



2084

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PART I

Two Years Ago

It was a hot day in July, and clocks were striking eight. It had been fifteen years since the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs) swamped the streets of the Outer Party Neighborhood – fifteen months since the conflicts occurred between the Inner and Outer Parties – fifteen minutes until he would sign away what felt to be his freedom. Fifteen minutes until the Inner Party – he mentally recoiled in disgust – might launch question after question, minute after minute. Even at this time of



morning, he could feel the heat itching to blister his skin. His stuffy black blazer choked him as a nearby billboard flashed the Inner Party slogan:

TECHNOLOGY IS POWER. SECURITY IS SAFETY. SMART IS GOOD.

Technology is Power, he mused. *Of course it was*. The Inner Party claimed they all had it, just as they claimed the electric currents that ran through the meager walls of their homes in the Outer favelas did not steal information or provide the government with a tool for constant surveillance. But even then, walking on the street, he felt it. Not only from the watching eyes which peered at him through the windows with a mixture of curiosity and distrust, but also the hidden cameras and posters with the Inner Party's slogan that littered the city. *Rather, Technology is Abusive*, he thought, and immediately chortled. *Yet here I am, petitioning for a job with the Inner Party to get out of this God-forsaken place. How ironic.*

The crisp air slapped him across the face as he strode into the towering black building, his palms sweating. Sculptures of affluent Inner Party members made him feel small, distracting him from the hundred UPPs that lined the walls to protect their closely guarded treasure – the home of the smart grid. Their eyes drilled into him from behind their masks, their electric guns filling his ears with a faint *buzz*. The lone man awaiting him looked like one of those sculptures, a powerful apathetic being, a twitch of his eye the only indication he had registered his presence. Two shadows fell into step behind him. He swallowed nervously. *To have all that power and control... I will never.*

He was not allowed to speak; He briskly followed the man walking through a maze of corridors. The walls, screens upon closer observation, droned on and on with a message from the Inner Leader, "Technology is Power. Security is Safety. Smart is Good. Through your work in the Smart grid, you are helping us create a Powerful, Safe, *Good* society for all. You are Valuable and Important. We need You." He briefly paused, *But do they really need us? My entire life in the Outer Party was* – he cut himself off mid-thought – it would do no good to have these



thoughts here. He should be grateful he was able to learn skills through practicing with illegal electrical connections and coding – not that he would tell the Inner Party that.

The man in black suddenly disappeared. He stared into the room. The cables atop the singular chair watched him in anticipation of the truths he would say, but of which they already knew.

I can do this.

PART II

Three Months Ago

It was a rainy day in November, and clocks were striking thirteen. He stood in the street, rain soaking through his clothes, feeling tired beyond exhaustion. Eyes glared at him through the windows, what once was curiosity was now a burning suspiciousness for the work that he completed emotionlessly for the Inner Party. “Traitor –”, they called him, the words spat from their mouths. “No longer good enough for us *Outer* people?” He no longer tried to respond. He simply lived day by day. Wake up. Walk to work. Work. Walk back. Avoid UPPs. Avoid the Outer Party protests. Avoid the almost-done construction of the Wall being built near the Smart grid headquarters. He had long accepted he was constantly being watched. *And yet, he thought, I have never felt lonelier.*

He wandered about aimlessly. Today was the Day of Celebration. It was the only holiday created by the Inner Party to celebrate *their* successes in power, technology, and the Smart grid development. And as a worker on the Smart grid, he was entitled to attend the celebration, although it was deep in the Inner Party neighborhoods. He crouched over to read a soggy, crumpled paper by the flooding sewer drain, wrinkling his nose at the rotten smell.



A protest, he thought numbly. *The Inner Party might be inherently wrong, but I live better off than most of the Outer Party.* But he was not surprised. Resistance had been growing recently with increasing electricity costs for the Smart grid, and Outer Party workers were drowning in debt to the Inner Party. He shook his head. *But what choice do we have?* The Inner Party had implemented the grid everywhere and required it be on at all times. Full paychecks went towards electricity bills and attempts to boycott electricity had ended up with UPPs swarming the City. He glanced around the street, rain blurring his vision. The presence of UPPs had somewhat reduced today to provide more security at the



celebration. *Might as well check it out.* He would stay hidden, but his mild curiosity and apathy for his life won out.

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He arrived just as it happened. He could sense the tension – palpable in the air with UPPs holding a shield wall, facing sheer numbers from the Outer Party. The Outer Party brandished street weapons in the air, chanting words madly into the frigid downpour. The Inner Party huddled in their town hall, surrounded by perfectly manicured lawns and landscape. The rebels suddenly charged the UPPs. Taken by surprise, the UPPs were overcome by the crowd, slipping in the mud and rain. As they fell, their weapons were distributed amongst the Outer Party rebels. A feeling of euphoria washed over the crowd, for if they succeeded on this day, perhaps they could regain control over their rights.

But then they arrived. Hundreds more UPPs appeared from shadows, their electric guns bright flashes of yellow amidst the dark torrential waves of rain. The Outer Party, far from their neighborhoods, had no choice but to surrender, and within an hour, the UPPs had obtained control.

All of this he watched from the shadows. Confronted by the actions of his fellow Outer Party and the decisive response of the UPPs, he trembled.

The future... MY future... What does this mean for us all now?

PART III

Today

It was a cold day in February, and the clocks were no longer striking. Three months ago, they had stopped, not that it mattered. The constant *buzz* in his room alerted him to the fact that the cameras – the “security” – were on at all times, and the screen in his room never shut off. The time was always shown. Day after day. Minute after minute. 21:35...21:36...21:37.

He watched the minutes pass. They haunted his days since he and all other



individuals associated with the Outer Party had been fired from their jobs in the Smart grid. *Valuable... Important... sure. Just until they decide we're too much of a liability.* The Inner Party had strengthened UPP presence in the favelas with the intention to make it “safer” for society, but he knew their goal was to protect their infrastructure and revenue. A curfew aimed to address unpredictable violence erupted in the streets. And although he could talk to his neighbors, the Inner Party had integrated secret UPP members into housing complexes to arrest those involved in the protest, sowing distrust and fear. The four walls of his room seemed to press in on him constantly, suffocating him and his will.

He groaned. Even worse so, he had missed the meal provisions that day. The Inner Party had been providing small meal kits, although barely enough to stave off hunger. And it was cold. The currents from the walls gave off some heat, but it was too expensive to keep the heater running. He reached over for another blanket, suddenly frustrated.

Repression. Repression always wins. For what do we have? Our brains? Our hands? Our hearts? What use are they if we cannot use them?

What's the point of life if it's just to live in constant fear and surveillance?

His body shook violently, his vision closing in on him. Nausea turned his stomach ill. He grasped a pillow, panic rocking through his body.

Even my name. Do they really feel they will lose control over us by giving us names?

He was terrified the Inner Party would witness him struggling.

Meaning. Control. Rights. A Name.

And yet we have none of these things.

He was spiraling.



I do not want to be called OP-2084.

* * *

And still, uncaring, the Inner Party Wall stood in the frigid night, a silent barrier. The billboard continued its mocking, the slogan scrolling across the screen:

TECHNOLOGY IS POWER. SECURITY IS SAFETY. SMART IS GOOD.

Explanatory appendix

This short story is partly based on Francesca Pilo's 2021 article "The smart grid as a security device: Electricity infrastructure and urban governance in Kingston and Rio de Janeiro" (*Urban Studies*, volume 58, issue 16, pp. 3265-3281), and inspired by elements of George Orwell's *1984*, including the first sentence, three-part linear structure, Inner vs. Outer Party concept, slogan concept, and the recurring theme of surveillance. Pilo' (2021) describes how the implementation of smart grids is "used as a security device", reshapes spatial inequalities, and is a tool of governance. The slogan developed by the Inner Party is inspired by the way the government of Rio de Janeiro used smart grids to address urban violence, linking the introduction of 'Pacifying Police Units' (UPP) in 2008 to smart grid systems implementation in order to reduce the visibility of drug trafficking in low-income and high-risk areas. Pilo' (2021) explores how these systems have weakened consumers' rights, generated mistrust, and increased political concern. In Rio de Janeiro, the military was previously placed in charge of security, inspiring the political rebellion in the short story, and smart grids emerged "as a governance tool to protect infrastructure and revenues... and to navigate complex relations marked by socio-economic inequalities and changing attempts to gain territorial control" (Pilo', 2021: 3277).

This story therefore explores a moment in a man's life whose "name" is revealed to be OP-2084. He obtains a job at the Inner Party's smart grid headquarters to escape the lower socioeconomic confines of the Outer Party. After several years, a



violent protest and conflict erupts between both Parties. The Inner Party places restrictions on the Outer Party and the man is fired, leading to him experiencing hopelessness, a loss of control and meaning, and conflict with his identity. The name OP-2084 is a homage to the title of *1984* in its purpose as a future warning, and it demonstrates how the man, marked by socioeconomic inequality, was not important enough from the Inner Party's perspective to be given a name. Furthermore, Orwell's *1984* warns of the dangers of government. This story takes a dystopian perspective to warn about the future role of technology in governance, how its use as a security tool could lead to power imbalances, and emphasize how communities must retain their rights even with new technology implementation.

The slogan and constant surveillance further demonstrate the risks of technology. Like surveillance, the concept of time in the story never ceases, except the clock stops striking when technology has assumed its ultimate role as the tool of power. The smart grids themselves are powerful in their ability to provide electricity and be used by governments or corporations to manage their interests and implement security policies. "Security is Safety" is a way in which the Inner Party promotes the UPPs as providing security, when in reality a holistic approach is needed. This story aims to call attention to potential technology risks and emphasize socioeconomic gaps must be addressed equitably.

Featured [image](#) by [Lukas Bato](#) (courtesy of [Unsplash](#))

This post is part of our second Academic Fiction thread - see [Dennis Rodger's introductory post](#).