGER

Hey, buddy.

Buddy—

What's wrong?

I'm here.

I gotchu. I got you. Hey?

OPOSSUM

If you leave again...

do you promise to come back again?

PARK RANGER

Hey, I'm here. I'm here.

OPOSSUM

I know, but.

If you do?

Park Ranger doesn't answer.

OPOSSUM

I thought I had a community, and that we were all working together, but when it mattered nobody wanted to work together for any kind of common good. It turns out they were all just a bunch of self-serving animals.

PARK RANGER

I'm sorry.

A pause.

PARK RANGER

I don't know how to fix any of this.

OPOSSUM

You could ask me what I need? And then listen?

PARK RANGER

Okay, yeah. How can I help?

OPOSSUM

Maybe you could tell me a story?

A nice story?

Like how it all started?

PARK RANGER

Um. Ok. Well, the first thing we need to keep in mind about the natural world is that there are lots of things we can't see but they're still all connected.

We call that "ecology".

Humans have that too.

Things where if you do one thing it will affect another thing you didn't think it would affect.

Things like random acts of kindness. Or systemic ra—

OPOSSUM

Oh. Um, actually I just meant how we began.

Like when we first became friends?

PARK RANGER

Right! Sure, buddy.

One night I was at the park late, thinking it was mid-April?

OPOSSUM

It was May!

PARK RANGER

A mild night, in May.

I didn't really have anything to do, but didn't really have anywhere to go either.
So I was scraping gum off the bottoms of the picnic tables, picking up litter,
that sort of thing.

Usually I find it very peaceful here at night.

But suddenly there was a commotion from the dumpsters.

I thought maybe it was a migrant? Trying to find some food?

And in a sense, it was. Just not in the form I expected.

So I called out softly, "Hello?"

And the commotion stopped.

"I don't want to hurt you," I said.

"I just want to help."

And then you slinked out from behind the dumpsters.

Your paw was hurt, and you had cheese dust on your cheeks.

OPOSSUM

Yeah, I'd found a bag of cheese puffs!

And you told me they were your favorite.

You shared some fresh ones from your lunchbox.

So I knew I could trust you.

Because you shared something important with me.

PARK RANGER

And we sat next to the dumpsters eating cheese puffs, and it was easy.

Like, even though your paw was injured, you made me laugh.

We laughed and laughed.

You told me that joke about the kangaroo and the wombat?

OPOSSUM

Yeah, that was some good pouch humor.

PARK RANGER

I thought I was helping you, but really, you helped me.

Because I didn't have any friends, not really. And then you came along and made me laugh.

I laughed so hard it started to hurt. So I said we needed to take a time out from jokes.

So we sat in silence for about ten seconds before bursting into laughter again.

And then the sun started to come up?

Over the mesquite?

OPOSSUM

Yeah...

They sit in silence.

PARK RANGER

You're my best friend.

OPOSSUM

I'm glad you came back.

PARK RANGER

You really inspire me, Opossum.

You inspire me on pretty much a daily basis.

OPOSSUM

Wow! Thanks you.

Silence.

PARK RANGER

(quietly) ...Do I inspire you?

Silence.

OPOSSUM

Um. It was...

It was pretty shitty of you to abandon the park like that.

PARK RANGER

I'm sorry.

OPOSSUM

But I'm glad you came back to continue our work.

PARK RANGER

Thanks.

OPOSSUM

I think it's gonna take more than one of us to save the park.

The sun starts to set. Its red blaze sets Tumbleweed aglow. Park Ranger and Opossum sit together.

TUMBLEWEED

(speaking to us) 500,000,000 years pass.

If Park Ranger and Opossum achieved nothing else, they have become a layer of dust for these rocks.

And you. You too have become a layer of dust for the rocks.

You have become stones.

You are stones made from the dust of the people who walked into this room on [date of tonight's performance]. From the dust of that theater.

The lightbulbs.

The lobby installation.

The chairs.

The exit signs.

Yep. I know. A lot to take in,

but this is the end of human civilization as we know it we're talking about.

Now, I know what you're thinking:

'Hold up. I'm willing to buy that I might have turned into a stone after 500,000,000 years passed... But how did a raggedy ball of dried up plant last this long?'

To which I say: dude, if your biggest concern is 'how did the talking tumbleweed make it to the end of the world' you haven't been paying attention.

The wind blows, a kind of music. Tumbleweed listens. Thoughtful, contemplative.

TUMBLEWEED

Huh. Yeah. That's the wind.

You can't see it,

but you still know it's there.

Pretty cool, huh?

It is a manifestation of vastness.

Solemnity and grace.

Fearful to behold.

Illustrating the emptiness between places.

The histories held between layers of rock.

The wind sings through Tumbleweed.

TUMBLEWEED

Pass me a hundred, a thousand of years.

Pass me a dewdrop, no time left for tears.

*We've all turned to dust but the plastic remains
a bag holding wind like the trouble we made
out of life on this planet, a body divine
till we torched her and trashed her, cried
mine mine mine mine.*

Tell her I'm sorry.

*If we're gonna do nothing then there's nothing to do.
But come to find strength in the weed that breaks through,
bursts through the concrete, the bones that held you.*

*Come face the music — we're all gonna die.
But the wind but the wind but the wind will still sigh.
The trees and the dirt and the rain will survive.*

*The sun climbs to the top of this mountain with me,
and I'll climb to the top of this mountain with you.
See that one in the distance,
we'll climb that one too.
For the world might be ending;
I can't say how much time
how much time we all have,
so put your paw in mine.*

*The wind will still blow,
and the flowers will grow.
Ought to plant you some wildflowers
but then I dunno: do you like wildflowers?*

Tell her I'm sorry.

*Say, "I've hurt you my mother, my home, and my friend."
Pray, "Let me come wash out your wounds in the rain.
Yes I want to feel the rain.
Oh love let me feel your rain."*

*Let our bodies become the same mountains we climb,
decompose and give back to this body divine.
When the wind sings our story into a layer of rock
when our bodies become a record of hours
let time not distinguish our flesh from the flowers.*

*So much life to discover from the top of our mountain
so while the world's burning I hope it keeps turning
just long enough I can hold you and ask you:
do you like wildflowers?*

The sun goes down.

end of play