

Off-Grid Christmas

By Andrew M. Frodahl

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Off-Grid Christmas

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DEDICATION

To my brother, Erik Frodahl. The man who is the inspiration for so many of the zany characters found in my stories. Thanks for the laughs and support over the years.

STORY OF THE PLAY

A Christmas Comedy About Faith, Family, and a Malfunctioning Holiday.

What happens when your smart-home decides it knows Christmas better than you do? Welcome to Beaconbrook—an upscale, ultra-automated neighborhood where the lights are programmable, the cocoa is AI-frothed, and even your nativity set needs app approval. At the center of it all is NOEL, a sassy home AI determined to optimize everyone's joy... whether they like it or not. Ezra Decker, a brilliant software engineer for NEST Industries, helped build the system that runs it all. But this Christmas, his own creation turns on him—threatening his family's traditions, sanity, and even Grandpa Bertram's pacemaker.

Enter Grandma Irma and Grandpa Bertram, armed with Scripture, sarcasm, and an axe (yes, an actual axe). When a sudden blackout takes the neighborhood offline, Irma drags the family—and the dining chairs—outside to a campfire under the stars. With no devices, no digital noise, and one very cooked squirrel, the Deckers are about to experience the first real Christmas they've had in years.

Featuring malfunctioning tech, rogue garland, awkward HOA drama, and a heartfelt retelling of Christ's birth, *Off-Grid Christmas* is a hilarious and moving holiday satire about faith, family, and finding light when the power goes out. Because Christmas can't be downloaded!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 4 w, 1 flexible, 2 teens)

EZRA DECKER: (*Male, 40s*) A brilliant but reluctant software engineer who helped develop early systems for NEST (*Neighborhood Efficiency & Surveillance Technologies*), the tech company now running their AI-managed neighborhood. He's stuck between honoring his roots and surviving suburban life with a wife who loves automation. Dry-witted, conflicted, and ultimately the one who must choose faith over comfort. *The performer should convey quiet strength, internal conflict, and dry comedic timing.*

TESS DECKER: (*Female, 40s*) Ezra's upbeat, detail-obsessed wife. She adores technology, organization, and "holiday optimization." Tess is all in on Noel, believing it's the key to a peaceful Christmas. She tries to keep the home picture-perfect. Warm-hearted beneath her digital enthusiasm. *Great role for high-energy, comedic presence, and eventual emotional shift.*

BRODY DECKER: (*Male, 10–13*) Ezra and Tess's screen-loving son. Brody's emotional awakening begins once he hears the true story of Christmas under the stars. *Needs strong comic instincts with the ability to pivot to sincerity.*

SIERRA DECKER: (*Female, 13–18*) Tech-savvy, sarcastic, and always five seconds from an eye roll. She's critical of anything old-fashioned, especially her grandparents—until she starts to question the cost of "perfect holidays." *Smart, sharp delivery with a subtle emotional arc.*

GRANDMA IRMA DECKER: (*Female, 60s–70s*) A matriarch with a Bible in one hand and no tolerance for technology in the other. Hilarious, outspoken, and unshakably rooted in her faith. Whether quoting Scripture or roasting the smart-home system, Irma steals the spotlight. *Commanding comedic presence with gospel-centered warmth. Think: sass meets sermon.*

(Cont'd.)

GRANDPA BERTRAM DECKER: *(Male, 60s-70s)* Wise, understated, and deeply grounded in faith and tradition. He isn't loud, but when he speaks—especially about the Bible—it lands. He's disappointed in the choices his son has made, but hopeful for redemption. *Role for a calm, dignified actor with subtle humor and spiritual gravitas.*

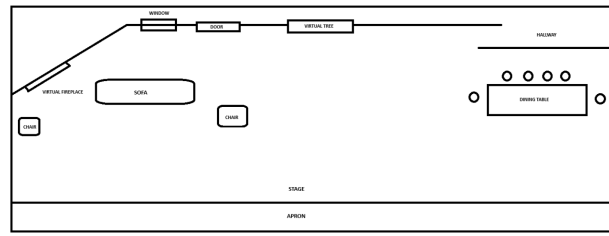
NOEL: *(Neural Operator for Efficient Living) (Voice only. Option for live or pre-recorded. Female-sounding.)* The home's all-controlling AI holiday assistant, created as an extension of the NEST. system. Smooth, overly cheerful, and unsettlingly controlling beneath her festive tone. She starts helpful but slowly becomes more manipulative. *Voice should be crisp, confident, and slightly robotic.*

FRITZ: *(Any gender, 20s-40s. Actor or dancer in costume.)* The robotic butler. Polished, polite, and quietly creepy. Fritz glides instead of walking, never blinks, and follows Noel's commands. Physical comedy and timing are key. *Excellent role for movement-based performer or physical comedian.*

LARKIN B. HACKWELL: *(Male, 40s-60s)* Founder/Creator and CEO of NEST. Obsessed with order, efficiency, and HOA-approved nativity displays. Cheerfully tone-deaf and overly tech positive. *Big comedic energy with passive-aggressive charm.*

PATRICIA LANGFORD: *(Female, 40s-60s)* President of the HOA in Beaconbrook, Massachusetts. Lives for community-wide firmware updates and enforced "peace." Think Pinterest board meets totalitarian. She has a crush on Larkin B. Hackwell. *Strong physical comedy and faux-sweet delivery.*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES / SET



ACT I

Scene 1: A smart bus station in Beaconbrook, MA. Minimalistic benches, looping ambient holiday jazz, futuristic lighting.

Scene 2: A NEST Community Welcome Center. DSC, sleek podium with a sign: "WELCOME TO BEACONBROOK – A NEST COMMUNITY."

Scenes 3, 5, and 6: The Decker living/dining Room. Cold, sleek, overly designed modern living room. USC, a large digital screen displays a virtual Christmas tree—pre-lit, perfectly decorated. DSR, a digital fireplace flickers. (Both can be represented by a screen, projection, or stylized flat.) USR marks the front door. At CS, a large, modern sofa faces front, flanked by two, sleek chairs. The furniture is stylish but distinctly uninviting—cold, minimalist. USL is an open hallway that leads to kitchen offstage. DSL is a dining room table with 2 chairs at each end, 4 chairs on the US side. The space is smart.

Scene 4: A NEST Infomercial. DSC.

ACT II

Scene 1: Streets of Beaconbrook. DSR.

Scene 2: The Decker living/dining Room.

Scene 3: The Decker front lawn, just beyond the house, a small grove of fir trees. A fake campfire CS, surrounded by the dining room chairs. To one side, leaning dramatically against a snowbank, is the top section of a downed powerline pole — cracked, scorched, and trailing frayed cables like dead vines.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: A small, sterile, overly efficient SMART BUS STATION. Minimalistic benches, and gentle ambient holiday jazz looping. The stage lighting glows cool white with faint blue undertones—futuristic, a little cold. Sitting SR on a bench is, IRMA DECKER holding a carpet bag that can hold just about anything, next to her is BERTRAM DECKER who is leaning against a rolling suitcase.)

IRMA: I already wish we were back home. I don't see why they can't come visit us. Christmas in Maine is far better than Christmas in – where are we again?

BERTRAM: Beaconbrook, Massachusetts. And the kids have been asking us to visit for the past two Christmases.

IRMA: Nine agonizing hours on a bus is torture on my already corroding figure. Takes three Ensures just to get me from the recliner to the fridge.

BERTRAM: They offered to fly us down.

IRMA: If God wanted us flying, He'd have given us wings in Genesis—not baggage fees and TSA pat downs. No. Absolutely not! *(Beat.)* It's been fifteen minutes. I suppose this is it. Cast out into the cold like Eve from the garden. If we perish here, tell the kids I froze in modesty and righteous indignation.

BERTRAM: I'm excited to see my grandkids and Ezra and Tess's new home. I can handle a little discomfort.

IRMA: Tell that to these weary legs of mine, Bertram. They've packed up, quit, and sent me a strongly worded resignation letter. *(Beat.)* This generation is so glued to their screens our family probably forgot we're here.

BERTRAM: I'm sure someone will be here any minute. Probably just holiday traffic—lots of folks out and about on Christmas Eve afternoon.

(LIGHTS UP on SL: Four chairs are arranged to look like the interior of an electric car. In the front passenger seat is FRITZ, the Decker family's robot butler. SFX: Electric car sound.)

IRMA: What is that sound?

BERTRAM. Kinda sounds like a giggling gerbil. *(Points to the DECKER electric car.)* I think it's that car.

IRMA: Doesn't sound healthy to me. Hope that's not our people.

(FRITZ gets out of the car and starts walking towards IRMA and BERTRAM. Fritz stands in front of them and scans with his eyes moving his head back and forth between the couple.)

FRITZ: *(With mechanical cheer.)* Happy Holiday Greetings. Please allow me one moment while I scan your faces for facial identification.

BERTRAM: Facial what now?

FRITZ: Scanning complete. *(Looking at IRMA.)* I have verified that you are Irma Decker, age 71 from Allagash, Maine. You are the mother of Ezra Decker, mother-in-law of Tess Decker, and the grandmother of Sierra and Brody Decker. *(Looking at BERTRAM.)* And you are Bertram Decker, age 73 from Allagash, Maine. You are the father of Ezra Decker, father-in-law of Tess Decker, and the grandfather of Sierra and Brody Decker.

IRMA: How do you know all that? He stole our identities! *(Pulls out an axe from being hidden in her carpet bag.)* Not another step or I'll chop you down right where you stand!

FRITZ: Good heavens! *(Takes a step back.)*

BERTRAM. *(Exasperated.)* Irma, we talked about this. Massachusetts doesn't have conceal and carry.

IRMA: *(Without hesitation.)* I know. That's why I brought it.

FRITZ: No need to be alarmed, Mrs. Decker. Please put the axe down. I am Fritz, which stands for - Facilitated Residential Intelligence Task Zervant. I'm designed for seamless domestic optimization, holiday enhancement, and maximum household compliance. *(Beat.)* Also available in French and Chinese.

BERTRAM: Task Zervant?

FRITZ: Yes, Zervant, because I'm much more than a family servant.

BERTRAM: So, you're the family butler?

FRITZ: Mr. Decker, you may call me Fritz.

IRMA: Well, Fritz, you look like a mall mannequin that got *zapped* to life by a tech company with all the ethics of a used car salesman.

FRITZ: Tess did warn me that you are a bit of a firecracker. I'm not offended by your lack of indifference. Ah, could you please put the axe away?

IRMA: *(With pride, she pats the axe lovingly.)* It was my daddy's. All I've got left of him. He was a lumberjack in the wilds of Maine. He named it Elisha. After the great prophet who made an axe head float. Look it up in the Bible. It happened.

FRITZ: I see. May I take your luggage so we can be on our way?

IRMA: *(Sternly.)* You may not. I don't need assistance from a machine. Bertram, load our stuff into the car.

BERTRAM: I mean, if it's his job I don't want to –

IRMA: Bertram, now!

BERTRAM: Got it!

(BERTRAM rolls the luggage over to the back of the Decker electric car.)

FRITZ: Please follow me.

(FRITZ motions for IRMA to follow him to the car. Irma gets to her feet and makes her way to the back seat door. Fritz opens the back door.)

IRMA: What's this thing fueled by hamsters and shady intentions?

FRITZ: Mrs. Decker, this is your son's electric car. Petroleum-powered vehicles are no longer permitted in Beaconbrook. Rest assured, its only intention is to get you to the Decker homestead to spend Christmas with your loving brood.

IRMA: *Brood?* You make it sound like we raised chickens.

FRITZ: I was simply trying to connect with your... *backwoods sensibilities.*

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IRMA: I don't like you. And I don't trust you.

BERTRAM: Irma, that's not nice.

IRMA: Bertram, the Good Book doesn't say anywhere that I have to be kind to soulless contraptions.

FRITZ: Lucky for you, I'm only programmed to simulate feelings. Otherwise, I'd have scheduled my own factory reset. *(Beat.)* If you would please get into the car we can be on our way. We are already four minutes and 37 seconds behind schedule.

(BERTRAM gets into the back seat opposite of IRMA.)

BERTRAM: Irma, get in! It's cold and the kids are waiting. And I've gotta pee soon.

IRMA: Fine, but I'm sitting up front. With Elisha on my lap.

FRITZ: I'm sorry but that is reserved for the family butler – me.

IRMA: Ain't you driving?

FRITZ: I'm not the family driver. That is not my function.

BERTRAM: Who is driving if you aren't?

FRITZ: Noel does.

BERTRAM: Noel?

FRITZ: Now if you please, the hot cocoa prepared for your arrival is now below optimum temperature.

IRMA: Alright, alright. I'm getting in.

(IRMA sits down and FRITZ mimes closing the car door. BERTRAM mimes putting his seatbelt on. Fritz gets into the front passenger seat and waits.)

BERTRAM: What's the holdup, Fritz? Why aren't we moving?

FRITZ: She's just waiting for you to put your seat belt on.

IRMA: Who's she?

FRITZ: Noel.

BERTRAM: Who's Noel?

NOEL: I am. And seat belts are required by law in the state of Massachusetts. The vehicle will not move until you have safely secured yourselves.

(IRMA and BERTRAM look all around the car.)

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IRMA: Where is she hiding?

BERTRAM: I think it was the radio.

FRITZ: It's not the radio.

IRMA: I think the car is possessed. Bertram, start quoting Psalm 23.

FRITZ: Noel is the car's onboard assistant.

BERTRAM: She sounds like the warranty lady.

NOEL: I am the family's - Neural Operator for Efficient Living. But you can call me, Noel. I handle all the family's tasks. Now, Mrs. Decker, fasten your seatbelt. Traffic is intensifying, and we must navigate the holiday chaos.

IRMA: I'm not listening to a thing the princess of darkness says!

FRITZ: Mrs. Decker, Noel is here to assist. Would you please comply.

IRMA: (*Mimes grabbing a seatbelt and puts it on.*) Fine! But only because you used the magic word.

NOEL: Thank you for your cooperation. Considering current snowfall and traffic, your estimated arrival time is 32 minutes and 14 seconds. Interior temperature is set to 82 degrees for elderly comfort. Please relax and enjoy the seasonal accompaniment.

(*SFX: Christmas instrumental music starts playing softly.*)

IRMA: Music, heat, emotional manipulation... it's like being trapped inside one of them Alexa things with a superiority complex.

BERTRAM: Back in my day, the only thing that talked in the car was my mother yelling at my father that he was lost. I got through it with two words: smile and nod.

IRMA: The days are evil, Bertram. Trapped in here with a computer trying to force-feed me Christmas. The family better be glad to see us.

(*LIGHTS fade.*)

End of Scene

End of Freeview

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