

Bright Angel Falling

Screenplay by

Peter Hyams and James Cameron

Story by

James Cameron

I MINUS SIX MONTHS: TONIGHT

A BRILLIANT NIGHT SKY FILLS THE FRAME The air is so clear, we can see the gossamer fringes of the Milky Way Suddenly, the sky jolts. and the camera pans violently left ..coming to a shaky stop. It goes out of focus and then becomes sharp again Everything looks normal, except for the faintest smear of light in the center It looks just a bit elongated, and it's not easy to see.

MAN'S VOICE

That's a comet?

YOUNG GIRL'S VOICE

That's a comet

MAN'S VOICE

You're sure?

YOUNG GIRL'S VOICE

I'm positive.

We now see that we are in the backyard of a pleasant home in the suburbs of Tucson, Arizona. It is part of a development that winds its way through newly paved streets that are all named Via Del something.

LORETTA SAITO, a 15-year-old Japanese-American, stands next to her father, BOB SAITO, who is squinting through an impressive looking amateur telescope, not the kind of instrument you normally find in the backyard. Loretta has glasses, and looks like the kid people want to sit next to when there is a math test; however, she is a remarkably un-selfconscious girl... especially for an adolescent

BOB SAITO

How come it doesn't have a tail? I thought comets have tails.

LORETTA

It will have a tail. .once it gets near the sun Then the carbon dioxide and hydrocarbons sublime from the surface and blow in the solar wind I've told you this before

BOB SAITO

How could I have forgotten? I'm the tax lawyer . you're the genius kid. and what is sublime?

LORETTA

It's when something vaporizes, and then.

There is a scream from inside the house, and then SHARON SAITO-- Loretta's mother--comes racing into the backyard, carrying a portable telephone She is holding it like it is made of something radioactive

CONTINUED: 2

SHARON SAITO
It's them! It's them! The C-B-T ...
T-B-C. .the what-do-you-call-it...it's
them!

LORETTA
Oh, my God.. CBAT? It's really them?

SHARON SAITO
That's what I said.

LORETTA
Oh, my God.

Loretta stares at the phone

BOB SAITO
Do you think maybe you should talk to
them?

Loretta is jolted back to earth. .and picks up the phone.

LORETTA
Hel...hello?

SPOTA (V O.)
Hello...Ms. Saito?

LORETTA
Yes...

SPOTA (V.O.)
This is George Spota of the Central Bureau
for Astronomical Telegrams in Cambridge.
We are very pleased to inform you that
your sighting has been confirmed as a new
comet Benton Wolfe...one of our more
esteemed astronomers called it in last
night...although he was an hour fifty
minutes after you So we have decided to
officially name the new comet Saito-Wolfe.

Loretta stares up at the sky She lowers the telephone to her
side...completely forgetting that it is there. Her lower lip
begins to tremble...and her eyes brim with tears

SPOTA (V.O.)
Hello Ms Saito?

Loretta can't stop looking at the sky She is crying and smiling
at the same time

LORETTA
(whispering)
Saito-Wolfe my own comet!

SPOTA (V O)
Hello? Are you there?

CONTINUED: 3

Her father gently takes the telephone from his daughter's hand
He is clearly touched by what he sees We push in on Loretta's
face as we hear her father's voice behind her

BOB SAITO

Hello this is Bob Saito Loretta's
father Yes

(pause)

Oh, yes we're very proud of her

EXT KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - RUNWAY - FLORIDA - DAY

Two deep-throated sonic booms shake Orlando, as the Space Shuttle
Atlantis plummets toward the ground The orbiter shimmers in the
heat of the afternoon's setting sun, and the optics of a
1,000-millimeter lens

The orbiter's tires hit the runway with puffs of smoke...the
drogue chute is deployed . and the massive Atlantis slows to a
stop, right on the mark. The telltale charring of some of the
ceramic tiles is mind-boggling evidence that this is an aircraft
that has arrived from space.. this is not the United flight from
New York. Vehicles rush to meet it The door opens as the
ground crew swarms toward it. .and the MISSION COMMANDER steps
out. He squints...as he surveys the ochre-lit runway in the
setting sun

His name is WILL SEACORD He is a man in his early 40s. He has
the athletic Marlboro Man good looks that one would associate
with an astronaut However, there is something else ...
something besides the advanced degrees in aeronautical
engineering and applied physics . something beneath the
sun-weathered skin, the strong jaw It is his eyes. They are
softer, and more whimsical than they should be They have seen
things that few mortals have seen They have seen the moon and
the heavens with a clarity that only searchers who have ventured
beyond our atmosphere have seen They have looked down at the
earth from a vantage point known only by the rarest of
travelers . and by God

Right behind him is his friend, and the mission co-pilot, BRENT
KUNETKA. who flashes the victory sign to the cameras

WILL tries a self-conscious smile knowing that his is being
photographed

KUNETKA

(to Will)

Ladies and gentlemen welcome to the
planet Earth, where the local time is six
forty-eight On behalf of Captain Seacord
and the entire flight crew, thank you for
flying Atlantis

EXT TERMINAL BUILDING - KSC - SUNSET

The crew bus pulls up to a noticeably small crowd. This is different than the Halcyon days of the Space program. It is mostly family and friends of the crew...some with miniature American flags, skeleton crews from the media, and a few die-hard NASA fans. Will is the first out of the bus. Kunetka follows, and then the remaining four astronauts.. three men, and one woman (SHIRLEY PICKET). Will scans the crowd. The rest of the crew pass him, and rush to the arms of waiting wives (in Picket's case a husband), and children. Will does not see whoever he was looking for. He is alone in this sea of familial bliss.

There is a momentary flicker of sadness on his face, and then the practiced smile of someone who is used to being on camera.

Kunetka is embracing his wife and looks over at Will. He sees what is going on.

SUBURBAN HOUSTON - DAY

The Texas humidity hangs over the day like a moist curtain. CORDELIA (COREY) SEACORD is tired as she gets out of her car. She is wearing a nurses uniform. She is an angular and extremely attractive woman, with black hair and wide cheekbones, courtesy of her Lakota Sioux mother.

She closes the car door, and starts toward the house.. and then stops. She hears something, and frowns.

EXT BACKYARD - DAY

Will is working at the sprinkler control box near the side of the house. Corey stands there for a second.. watching him.

COREY

What are you doing?

Will looks up with a start.

WILL

Oh . Hi .uh.. I noticed the lawn is turning brown. The sprinkler system, it.. hadn't been turned on to the summer cycle.

He closes the sprinkler box, and stands up. wiping his sweaty hands on his jeans.

COREY

Well, that's nice of you except you can't just come here anymore without calling first. You know that.

WILL

Yeah, I know. I know. It's just the lawn. I was.

COREY

It's not your lawn anymore.

CONTINUED:

Will looks down at the ground He looks a lot more attractive
than she wants him to

WILL
It was turning brown.

COREY
I'll paint it

WILL
Why didn't you bring Claire to the landing
like I asked you to?

COREY
She couldn't get away.. she had a school--

WILL
Bullshit.

He is visibly angry. He glares at her. She does not know what
to say.

WILL
You didn't have to keep her from me.

The expression on Corey's face is one of deep sadness. She is
not trying to be combative. She shakes her head.

COREY
Will...I don't want to hurt you.

WILL
So you do it by accident?

COREY
Will..

WILL
She's my daughter, she should have been
there..

COREY
Will...

WILL
.. and you know it.

COREY
She didn't want to go

Will stares at her

WILL
What?

COREY
I tried to get her to go She refused

He looks like he has been slapped in the face

CONTINUED: 2

WILL
That's nuts no.

COREY
I'm sorry .

Will walks out of the yard, and out to the street. Corey stays rooted to her spot ..and folds her arms Her eyes brim with tears The sprinklers go on

EXT. CLIFTWOOD HIGH SCHOOL - SUBURBAN HOUSTON - DAY

AURORA CLAIRE SEACORD is on her way home, walking with a friend of hers named VICKI. Claire is a 15-year-old in the middle of an adolescent riot ..a green streak in her hair, a braid full of beads, ears riveted with studs, and two silver eyebrow rings. None of this hides the fact that she has her father's eyes.

She suddenly stops and frowns. She sees her father standing in front of his car. A parent is probably the last thing she wants to see when she is with a friend

Will smiles at her She groans.

VICKI
Hey ..is that the astronaut?

CLAIRE
Worse...it's my father

VICKI
That is definitely way beyond cool.

Claire chews on her lip.

EXT GRANDSTANDS - DAY

Will and Claire sit in the rickety high school grandstands They are alone A few members of the high school track team are practicing on the field. Claire is picking at the peeling green paint of the wooden stands

WILL
(pointing to her eyebrow)
Does it hurt when they do that?

She shrugs

WILL
It's at this time when I start saying something like "how about that weather we've been having?"

She doesn't even shrug

WILL
What's going on?

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

With what?

WILL

With you and me You missed the launch. you missed the landing.

CLAIRE

Yes...I missed the chance to go there and wonder if I was going to be like one of those Challenger families, staring up at a big ball of smoke where my father used to be. Yes. I missed that

WILL

I never knew you felt that way. You should have told me

CLAIRE

Mom said it, and you didn't listen to her. Why should you listen to me?

WILL

You've always been my good luck charm The first time without my girl ... I was scared to death.

CLAIRE

You're the American hero ... you're never scared of anything.

Will stares at her in disbelief.

WILL

I'm scared of what's happening right now.

CLAIRE

It's a little late for that

WILL

Why are you pushing me away?

CLAIRE

You're the one who left, not me

WILL

I didn't leave you And, by the way, it was your mother who wanted the divorce.

CLAIRE

You could have fixed things She just wanted you to come home at night like everybody else that's all

WILL

It's not that simple

CONTINUED: 2

CLAIRE

You could have taken that instructor job, like you said you were going to, instead of going back on the flight roster. Then she would have had a husband and I would have had a father.

WILL

You have a father.

CLAIRE

No, I don't. I have a story on the eleven o'clock news about you and a bunch of other people doing weightless somersaults while you're in orbit. Now there's a real thrill. You know why I quit the swim team? Do you?

WILL

Of course, I do. You pulled a hamstr--

CLAIRE

I quit because I was the only kid who never had their father at one meet. Not one lousy meet. Everybody else's father was there making fools of themselves... cheering their heads off. Not my father. No... he was either training to be 200 miles up in space, or he actually was 200 miles up in space. Two hundred miles that's like from here to San Antonio... whoa. That's certainly worth abandoning your family for. It's like a drug to you. Maybe you should be in a program or something.

WILL

I wish I could explain

CLAIRE

What's the name of my science teacher?

WILL

What?

CLAIRE

Go on tell me the name of my science teacher. You can't, can you?

WILL

Uh

Will looks grief-stricken

CLAIRE

You know what the saddest thing is?

WILL

What?

CONTINUED: 3

CLAIRE

After you left things didn't change at
all You can't miss somebody who was
never there

Will looks down at the little pile of chipped paint by Claire's
foot

TELEVISION SCREEN

A jerky hand-held image of a home videotape The younger Will is
playing a toy xylophone with 3-year-old Claire. He has a song
book which shows the notes by color, and Will is plunking the
colored keys, accompanying his daughter, who is singing.

3-YEAR-OLD CLAIRE

Twinkle twinkle, little star . how I
wonder what you are . up above the world
so high, like a diamond in the sky.

We see that we are in Will's barely furnished apartment. He is
staring at the videotape. His face is lit by the flickering
image on the screen.

METEOR CRATER, ARIZONA - DAY

It is a spectacular sight a wound in the earth's crust almost a
mile across and over 600 feet deep. The camera moves steadily
toward a dot on the crater's rim.

TARNAUER (V.O.)

Fifty thousand years ago, an asteroid 150
feet across slammed into the ground here,
exploding with the force of many hydrogen
bombs.

As the camera gets closer, we see that the dot is CHARLIE
TARNAUER. a thin, angular man in his 70s, walking along the
edge, and talking He is, in fact, talking to a television
camera mounted on a helicopter The helicopter roars by him.

TARNAUER

This sort of thing is always happening,
and in fact, the earth had been a cosmic
dart board throughout its history Just
look at the moon, and you'll get an idea
of what we look like underneath all of our
water and vegetation

Tarnauer absent-mindedly kicks a stone into the huge crater

CRATER FLOOR - DAY

We are looking at a MACRO SHOT of an ant colony bustling about
Thousands of them swarm about at the entrance to their colony

The stone thrown by Tarnauer falls out of the sky and slams
into the ant colony obliterating it

TELEVISION SCREEN - CNN SCIENCE SPECIAL

Tarnauer is talking to the camera the crater behind him.

TARNAUER

In less than six months' time, Comet Saito-Wolfe will pass within a million miles of us. For astronomers, who deal in light years, we shave closer than that.

For the rest of this presentation, Tarnauer's narrative will be illustrated with graphics . . . computer animation . . . and stock footage. It is a very slick and well-edited affair.

TARNAUER

When it passes by Earth, we will see a glorious streak that will light up the night sky, several times brighter than the full moon

The camera begins to pull back from the television screen.

TARNAUER

Even though it's not going to happen, what would occur if Saito-Wolfe would actually hit us? Let me show you something. A comet is made of ice . very old, very dirty ice.

Tarnauer is standing next to a large globe He takes a tiny piece of ice and throws it at the globe It hits and bounces off

TARNAUER

Now, watch what happens if the same piece of ice is traveling much faster

The small piece of ice is now the head of a bullet. He puts the bullet in a gun and fires the gun at the globe. The globe shatters.

TARNAUER

Saito-Wolfe is a relatively big comet... probably about six kilometers Also, it's traveling almost forty times the speed of the fastest bullet Imagine if every nuclear weapon possessed by every nation on Earth were to be exploded at the same time The impact of this comet would be one thousand--that's right-- one thousand times greater than that

We see that the television set we have been watching is in the middle of an apartment The apartment belongs to BRAN DOCHARD and MARTY BRAVERMAN--two graduate students at Berkeley

TARNAUER

Not only is this possible: It has already happened Sixty-five million years ago, dinosaurs were the rulers of the planet

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

TARNAUER (cont'd)

In one blinding flash, a comet hit. It ripped away half the atmosphere, ignited forests over an entire continent, and turned the sky black as pitch for months. That is why there are no more dinosaurs.

Dochard and Braverman are lounging in a sea of clutter. Dochard is intense ..with the metabolism of a humming bird. Braverman is fat, bearded, and slow moving. They are the Ren and Stimpy of the Astrophysics Department.

TARNAUER

So when Saito-Wolfe fills the sky, remind yourself that this is what the dinosaurs saw on their last night. Saito-Wolfe will be a once-in-a-lifetime spectacle.. one of the miracles of creation. However, had its orbit been just a half a degree different, it could just as easily have been a bright angel of destruction...and we could just as easily have been the next dinosaurs.

The Theme Music and Credits Begin, as the program ends. Bran takes a hit off the joint and looks at Marty.

BRAN

Hey, are you thinking what I'm thinking?

Marty rolls his considerable bulk onto his stomach. He talks into the couch.

MARTY

Why not?

He holds his hand out--without looking--and Bran slaps his own to it, in a semi-conscious high-five

MARTY & BRAN

Theeesssssss!

Bran sits back. His eyes are not well focused

BRAN

We'll start in the morning

MARTY

Late in the morning

SPACE SHUTTLE

It is a model of the COLUMBIA, and it points toward the ceiling of LEW BONDY, the Flight Director's desk, at the JOHNSON SPACE CENTER in Houston. Will is sitting on the other side of the gleaming desk, absent-mindedly running his finger over the outline of the model Orbiter

CONTINUED:

BONDY
You did well real well

WILL
Thank you.

BONDY
Not that it's a surprise.

WILL
How bad is it?

BONDY
How bad is what?

WILL
Whatever you're going to tell me. We've known each other a long time, and all of a sudden you're sitting there so tight-assed, you look like somebody is taking your temperature.

Bondy sits back . his chair squeaking...and exhales.

BONDY
It's not the greatest.

WILL
I'm sitting down, coach.

BONDY
The flight roster for the next eighteen months is being posted, including the missions with the Russians. I wanted you to hear it from me, and not see it on a wall.

(pause)
Stuart Cole is flying Atlantis in six months You're the backup.

Will nods.

WILL
What about after that?

Bondy doesn't answer.

WILL
Mmmm . well. I guess I'm going to be backup for Stuart If he breaks his ankle, I'll fly the mission . you

BONDY
Cut the shit Stuart Cole hasn't had a hiccup since puberty, and you know it

WILL
Then if he breaks his ankle, I'd better have an alibi

CONTINUED: 2

BONDY

It sucks I'm sorry. It's numbers. The whole goddamn thing is numbers. The number of scheduled manned flights has been cut in half .half! We've been to the moon now that was sexy. we beat the Russians that was even sexier. Now the Russians have dropped out. There's no team to beat The Super Bowl doesn't work if only one side shows up The ratings won't be any good. Bad numbers.

(pause)

For Christ sake, Will you shouldn't be backup to anybody. Take the pilot-instructor job. Come on ..you've done it . and done it as well as anybody could ever do it. It's time

Will looks at Bondy for a long time.

WILL

I have to go again

BONDY

You're not going ..you're the backup!

WILL

Then at least I'll have tried.

BONDY

What's the point?

WILL

You haven't been up there

BONDY

What are you trying to prove?

WILL

You haven't been up there.

BONDY

Was it worth losing your marriage?

Will tries to answer He can only shake his head

WILL

It's what I am

BONDY

Take the damn job

WILL

One more try

BONDY

The last flight was the perfect way to end it

CONTINUED: 3

WILL
No It can't be the last flight.

BONDY
Why? Why?

WILL
Because I didn't know it was the last flight.

Bondy looks at the model .and then at Will.

INT. JSC CAFETERIA - DAY

It is large. and harshly lighted .not unlike most institutional cafeterias, except for the IQ of its clientele. Will and Kunetka are pushing their plastic trays along the aluminum rails.

KUNETKA
I heard, man This is not good at all.

They pick up plates of what looks like chicken and vegetables, and keep moving

KUNETKA
Backup. shit...that's a lot of training to not fly.

WILL
I'm so glad you pointed that out

Kunetka passes a display of fruit He tosses a banana over his shoulder, without looking.

KUNETKA
You know what the problem is?

Will catches it without breaking stride and starts to put it on his tray.

KUNETKA
After a certain age, your reflexes go.

Kunetka fires a hidden orange at Will's head, just as he was trying to put the banana on his tray Will catches it without blinking.

WILL
That's true Hello, Lize

They arrive at the cashier an elderly woman named LIZE. She is genuinely happy to see the two men

LIZE
Well, it's nice to see you boys back safe and sound That's \$12 41
(to Kunetka)
and you pay for both because you have the bigger mouth

CONTINUED:

KUNETKA

I'll pay if you identify what it is.

LIZE

Keep talking, and it'll cost you a dollar more

KUNETKA

I'll settle for you naming just the category.

LIZE

That's two dollars more. Keep going...we could use a new shuttle.

OTHER PART OF CAFETERIA - DAY

Will and Kunetka sit down at a table already occupied by SHIRLEY PICKET and JUDE FOSTER...who will serve as the CAP COM (Capsule Communicator) on the next flight...and STUART COLE. There is almost an awkward silence. It doesn't have enough time to blossom before Will turns to Cole.

WILL

Let's cut to it. If I have to be a backup .. there is no one I would rather back up than you, so let's have lunch.

COLE

Thanks

You can plainly see the mutual respect of the two men. The relief is palpable. Everybody goes back to their food.

I MINUS THREE MONTHS

EXT. MAUNA KEA OBSERVATORY - NIGHT

The giant telescope is taking its first unblinking look at the stars after the sunlight has stopped intruding.

INT. MAUNA KEA OBSERVATORY - NIGHT

The faces of TWO YOUNG ASTRONOMERS are glowing in the light of monitors, in the observatory control room. They are watching the image from the telescope, as it is digitized and scanned in the monitor. One of them cranes forward a bit, staring at the monitor. He studies the image and blinks. His name is SHEPPARD

SHEPPARD

Holy shit .

BLACK

The screen is black. We hear a telephone ring once .twice, the rustling of sheets, and then the fumbling for the telephone receiver

CONTINUED:

TARNAUER (V O)
 (barely a whisper)
 Hello?
 (pause)
 What?

Tarnauer switches on his bedside lamp He is sitting bolt upright now, rubbing his eyes. trying to think.

TARNAUER
 (into phone)
 Okay, Okay Get everything you can ..
 Call all the other observatories. I'll be
 there in twenty minutes.

He hangs up the phone, keeping his hand on it, as if there is something more he should be doing. A hand reaches out and touches his shoulder ERNESTINE BRANDENBURG--his middle-aged assistant and his wife--sits up, bringing her face into the light.

BRANDENBURG
 Charlie, what the hell is going on?

TARNAUER
 It's Saito-Wolfe. It just passed the
 sun and Mauna Kea is saying the orbit
 has . the orbit has changed

BRANDENBURG
 Changed how?

TARNAUER
 They say it's going to hit us

EXT. MISSION SIMULATOR BLDG - JSC - HOUSTON - DAY

Will, Kunetka, and Picket walk out of the building, carrying their mission books. They are slapped in their respective faces by the heat of the Texas afternoon. Will stops. He sees something past camera So does Kunetka

KUNETKA
 Well well .well

Lew Bondy is escorting two people One of them is VLADIMIR TIVERZIN, a strong, athletic looking man. The other, an athletic, formidable, fierce, and truly wonderful looking woman

BONDY
 Everyone, I would like you to meet our two
 cosmonaut friends who have just arrived
 from Moscow They will begin their
 training with us tomorrow Those of you
 who have flown joint missions with the
 Russians may be familiar with them This
 is Major Vladimir Tiverzin, and Senior
 Captain

CONTINUED:

The woman has eyes that can bore a hole in sheet metal. She takes your breath away. She walks directly to Will...takes his hands, and kisses him on both cheeks

VIERA

Good to see you, Colonel.

Will tries valiantly to contain his surprise and to not act flustered. It isn't easy. Kunetka is amused.

WILL

Viera...Captain Dudorov. I wasn't expecting to see you

VIERA

Leonid has been having heart arhythmias, and I've been put in his place.

She glides to Kunetka, and kisses him on both cheeks

VIERA

Hello, Brent.

KUNETKA

Viera. This is Shir--

VIERA

Shirley Picket. I am honored to meet you.

PICKET

Captain, it's my honor.

The beeping sound of a pager goes off. Bondy looks at the small plastic and hurries inside the building

VIERA

My name is now Chernayev.

(to Will)

Marriage can happen to anyone...even me

WILL

I hope you are very happy.

VIERA

Why would I not be happy?

PICKET

I'm excited about working together.

VIERA

Our missions do not coincide. However, we will be together in training. I hope that does not disturb you, Colonel

WILL

Why would I be disturbed?

There is almost the briefest flash of a smile on her face. Bondy hurries out of the building

CONTINUED: 2

BONDY

Something has happened All launches have been canceled The entire program is on hold There was no explanation. Whatever the hell it is.. it's big

EXT. THE WHITE HOUSE - MORNING

The American flag is billowing in a stiff breeze on top of the sun-soaked White House

INT. SITUATION ROOM - MORNING

The President of the United States is flanked by his Secretary of Defense, National Security Advisor, Vice President, and senior staff...as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of NASA, and the Director of the N.S C Charlie Tarnauer is also at the large conference table

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

Are you actually standing there in front of God and everybody, and telling me that this is the end of the world?

TARNAUER

End of the world? No sir, Mr. President, nothing like that No.

(he takes a sip of water)

Just the end of civilization.

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

Why are we only getting three months warning on this?

TARNAUER

Because the comet just passed closest to the sun, and there was intense solar flare activity. This caused unusually powerful outgassing from the comet nucleus

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

(interrupting)

Stop! Speak English

TARNAUER

Well. a comet's made of ice The heat from the sun caused gas to shoot out from the nucleus This acted like a rocket motor, and changed the orbit by a small percentage However, it only took a small percentage to change it from a near miss to a hit

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

I would like you to get specific about what's going to happen real specific

CONTINUED:

TARNAUER

Well the thermal disturbance I described, coupled with tidal forces created by the comet's proximity to the sun .

The President glares at him

TARNAUER

Uh .the same thing that made the comet change course, also caused the comet's nucleus to break up to fragment. It now consists of a swarm of fragments around the nucleus A number of fragments are going to hit

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

How many?

TARNAUER

Six fragments over a 72-hour period, and then the nucleus We've designated them fragments A through G, with G being the .the uh ..main body

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

How much damage will the fragments do?

GENERAL BLOCK

Depending on where they hit, it could be pretty devastating An impact on a city could be like a nuclear warhead. An impact in the ocean could cause a tsunami bigger than anything we've ever seen

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

And how much damage will the big one do?

TARNAUER

It would make all-out global thermo nuclear war look like an argument.

(pause)

The people who do not survive the initial blast will be the lucky ones

There is silence in the room

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

Jesus Chicken Little was right The sky is falling

(pause)

Why don't we just try to blow it up?

GENERAL BLOCK

We don't have enough deliverable nuclear power to blow up something that size

CONTINUED: 2

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Even if we had the nuclear power, we couldn't get it that far into space. Our shuttle program is only for low earth orbit

TARNAUER

Also, blowing it up into small pieces wouldn't really do that much good. It would only result in thousands of smaller fragments. It would be like taking a bullet, and turning it into a shotgun blast

The President drums his fingers on the shiny oak table.

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

Let me see if I've got this straight: We've got good news, and we've got bad news. The bad news is that we're all scheduled to die in twelve weeks. The good news is that it's only the end of civilization...not the end of the world. Is that about it?

TARNAUER

That's about it.

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

Well, I've got good news and bad news for everybody at this table. The bad news is Armageddon is due twelve weeks from now. The good news is, right now is not twelve weeks from now and I wasn't elected to this office to sit around with my thumb up my ass and hope for the best. So here is what we're going to do: I am putting Dr. Tarnauer in charge of a Special Science Advisory Committee, to come up with a plan. It's going to be a plan that actually works

(to Tarnauer)

You will have total access to any resources you need. You have the highest security clearance and you now have an unlimited budget. Also, you have six days to come up with an answer

(to the rest of the group)

Secretary Burr, you and the Joint Chiefs will create a military task force, and come up with any plan the military can figure out. You have the same six days. We will all meet again on that date

(pause)

I realize ordinarily people in government can't agree on dinner in six days; however, God made the world in six days

(MORE)

CONTINUED: 3

PRESIDENT BARRINGER (cont'd)
That should be enough time for us to
figure out how to save it Thank you,
everybody I don't think we should waste
any more time

The President gets up Everyone else rises, all a bit stunned.
The President gets to the door, and stops.

PRESIDENT BARRINGER
One more thing--and I can't stress this
too highly: Security has to be absolutely
ironclad Nobody--and I mean nobody--can
find out about this before we have some
kind of handle on it

He turns and leaves

CLOSEUP TELEVISION SCREEN

The network newscaster's neatly trimmed face is in front of a
photograph of Saito-Wolfe

NEWSCASTER
is expected to hit within twelve weeks
The White House has refused to confirm or
deny any of this; however, the scientific
community has been flooding the internet
with calculations and predictions. There
are seven fragments that are on a direct
collision course with the earth

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

A huge crowd has gathered across the street. They are carrying
signs that are demanding answers from the President.

EXT. 42ND STREET - NIGHT

Crowds are gathered around an electronic store, with its dozens
of television sets showing Charlie Tarnauer standing at the rim
of Meteor Crater during his CNN special

TARNAUER
However, it could just as easily have
been a bright angel of destruction

INT WHITE HOUSE PRESS ROOM - NIGHT

Press Secretary ROBERT CAULFIELD is holding his hand up, in an
effort to fend off the hysterical clamor from the reporters who
are gathered there

CAULFIELD
Ladies and gentlemen, no one is ducking
anything There is a great deal of
speculation--some of it wild--and

CLOSEUP TELEVISION SCREEN

Another newscaster is in front of a graphic This one shows Saito-Wolfe with what looks like a large tail. and six small ones Giant red letters underneath the image read: "Bright Angel of Destruction "

NEWSCASTER

Our science editor, Dr. Julian Fiske, is in our Washington studios, with.

THE CATHEDRAL OF GOD - ATLANTA - NIGHT

It is a majestic structure, made of cut glass .shimmering in the pin spots of television lights. The crowd of over 2,000 is sitting in rapt attention, as the REVEREND JIMMY BUELL stands in front of the three television cameras that are feeding in to the built-in control room. The Cathedral of God was built for broadcast, and Jimmy Buell was the man who built the Cathedral. He holds up the Bible.

REVEREND BUELL

Revelation One--Sixteen, Seventeen--"And he had in his right hand seven stars.. seven stars . and when I saw him, I fell at his feet dead. And he laid his right hand upon me saying unto me, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last.'"

The audience shouts "Amen "

REVEREND BUELL

(looking right at the camera)
They made fun of us. They mocked us.
They paraded their contempt for us with their love of sin.

The audience cheers

REVEREND BUELL

. in their muuu-zzzzic .

The audience cheers more

REVEREND BUELL

and their moooooovies

The audience is screaming

REVEREND BUELL

and their abbbboorrriion

The audience is berserk

REVEREND BUELL

Well now the Bright Angel of Destruction is coming and those who have not listened will be punished Those who have will be saved They will be saved!

CONTINUED:

The crowd is in a frenzy The orchestra and lavender-robed choir start the music as a cue light flashes

REVEREND BUELL

Come to us We will not leave the air
We will stay on for you Call us, and
give us what you can Our operators are
standing by at the toll-free number .

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

The President. flanked by the Blue Presidential flag.. and the American flag ..is sitting behind Woodrow Wilson's desk, and speaking sincerely to the teleprompter

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

My fellow Americans You have no doubt
heard a great deal from many different
sources...much of it shrill, and not all
of it informed I will not sit here and
mislead you by saying that there is .

INT WILL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Will is eating pizza from the delivery box. and sipping a bottle of beer He is watching the Presidential address.

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

.nothing whatsoever to be concerned
about While we're trying to get answers,
the most important thing we can all do is
remain calm Our biggest enemy right now
is not in the sky ..it is here at home
It is panic. More than anything

Will picks up the telephone and dials a number.

INT CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - (INTERCUT WILL/CLAIRE)

Claire is watching the same image on television She is visibly frightened. She picks up the telephone

CLAIRE

Hello?

WILL

Claire, honey, it's me

Claire cannot take her eyes off the television screen Her eyes are wide with fear

CLAIRE

(solemnly)

Hi

WILL

I just called I don't want you to worry
Everybody is talking, and nobody is
listening

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

I know

WILL

The television people get good ratings if
they scare everybody, that's all

Claire's eyes begin to brim with tears

CLAIRE

Sure

WILL

I wish I could be there with you.

Claire is crying more freely now...trying not to let her father
hear

CLAIRE

I know. Um. listen...I have to get off
now I have a lot--

WILL

I understand Just don't worry, baby I
love you

CLAIRE

'Bye.

She hangs up the phone Will holds the receiver in his hand,
watching television.

EXT. CALTECH - DAY

Tarnauer exits a government limousine with some of his advisors
and Brandenburg He enters the Department of Planetary Science
building. He is surrounded by a phalanx of Secret Service
Agents, and is followed by a horde of hysterical Reporters
shouting unanswered questions to him

INT. CORRIDOR - CALTECH - DAY

It is bedlam as the procession passes. Two scruffy looking young
men break through the crowd--one rather heavy, the other lean.

BRAN

Dr Tarnauer! Dr Tarnauer! I'm Bran
Dochard we've spoken on the phone!

The two Secret Service agents start to react at the approaching
men Tarnauer stops them

TARNAUER

Do I know you?

BRAN

I'm Bran Dochard

CONTINUED:

TARNAUER
You've already said that.

BRAN
This is Marty Braverman. We're graduate students from Berkeley. We've spoken--

TARNAUER
I'm pretty busy right now...

He starts to walk away Bran stuffs a heavy manila envelope under Tarnauer's arm.

BRAN
Please, Dr Tarnauer.. you must read this right away!

As more reporters catch up to Tarnauer, the din grows louder. He nods absent-mindedly to Bran, and walks away.

BRAN
Please...you must read it!

Tarnauer. .and the accompanying whirlwind are gone. Bran and Marty are left standing in the corridor.

BRAN
Now that's a major-league prick. I'm telling you, man, never meet your heroes

MARTY
Let's go home, man

ANOTHER CORRIDOR

Tarnauer and his entourage burst around the corner of a long corridor. He takes the manila envelope and drops it in a trash can without missing a stride Brandenburg, walking behind him, picks the envelope up from the trash can, and stuffs it in her shoulder bag She has to hurry to catch up to Tarnauer.

COMMAND CENTER - PENTAGON - DAY

A large conference hall has been taken over. A small army of people hustle around with boxes, files, and every imaginable piece of computer equipment Tarnauer is moving like a whirlwind As usual, Brandenburg is with him Two other people are with him now: CUMMINS and WEAVER

CUMMINS
Preliminary analysis is bleak DOD hasn't come up with anything

WEAVER
The shuttle can't get up there Nothing that we know of can

CONTINUED:

TARNAUER

You two are telling me all the things we
can't do I want to know what the hell
we can do Tell me something I don't
know

CUMMINS

I'm wearing blue boxers

BRANDENBURG

Try something that anybody wants to know

TARNAUER

I've got to go to the President in--
(looking at his watch)
thirty-two hours So far I'm walking in
there with nothing in my hands except my
dick.

INT HOTEL SUITE - LATE NIGHT

The camera starts on the carpeted floor Time Magazine is lying there, its cover boldly pronouncing: "Countdown to Cataclysm" ... with an artist's rendering of a comet striking the earth with an explosion destroying the planet. The camera moves through the large suite. Every piece of furniture is piled high with documents, printouts, books, files, and disks. The television is on, although the sound is off. We can see the continuous coverage of Saito-Wolfe. Tarnauer is slumped over on his desk, face down in a sheaf of printouts He is snoring. The camera moves into the bedroom Brandenburg is sitting up in bed, reading the document Bran Dochard gave her She is on the last page She closes it, and chews on her glasses. Brandenburg gets out of bed and walks to the living room. She sees Tarnauer...and gently shakes his shoulder

BRANDENBURG

You better read this

Tarnauer rubs his eyes

TARNAUER

(groggy)
Not tonight

BRANDENBURG

Tonight Right now Trust me on this

INT ASTROPHYSICS DEPARTMENT - BERKELEY - DAY

Bran and Marty have their four feet up on the cluttered desk they share in a small cubicle They look tired, and more than a little depressed There is a low rumble outside the window. It grows in intensity, accompanied by a rhythmical thumping It gets louder and louder The window shakes Bran and Marty pick up the Venetian blinds, and look out, as the massive silhouette of a Bell 222 twin engine helicopter descends right by their

CONTINUED:

window and lands in the middle of the campus quadrangle, scattering students . and kicking up a small storm of leaves and papers.

INT THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

The doors to the Situation Room open, revealing Tarnauer, and a wide-eyed Bran and Marty They can't believe what they are seeing.

The JCS chairman, with all of the Joint Chiefs make you squint, their uniforms, ribbons, and stars are so bright The Secretary of Defense is seated next to the National Security Advisor, who is seated next to the Vice President. And finally, seated at the end of the table, is the President of the United States

MARTY

Uh .you do all the talking

Bran and Marty are led into the room by Tarnauer. Marty is coming close to hyperventilation

BRAN

(whispering)

You've got mustard on your tie.

Marty looks down, horrified. He realizes there is nothing there. He stifles a smile.

MARTY

(whispering)

Asshole

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

You're not the first person to call me that, and you won't be the last.

Marty looks like he has been electrocuted

MARTY

What? . . .No, oh. I. .uh Mr. Presid--

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

Please, sit down I am very happy to meet you both

They sit, along with Tarnauer

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

So tell me is it really true that the plan to save the world actually wound up in a trash can?

Tarnauer's shoulders noticeably sag

BRAN

Marty and me got the idea to write our thesis on a comet strike, after we saw Dr Tarnauer's special on television

CONTINUED:

MARTY
(whispering)
Marty and I

BRAN
We figured it would be cool to simulate
what we'd do if a no-kidding comet
impactor came along without a lot of
warning. The idea was what could you do
with existing space assets if you only had
a few months to pull it off
(shrugs)
Who knew?

PRESIDENT BARRINGER
Obviously nobody in the government.

TARNAUER
The Docharde-Braverman proposal involves
thermonuclear weapons in a deployment that
is truly unique

BRAN
Since we can't just try to blow it up, we
have to deflect it--move it off its
orbital path just enough, so that it
misses the earth.

PRESIDENT BARRINGER
How do you propose to do that?

BRAN
We need two bombs--really big ones--50
megatons each should do it. The trick is
to place them carefully. You're like a
diamond cutter. You gotta hit with the
right force and at just the right angle.
You got anything for me to write on?

Before Bran can blink, one AIDE scurries to the far wall. He
tugs at the bottom of a hanging map which is like a window shade.
It snaps up, revealing a shiny white illustration board. A
SECOND AIDE places a large black marker in Bran's hand, and a rag
in case he wants to erase something.

BRAN
(under his breath to Marty)
Is this cool or what?

He gets up and goes over to the board. He illustrates everything
he says in his speech by frantically drawing on the board.

BRAN
Okay. uh. the nucleus has lots of cracks
and fissures. We put one warhead about
here. and the other about here. We
detonate the first one. It sends off two
(MORE)

CONTINUED: 2

BRAN (cont'd)
 waves--a surface wave which, like it
 sounds, goes around the surface and a
 body wave, which goes right through the
 center of the comet. Because the body
 wave has a shorter distance to travel,
 it'll reach the second warhead before the
 surface wave does. By my calculations,
 six milliseconds before. So, the shock
 from the body wave triggers the second
 warhead, which in turn sends out its own
 waves. The two waves should come together
 right over here, directly in line with the
 earth. When the two waves resonate with
 each other, it will carve out a huge
 crater. The recoiling force will be like
 a giant rocket engine, enough to push the
 comet away from its path.. not a lot,
 except enough to cause it to come in at a
 25-degree angle and miss us

All the faces in the room stare at Bran's drawing. Bran comes
 back almost sheepishly and sits down

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
 Dr Tarnauer, you've checked this out?

TARNAUER
 We ran multiple independent reviews. It's
 been flogged by the blast gurus at Sandia
 and Alamos. It checks out

MARTY
 (whispering)
 This is cool

PRESIDENT BARRINGER
 You fully support this?

TARNAUER
 I'm betting my life on it

PRESIDENT BARRINGER
 I guess we all are

GENERAL BLOCK
 I hate to piss in the soup, son. We don't
 have anything close to a 50-megaton
 warhead

BRAN
 (to Marty)
 You tell them, Marty
 (to the group)
 He does speak

CONTINUED: 3

MARTY

That's true, General, we don't. The Russians do. Code name "Tsar Bamba" three stage weapon. 50 megatons, detonated October 1961.

GENERAL BLOCK

That's highly classified

BRAN

It's been on the Internet for years.

GENERAL BLOCK

(to himself)

Shit

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1961 was a long time ago. We don't know if they still have them. Right now, I don't know if they could find the keys to a tank.

BRAN

I bet they haven't thrown the warheads away

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

How are these warheads supposed to be delivered to the comet?

BRAN

Well...there's no way around it. You have to send some guys out there

BRIEFING ROOM - JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY

We see "the guys" that Bran is talking about. Will, Cole, Kunetka, Picket, and the rest of the flight crews are seated together. They are staring with a look that can charitably be described as skepticism. Bran and Marty are bathed in bright light. They are seated on a stage along with Tarnauer and Lew Bondy, as well as some senior NASA engineers. Bran opens a floppy athletic bag that he puts on the dais. He removes a large model of the shuttle. attached to the big orange E-tank ..with the two white solid boosters. It is the way the shuttle looks at a normal launch.

He uses the model to demonstrate each facet of his explanation

BRAN

I uh got this at the souvenir shop.
(pause)

So here's what we have: A shuttle that can't go farther than earth orbit, because it doesn't have enough fuel. Now here's what we can do: We take a stripped down
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

BRAN (cont'd)

shuttle--nothing on it-- we take the tiles off, the landing gears--because it's not coming back. Now don't get upset yet. We change the skin of the external tank to a lithium alloy. I figure we'll have taken about 100 tons off the whole thing. When we launch, after the SRBs are jettisoned

(he snaps off the SRBs)

. we don't jettison the tank, we keep it, and park the whole thing at the MIR Space Station. The next thing we do is send up a bucket brigade--everything that can be launched, piggy-backed, or slingshot into space, with enough fuel to refill the E-tank. Since we'll already have one shuttle and a couple of Soyuz spacecraft docked at MIR, we'll have people to do the work. I forgot to mention that.

He reaches in his bag and takes out a bunch of cardboard cylinders, dropping a couple and picking them up again.

BRAN

There's a large pile of paper towels in the next room. Anyway, these are the first stage boosters of MX missiles. They only weigh 80 tons, and deliver 600-thousand pounds of thrust each. We need six of them. The Russian heavy lift boosters, the Energyas, can bring them up.

He takes chewing gum from his mouth, and uses small pieces of it to fasten the cylinders to the E-tank model.

BRAN

Up at MIR, we bolt the solid boosters to the E-tank. Then we launch the final shuttle. This one will carry the two bombs. When it's up at MIR

He takes two cigars out of the bag, and puts them in the open payload bay of the model shuttle

BRAN

We transfer the bombs to our stripped-down mission shuttle

Will and the rest of the astronauts are leaning forward now, less skeptical, and much more interested

BRAN

We fire the solid boosters, which will get the shuttle out of low Earth orbit and into deep space, to meet the comet

He pulls the cardboard cylinders off the tank, and throws them on the dais

CONTINUED: 2

BRAN

We jettison the boosters to lessen the inertia. When we get near the comet, we fire the main engines, using the fuel from the E-tank. This makes us change directions, slowing our outbound speed, and then accelerate to match the inbound speed of the comet, essentially blasting back the way we came in one killer burn.

The flight crews start to stir

BRAN

I know the Gs will be horrendous--you people will just have to handle it. Now, here's the tricky part: Once we've caught up with Bright Angel and are alongside, you'll park. You've got to take the two bombs and maneuver them down to the surface, using a rig I call the "Bomber." When you get there, you'll be inside the coma, so it will be too bright to make any calculations from earth. You'll have to zap the nucleus with penetrating radar and analyze its structure. Then I can run my software back here to figure out the exact fissures and tell you where to place the bombs. Once you've placed the bombs and set the timers, you get back to the orbiter and get the hell away. You have to be at least 100 miles away before you blow the bombs. You rendezvous with MIR and get in one of the remaining shuttles, and make a normal landing.

(he looks at his audience)

It will work. It really will.

There is stunned silence. Will has his face resting in his cupped hands. His concentration is enough to burn a hole in a piece of paper.

BONDY

Training begins immediately. Current crew assignments, as well as backup crews, remain the same, with the addition of some Russian astronauts. Discovery will launch first, seven weeks from now. Endeavor is the primary mission ship. She launches one week later, in stripped down form. We then have three days, I repeat three days, to get Atlantis up. She'll be carrying the modified Russian warheads, if the President can get Russia to commit. The plan is called Bright Angel Intercept, and let me tell you, once an operation has a name, it's going to happen.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

The group of astronauts, along with Tarnauer and Bondy, have obviously been sitting around a large table for a long time. There is an ocean of crumpled paper on the floor, bleary eyes are being rubbed, the fluorescent light is beginning to get to everyone. In the middle of the table, is Bran's spacecraft made of plastic, gum, and paper towel rolls. Bran and Marty sit at the far end of the table.

COLE

How are we going to get all that equipment up there and everything put together in time? Three shuttles in orbit at the same time. All launched in a couple of weeks of each other?

BRAN

(to Marty)

I've got to take a leak

He gets up and walks out of the room

TARNAUER

We have to do something because Bright Angel is heading our way... and we're the only thing that can stop it. My theory is, if you're falling off a building, you might as well try flapping your arms and see if you can fly.

Will is playing with a pencil, twirling it between his fingers, absent-mindedly.

WILL

I was thinking, if early arriving fragments are going to hit the earth for 72 hours while the crews are working in orbit, there is going to be some pretty big devastation. All ground stations and tracking could be damaged, the atmosphere ionized--anything could happen. The crews could be completely cut off. They have to be totally self-contained.

BONDY

That's true

WILL

Well, if this guy's analysis can't be done until Endeavor reaches the comet, and is inside the coma, then to be truly self-contained, someone has to go who can make that analysis, and do it very quickly. Someone who can do the math onboard, who can analyze the configuration of the nucleus.

Bran re-enters the room

CONTINUED:

WILL

The diamond cutter has to be there, at the diamond

Bran feels every pair of eyes in the room turn to him. He pales.

BRAN

Oh, shit.

WILL

It's quicker to train someone as a payload specialist and bring him along, than it is to teach an astronaut everything that guy knows.

BRAN

Oh, shit.

I MINUS 9 WEEKS

EXT YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK - DUSK

A handsome buck with a beautiful set of antlers comes out of the woods into a clearing. He sniffs the air and looks up. Low in the sky, lit by the just-setting sun, is a bright smudge. Whether the buck notices a strange new sight in the sky or not, we will never know. He turns away and gallops off.

NASA SIMULATION BUILDING - DAY

It is a huge hangar-sized building, with full-sized mockups of the shuttle. .used for training. In front of one is a large dais. This is a news conference the likes of which hasn't been seen at NASA since Armstrong landed on the Moon. The three prime crews, and the three back-up crews are on the dais. Each is situated according to mission; i.e., the Discovery, Endeavor, and Atlantis crews are separate. Seated with the Atlantis crew next to Stuart Cole is Viera. With the Endeavor crew is the other Russian astronaut, Vladimir Tiverzin. Each astronaut has his name on a card in front of him. (The back-up crews are a little off to the side.) Tarnauer, Bran, and Marty are there, along with Lew Bondy.

There is a VIP section, and among the dignitaries are Loretta Saito, and Claire Seacord as well as a lot of the families of the astronauts

REPORTER #1

Colonel Hayden, as Mission Commander of Endeavor--the shuttle that will actually go out and meet the comet--do you feel the weight of your responsibility?

GEORGE HAYDEN is in the most prominent position of all the astronauts, right next to Bondy

CONTINUED:

HAYDEN

All of us here at NASA feel the responsibility. This is what we have trained all our lives for.

REPORTER #1

Are you aware, Colonel, that you are being written about as "Saint George" . . . like the dragon slayer?

Hayden shakes his head.

HAYDEN

I'm not a Saint. I'm an astronaut. That is a higher calling.

The crowd laughs and applauds. From a public relations standpoint, NASA has chosen the right man.

BONDY

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Mission training begins tomorrow.

REPORTER #2

Wait a minute! Is that Loretta Saito seated over there?

The huge crowd turns to the VIP section on the side. The hoards of cameras pan around, to catch Loretta, who is frozen with fear and embarrassment. All the reporters shout questions at the same time. Above them, we hear:

REPORTER #2

Loretta! Loretta! How does it feel to have your name on what could be the most destructive thing in the history of the human race?

Loretta is paralyzed. She couldn't answer a question like that in a million years. She shakes her head, her eyes brimming with tears. She is silently mouthing the words, "I'm sorry." She doesn't know what to do. The other reporters shout similar questions. Some security and PR people come to her aid, and shield her. She is openly crying now, and is mercifully being escorted away. Tarnauer is furious. He stands up.

TARNAUER

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. This news conference is concluded.

OTHER SECTION OF THE BUILDING - DAY

Loretta is being comforted by three people from the NASA public affairs office, away from the retreating press. One of them has brought her a Coke. Claire comes up to Loretta, and sits down next to her.

CLAIRE

Hi. That really suc'...

CONTINUED:

Loretta, clutching her cup of Coke, her cheeks wet with tears... looks at Claire.

LORETTA

I was so proud, when they named it after me, and now..

CLAIRE

It's not your fault. Those reporters are bugs. Anyway, these people will make it all work out. Believe me, I know them.

LORETTA

You do?

CLAIRE

Yeah I'm Claire Seacord

LORETTA

Your father is Will Seacord?

CLAIRE

Well, yeah...it's no big deal

LORETTA

You're wrong It's a very big deal.

CLAIRE

He's only back-up

LORETTA

He's Will Seacord!

Claire shrugs

LORETTA

My dad's a tax lawyer.

CLAIRE

That's.. uh pretty cool.

LORETTA

No, it's not, except he is. He's always helped me do what I wanted to do, which is to study comets

CLAIRE

Why'd you want to do that?

LORETTA

Did you know that when the solar system was formed, the inner planets like Earth didn't have any organic compounds?

CLAIRE

Uh, no I was sick that day

CONTINUED: 2

LORETTA

All organic compounds came from comet impacts, millions of them, back in the early days when the sky was filled with them. So all living things on Earth, including you and me, are made of stuff that used to be in comets. We are comets. So they're not just some light show in the sky like a meteor shower or an aurora borealis or something

CLAIRE

That's my name Aurora

LORETTA

I thought you said your name was Claire

CLAIRE

Aurora Claire Seacord. Aurora blows for a name, so I told them I was changing it when I turned ten. My dad saw an aurora from space over Antarctica and said it was the most beautiful thing he ever saw...so I got the dumb name.

LORETTA

My dad saw Loretta Lynne in Phoenix

EAST WING PORTICO - THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

The President is striding along the columned walkway, dappled with light...trailed by Secretary of Defense Burr. They are in a hurry.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

All is not sweetness and light in the Kremlin. Yeltsin has all the hardliners going berserk over the prospect of handing us their two biggest hydrogen bombs. He's sending signals that it will happen...we just have to give him a little more time

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

No problem. it's not like time's a factor in what's going on here

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

General Block and the rest of the Joint Chiefs are doing some squawking of their own about us sending our MXs to Russia

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

You tell Block that those MXs better be in Russia by tomorrow, or I'm personally going to take his temperature with one

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

The President and Wootton burst in. The Vice President, and the Secretary of Defense are waiting for him, along with a middle-aged Asian woman, who is the TRANSLATOR. She is standing to the side of the President's desk, a telephone to her ear. The President picks up his phone

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

Premier Dieng. It is good to talk to you.
I hope all is well.

There is a pause, and then the Translator speaks

TRANSLATOR

Mr President, as you well know, the International Space Treaty prohibits launching weapons of mass destruction into space.

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

Yes, Mr Premier, that is true. However, every signatory to that treaty with the exception of China has understood the extraordinary nature of this crisis. We are doing the opposite of something belligerent. We are trying to prevent destruction not cause it.

TRANSLATOR

Mr President, those bombs could be used to deflect the comet to fall on China. We will not agree to a waiver of the treaty. If you persist in this violation, we will respond by putting up a space station armed with nuclear weapons

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

(to the Translator)

Talk to your counterpart on the other end.. and tell them I want them to translate exactly what I say, so there is no misunderstanding. Okay?

The Translator speaks in Chinese for a few seconds. She listens...and then nods to the President

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

Mr Premier go fuck yourself

He hangs up the phone, and looks around the room

PRESIDENT BARRINGER

I always wanted to do that

INT JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - BUILDING 5 - DAY

We are in a shuttle mission simulator (SMS). Will is in the command seat. Viera is next to him. Bran is in the jumpseat.

CONTINUED:

behind them They are wired up to a set of bio-med leads that read his heart rate and blood pressure. We are in what is obviously a launch simulation

WILL
We have SRB burnout--ready for SRB separation, over.

JUDE (CAP COM) (V.O.)
Roger, Atlantis, out.

Will looks at a small light on the control panel, waiting for it to change from red to green.

WILL
This is Atlantis. I am not reading SRB sep, over.

JUDE (CAP COM) (V.O.)
Roger, Atlantis. We copy We do not have SRB sep.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Medical Technicians are looking at the readouts of Viera and Will's pulse rates and blood pressure. They remain steady, as if absolutely nothing wrong is occurring. Bran's are apoplectic.

INT. COCKPIT - SMS

JUDE (V O.)
Atlantis, we are still showing no SRB sep.

WILL
Roger, still no SRB sep

He casually leans forward On panel marked "C-3," there is a switch that says "SRB sep." He switches it from Auto to Manual. He lifts the cover over the button marked "Sep," and pushes it. All lights turn green.

WILL
Atlantis has SRB sep.

JUDE (V O)
Roger, Atlantis, we copy

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

The technicians are staring at Will's 60-beat-per-second pulse rate

INT. COCKPIT - SMS

Viera reaches near Will to adjust two overhead switches He becomes aware of her presence, just inches from him

INT. CONTROL ROOM

We see Will's heart rate increasing noticeably

INT AIR-BEARING FLOOR - BUILDING 9

This is a large square elevated floor that has hundreds of holes in it. Air is forced up through the holes. When someone is suspended over the floor, they become something like a human air hockey puck. It is used to help people learn how to use the large manned maneuvering unit (MMU). .the large white backpack-like device that has small jets which allow astronauts to fly untethered from the spacecraft during an EVA maneuver.

Bran is hanging from cables and pulleys over the air-bearing floor. He is trying to learn how to use the MMU. He over-reacts and goes out of control. Technicians duck as he sails over them, everybody scrambling. He is terrified. Cole is not pleased. He barks instructions to Bran. Will is off to the side...he smiles.. and gently tries to encourage Bran

TELEVISION SCREEN

LARRY KING is talking to a group of scientists

KING

What I want to know is why the six pieces of that thing or fragments as they're called ..are being allowed to fall and hit us without any effort to stop them. Isn't it true that millions of people could die if these things hit a populated area?

SCIENTIST

There really is no plan that can prevent the earlier impacts. We can only hope the effects will be localized, and confined to unpopulated areas. Everything that NASA is doing is concentrated on trying to stop the comet nucleus from hitting That would be a cataclysm

TELEVISION SCREEN

Walter Jacob of CNN is talking

WALTER JACOB

Civil defense shelters all across America are being re-activated and stocked, as people are starting to prepare for the impacts. Supermarkets are running out of food in some areas. There have been sporadic reports of looting

INT JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - NIGHT

Bran is drilling getting into his pressure suit, with a crew of technicians rushing around him. He is nervous, trying to remember everything. He makes a mistake on a hose coupling

CONTINUED:

BRAN

Shit, fuck, shit, fuck

We can see some of the technicians starting to get edgy Will comes over to him

WILL

Listen ..if you're going to go up on my ship, and I've got to stay on the ground, the least you can do is learn how to dress for it. You take this hose and you put it here, and twist, like that. Got it?

Bran tries it a second time...and it works He smiles a relieved smile at Will.

INT. GYM

Will is lifting weights The only other astronaut in the room is Viera. They try not to look at each other. Will can't resist sneaking a glance at her in the mirror He catches her looking at him. She immediately looks away. They continue with their weights.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - CAPE CANAVERAL, FLORIDA - NIGHT

Everybody is working 24 hours a day, as three shuttles are being prepared at the same.

INT. VEHICLE ASSEMBLY BUILDING

The VAB is the largest building by volume in the world. In fact, it has been known to rain inside the building. Discovery is in the late stages of the "stacking" operation whereby the shuttle is mated to its twin Titan 2-C solid rocket boosters and the enormous E tank.

INT ORBITER PROCESSING FACILITY (OPF)

Endeavor and Atlantis are being readied for stacking. Lew Bondy is walking through the OPF. .watching the proceedings. He is with Tarnauer and the Secretary of Defense

BONDY

It takes thirty thousand people to get a single shuttle ready for launch There are over six million parts to check We have to get three of them ready at the same time

BURR

Are you really going to be able to do it?

BONDY

I think so God, I hope so

BURR

Is there anything more that you need?

CONTINUED:

TARNAUER

I'll tell you what we need. We need those goddamn bombs from the Russians. We're sucking air without them. Can't you give them Alaska or something?

EXT. RUNWAY - KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - DAY

An enormous Ilyushin IL-76 cargo jet touches down on the runway, its tires making puffs of smoke.

EXT TARMAC - KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - DAY

A large group of NASA technicians, military, and state department brass are waiting on the tarmac as the huge aircraft comes to a stop. Bran and all of the astronauts are there, along with Tarnauer.

The cargo doors open, and a large contingent of Russian military, accompanied by a large security squad, slowly walk down the ramp. They are escorting the two warheads, which are rolled off in sealed containers like giant sarcophagi. An American security squad falls in around the Russian contingent.

BRAN

Shit...I was there once. I liked Alaska.

BONDY

Don't worry. we've got all our states. I'm afraid we gave up a lot more to get the warheads.

Two cosmonauts have arrived with the Russian contingent. They are walking with security people.

BONDY

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, those two are Alexei Arbatov and Ivgeny Schmulevich. You are going to get to know them really well, because Arbatov is going to fly on Endeavor with the bombs.

TIVERZIN

They are KGB. I know who they are. They have been through cosmonaut training; however, they have never flown.

BONDY

We know all that. It turns out the Russian high command has refused to give us the firing codes for the bombs. They've given the warheads on the sole stipulation that their man goes along as a payload specialist to handle the detonation.

WILL

This is pretty stupid.

CONTINUED:

BONDY

It may be, except we need the warheads

COLE

This is only adding one more liability to the mission

(motioning to Bran)

Things are shaky enough with wonderboy here . except at least he does something

BONDY

Well, he's got the firing codes, and nothing works without them. Once you're up there, if he gives them to you, you can throw him out the door as far as I'm concerned.

The astronauts glare at the two cosmonauts, who are in the middle of the thermonuclear funeral cortege.

I MINUS 3 WEEKS

EXT HOUSTON - SUNSET

The silhouette of Will against the orange sky is seen jogging by himself. We hear his breathing...and the rhythmical slapping of his running shoes on the road. His shadow stretches out in front of him. He sees another shadow appear next to his, and looks beside him. Viera falls into step next to him. They run together without saying a word. We hear both of them breathing. We hear the sounds of both of their bodies. Viera peels off onto another path. Will stops. He sees her retreating body. Behind him, a large and extremely bright light is in the sky. It is surrounded by a coma, almost the size of the moon. An obvious tail emanates from it, getting wider as it nears the earth. We can see six other faint, star-like components with what look like tails emanating from them.

TELEVISION SCREEN

We hear the theme from "Nightline" and TED KOPPEL's face fills the screen.

KOPPEL

Good evening. It is strange sitting here and talking to an audience that may not be around three weeks from now.

CITY STREETS - NIGHT

KOPPEL (V O)

There has been a growing panic across the country. The National Guard has been patrolling streets in some urban areas with tanks and humvees.

JAMMED FREEWAYS

KOPPEL (V.O.)

The roads out of many cities are jammed.
People are hoarding food and survival
equipment. Gun sales are at an all-time
high

INT. FERRARI DEALERSHIP

KOPPEL (V.O.)

People are looking for instant
gratification

A man is standing by a gleaming, red Testerosa convertible. He
is talking to the camera.

MAN

If I've got three weeks, I'm going to
spend them tooling around in this

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS

A group of college students are facing the camera.

KOPPEL (V.O.)

Attendance at college classes has
virtually stopped.

STUDENT #1

What's the point? Why do I have to learn
stuff I'm never going to get a chance to
use?

STUDENT #2

I'd rather spend the time getting laid.

INT. SINGLES BAR

There is a couple sitting at the bar, looking at the camera.

KOPPEL (V.O.)

The same thing has happened with the sale
of condoms.

WOMAN IN BAR

Somehow or other, a meaningful
relationship doesn't seem so important

INT. NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE

KOPPEL (V.O.)

The bottom is starting to fall out of the
stock market. People are buying gold and
silver. Currency markets all over the
world are in a shambles

EXT. SAINT PETER'S SQUARE

KOPPEL (V O)

The Pope is holding Masses to record
crowds. Attendance in church and temples
all over the world is at all-time levels
Some of the answers have come from voices
outside established religion.

CATHEDRAL OF GOD - ATLANTA - NIGHT

The Reverend Jimmy Buell is in splendid form The Cathedral is
jammed with a rabid following

One thing that we notice is that a number of people in the
audience are wearing black robes and have shaved their heads.
Most of them are young. Buell turns and points a finger at the
camera. He shouts:

REVEREND BUELL

You can't run! You can't hide! Because
you're trying to run and hide from God!
And now what do we have? We got some
people who call themselves scientists. We
got some people from NASA. They think
they can change God's will. They're gonna
try to fly up, intercept God's will. Let
me tell you something:
N A...S...A...think of it You take
those letters, you add a T...what have you
got? Satan!

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

Thousands of black-robed, shaved-head followers of Buell are
protesting in front of The White House

REVEREND BUELL

This act of human arrogance will be
punished and will damn us all! It must be
stopped!

EXT TIMES SQUARE - NIGHT

Thousands more of the black-robed young people are chanting in
the streets, imploring people to throw down their sinful ways,
and give themselves to God

REVEREND BUELL (V O)

You cannot escape His wrath!

EXT. LAUNCH PAD 39-A - KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - DAY

REVEREND BUELL (V O)

Those who try are doomed to burn in the
eternal hellfire!

Discovery's three massive main engines ignite, followed by the
ignition of the two solid boosters Six million pounds of thrust
lifts Discovery past the gantry

EXT LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER - KSC - DAY

The families of the astronauts are on the roof of the building.
Discovery is on its way Everybody is cheering

LAUNCH CONTROL (V O)

We have liftoff at fourteen minutes after
the hour The tower has been cleared, and
all engines look good Commander Caldwell
reports all systems are nominal, all
lights are green.

TELEVISION SCREEN

The image of Discovery starting its pitch and roll program is on
CNN.

CNN COMMENTATOR (V O.)

Bright Angel Intercept has begun The
crew of Discovery Edward Caldwell, pilot
Alan Laboe, and mission specialists Chris
Loper and Shirley Pickett will rendezvous
with the first of the MX SRBs.

EXT. SECURITY GATE - KSC - DAY

It is now heavily guarded. A group of black-robed protesters
with shaved heads stand outside, watching the distant flare of
Discovery. We see the back of their shaved heads, as they are
staring up at the retreating pinpoint of light

BAIKONUR COSMODROME - RUSSIA - NIGHT

A monster energy booster ignites and streaks into the night sky

CNN COMMENTATOR (V.O)

A few hours ago, the first Russian energy
rocket brought the SRB into low orbit
Discovery will use its remote manipulator
system arm to recover it, and then move to
a higher orbit and rendezvous with the MIR
Space Station With impact less than
three weeks away, Bright Angel Intercept
has begun.

EVA SIMULATOR, SONNY CARTER TRAINING CENTER - JSC - NIGHT

The simulator is a gigantic pool 200 feet by 100 feet...40 feet
deep, of crystal clear water. The astronauts float in their
bulky pressure suits attended by teams of divers

This is the closest they can come to weightlessness while they
are wearing their bulky EVA suits There is a mock-up of the
cargo bay and the warheads in the pool Bran is trying with
limited success, to get the hang of using tools in zero G. The
problem is, when you turn a wrench, the wrench turns you the
other way. Will patiently guides Bran, showing him how to do it
We can see the exasperation on the faces of the technicians We
can also see the growing exhaustion There are some technicians
who are actually asleep on the floor near the pool

INT HALLWAY - MISSION SIM BUILDING - JSC - NIGHT

Two technicians are asleep on a couch. There is a clock which has been put up in each of the buildings. It reads: "Impact Minus 10 Days 14 Hours 12 Minutes 37 Seconds "

INT JSC - MISSION SIM BUILDING - DAY

The astronauts are walking out of the building, into the glaring sun and depressive humidity of Houston, after a training session. There is now a large and semi-hysterical contingent of reporters waiting outside. Television cameras are recording their every move. Questions are shouted out. The press is being restrained by a fairly large security contingent.

Suddenly one man breaks through the crowd. He is in front of Stuart Cole before anyone has a chance to see the small black gun in his hand. The gunshots sound like fire crackers ..four of them in rapid succession. Cole has an almost quizzical look on his face as the blood spurts from his bullet-riddled chest. He is dead before he hits the ground. The security people are on the man in an instant, wrestling him to the ground. In the struggle, his hair is pulled off .. revealing a shaved head. There is pandemonium. We can hear him ranting

ASSASSIN

I am God's hands...doing God's work. You must accept God's will and repent.

EMT crews are pushing through the crowd that is screaming and scattering in different directions. Will is spattered with Stuart Cole's blood. He is kneeling down, cradling Cole's head. He knows there is nothing he can do. The pool of blood around Cole's body is widening. He looks up at Viera, who stares back at him.

INT. MISSION SIM BUILDING - JSC

The building is empty. We see the shuttle simulator brightly lit by the harsh ceiling lights.

INT FLIGHT DECK - SHUTTLE SIMULATOR

Will is sitting in the command seat of the flight deck simulator. His feet are up on the console, and his arms are folded across his chest. He is alone and he clearly wants to be. Viera climbs up the ladder from the mid-deck, and sits down next to Will. She doesn't say anything.

WILL

I wanted to go. I wanted to go so badly
my teeth ached

(pause)

Not this way. Not this way.

VIERA

I understand

CONTINUED:

WILL

I don't get it Stuart Cole didn't have a bad bone in his body. . and he was risking all of them to try to save everybody . and then some fucking misfit who couldn't get a date in high school wanted fifteen minutes of fame...I just don't get it

VIERA

You're the commander now

WILL

It shouldn't have been this way.

VIERA

Valery ..my husband, has come to Houston to be with me for the last few days.

WILL

That's good . that's really good. You should be with your husband.

Viera gets up from her seat and moves behind Will. There is a moment when we don't know what she will do. She puts her hand on his shoulder.

VIERA

We have such wonderful timing, you and I

WILL

That's our story.

VIERA

You had to be so noble, because you were married

WILL

Now you have to be

She starts to move her hand toward his cheek She turns and lowers herself down the ladder Will is by himself again.

I MINUS FOUR DAYS

TELEVISION SCREEN

The image on the screen is of urban rioting. We hear the wail of sirens

PAD 39B - KSC - DAY

Endeavor, looking like a green mutation without its ceramic tiles, thunders to life The main engines ignite, and then the SRBs and the gigantic display of raw power begins

INT. SEACORD HOUSE - HOUSTON, TEXAS - DAY

Claire and Loretta are sitting on the floor in front of the television, watching the liftoff. Corey in her nurse's uniform is sitting on the couch. You can see them clenching their fists and willing the spacecraft upward, right through the TV tube.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)

We have liftoff ..we have liftoff at twenty-seven minutes after the hour. Endeavor is beginning its pitch and roll program. all systems are go. all lights are green

CNN COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

Endeavor is on her way and now all eyes turn to the race against time to get Atlantis out to the pad and ready in less than forty-eight hours. This has never been done before.

Claire stares at the television, and then turns to her mother.

CLAIRE

Mom...I want to go to Florida and see Dad take off.

COREY

That's out of the question. All the coastal areas are being evacuated. Besides, it's getting crazy out there.

CLAIRE

I'm his good luck. I have to go

LORETTA

I want to go too

COREY

I understand. It just can't happen now. Loretta, your parents are coming this afternoon to take you back to Arizona. You know that.

(pause)

I'm sorry. I know how you both feel. Listen, I have to go to the hospital. They need everybody they can get. I won't be back too late.

She hugs Claire and Loretta

COREY

There's all kinds of food that's bad for you in the refrigerator

She closes the door and is gone. Claire looks at Loretta.

CLAIRE

I'm his good luck. He told me

INT. BUS STATION - HOUSTON

The terminal is mobbed with people carrying as much as they possibly can. Cartons, duffel bags, old suitcases, anything lashed together with twine or rope. Claire and Loretta are at the ticket window, in front of an elderly man.

TICKET SELLER

Let me get this straight. You kids want to go to Florida? Everybody's trying to get the hell out.

CLAIRE

Is this enough money for two tickets?

TICKET SELLER

Yes, it's enough. You sure you know what you're doing?

CLAIRE

Yes, I'm sure.

The man shrugs and he gives them the tickets.

TICKET SELLER

It's your life.

They walk away from the ticket window.

CLAIRE

You don't have to do this, you know.

LORETTA

I know.

INT. VAB - KSC

Atlantis is now upright in its stacked position. It is attached to the orange E-tank, and the two SRBs are in place.

The two warheads are being lowered into the cargo cradle which is designed to hold them firmly in place in the payload bay.

TECHNICIAN #1

This cradle's at least ten centimeters off! There is too much play! It's too loose!

BEN GENTLING, the Launch Supervisor, is one level below. He screams up at them.

BEN GENTLING

What are you talking about? It's got to fit.

TECHNICIAN #1

Somebody measured wrong. I don't think you want two hundred megatons bouncing around in there.

CONTINUED:

BEN GENTLING
Find whoever made this mistake...and I
want him killed

TECHNICIAN #1
Then what?

A quiet technician, who has been listening to the conversation,
turns to Technician #1.

TECHNICIAN #2
Why don't you try peanuts?

TECHNICIAN #1
Peanuts?

TECHNICIAN #2
Styrofoam peanuts Pack the whole payload
bay with them

TECHNICIAN #1
These are nuclear warheads, not a VCR.

BEN GENTLING
Get the goddamn peanuts!

Everybody looks at him.

BEN GENTLING
You heard me ..get the goddamn peanuts!
Now!

EXT. VEHICLE ASSEMBLY BUILDING

A convoy of trucks filled with Styrofoam peanuts arrives at the
VAB.

INT. BUS STATION - LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA

Claire is on a pay telephone

CLAIRE
I know how mad you are, Mom. I don't
blame you I just have to go. Listen,
Loretta wants her parents to know that
she's really sorry too

INT. SEACORD HOUSE

We see Loretta's parents are standing next to Corey. They all
look about as distraught as parents can possibly look Bob Saito
picks up the telephone

BOB SAITO
Claire, this Bob Saito I want you to put
Loretta on Immediately

INT BUS STATION

CLAIRE
I love you too, Mom.

She hangs up the phone and turns to Loretta

CLAIRE
It's cool No problem. Let's go, they're
boarding

I MINUS THREE DAYS

EXT. MONTAGE VARIOUS SKYLINES - DAWN
NEW YORK - PARIS - CAIRO - MOSCOW - SYDNEY

Spectacular meteorite showers are punctuating the dark sky. The fragments with their wedge-shaped tails pointing away from the sun are distinct. We can almost detect motion Bright Angel itself has a tail that is sweeping nearly 180 degrees across the sky We can see the blue of the ion gasses as well as the yellow dust tail It looks like the Milky Way with a bluish streak running through it.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER

The Atlantis, fully stacked, rolls out toward pad 39A on the Crawler, the largest land vehicle in the world.

INT. HOUSTON INTERCONTINENTAL AIRPORT

It is a madhouse Babies are crying People going berserk over canceled flights. Everybody carrying all their possessions. It looks like Ellis Island at the turn of the century.

Corey and Mrs. Saito are trying to find an open ticket counter Most are closed Enormous numbers of flights are listed as canceled. Corey finds a harried-looking Airline Representative who has been beseiged by everyone

COREY
I have to get to Orlando Please, it's
very important

AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE
I'm sorry there's been a federal curfew
on all flights into coastal cities The
last flight is leaving in about twenty
minutes

COREY
I have to get on that flight

AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE
Ma'am that flight is full It's way
overbooked You couldn't even get on the
wing

COREY
What gate is it leaving from?

CONTINUED:

AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE

D-24.

COREY

Thanks.

Corey turns and starts to hurry away.

AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE

Don't waste your time.

GATE D-24

The boarding line is slowly being swallowed by the jetway. Corey is running and pushing her way through the crowd. The Saitos are trying to keep up.

COREY

Please! I've got five hundred dollars. I'll give it to anybody who'll give me their seat. Take my watch. It's made of pure something or other.

People are pushing by her, ignoring everything she's saying.

Suddenly, she jumps on top of the counter next to the ticket agent, and screams:

COREY

Look, Goddamnit! I'm Will Seacord's wife. You know...Will Seacord? The astronaut? He's going into space tomorrow to save your goddamn asses, and I need to get to the space center to be there for the launch!

People stop to stare at her now. The first officer--in his white shirt.. and three-striped epaulets--is passing the counter. He turns to her.

FIRST OFFICER

Ma'am.. are you really Will Seacord's wife?

She jumps off the counter, fumbles for her wallet, and shows him her driver's license.

FIRST OFFICER

There's a jump seat in the cockpit. It's against FAA regulations, then again who cares now? There's no movie 'cept it'll get you there

COREY

Oh, my God, thank you

She turns to the Saitos

CONTINUED:

COREY
I'll find the girls*

TELEVISION SCREEN

Footage depicting the various scenes as described.

CNN COMMENTATOR

The first two fragments of Saito-Wolfe are scheduled to hit just before midnight tonight. There is looting and scattered rioting in many cities. Two million Muslims have crowded into Mecca to pray. Prayer services are being held in sports arenas and stadiums all over the country. Tens of thousands have gathered in the desert, saying that the Rapture is at hand. The North American Aerospace Command is tracking all the fragments in order to plot and anticipate their trajectory. Despite these efforts, we have been told to expect little warning as to the location of the fragments' impacts. All military forces have been mobilized to provide aid and security to the affected areas. One hour ago, President Barringer addressed the nation, appealing for calm, cooperation and strength. He then returned to the White House, refusing to seek refuge in the command bunkers built during the Cold War to withstand nuclear attacks, insisting that the Vice President go there to assure the continuity of government should it become necessary. The world can do nothing now except brace for the onslaught of the first two fragments.

I MINUS 66 HOURS

MIDNIGHT - BEIJING

The blue and yellow tail of Fragment A undulates from the horizon into the night sky. The tails of the other fragments off in the distance. The coma of the nucleus is much bigger and brighter than the moon. The first fragment is clearly moving. It looks almost like a flaming arrow shot from some heavenly quiver. Tens of thousands of people are crowded in the forbidden city, standing silently together. They see the fragment streak downward and disappear just over the horizon. There is a pause. Then there is a horrible blinding flash. The ground trembles.

INT CALTECH

The main seismometer at Caltech starts to go crazy. A group of people are huddled around, watching the needle lurch from side to side, and then slowly subside.

INT OVAL OFFICE

The President, along with Secretary Burr and other advisors, are watching two televisions. One is a closed circuit hookup to Kennedy Launch Control. The other is displaying CNN. Secretary Burr is on the telephone. We can see Ben Gentling at Launch Control, with a telephone in his hand.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Caltech says the impact point is in Sichuan province about four hundred miles northwest of Chongqing. Very little news is coming out of that area. We have no idea how bad it is.

On the television screen displaying CNN, is the hand-held telephoto video shot taken from Discovery as they are flying over the impact site. It shows a tumorous pall over a vast area, shot through with the orange glow of hellish ground fires.

PICKET (V O)

From up here, the fire looks like it's more than five hundred miles across. It's really big.

Like the eye of a hurricane, a malevolent fiery center glows with the fragment ripped deep into the earth's crust. Everybody in the Oval Office is speechless.

TELEVISION SCREEN

CNN COMMENTATOR

The reports of the second strike are now confirmed. It appears to have hit in Antarctica. We are still not getting much information from China about the results of the first impact.

SUPERDOME - NEW ORLEANS

Over a hundred thousand people are jammed into the stadium. Jimmy Buell is on a podium that is draped in white satin, and situated on the 50-yard line.

REVEREND BUELL

Oh, we were warned. We were warned, for two times ten centuries. Did we listen? No! We did not listen! And now the hellfire has begun to fall!

EXT KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - MAIN GATE

There is absolute chaos around the gate. Press and VIP visitors have to pass through an enormous crowd. There are well-wishers, and there are a lot of black-robed shaved-headed followers of Jimmy Buell. Security is so strong it looks like Marshall Law has been declared.

EXT COCOA BEACH - NIGHT

The streets are ominously empty. There is an occasional speeding car; however, basically, it is a ghost town. A sign in front of a deserted hotel reads God Speed Atlantis. A Trailways Bus drives by.

INT BUS - NIGHT

Claire and Loretta are the last two people on the bus. They look out the window at this eerie sight.

EXT. BUS STATION - NIGHT

The bus pulls into the station. Its brakes hissing. The station is locked and deserted.

BUS DRIVER

Looks like we're the last three people left. Everybody must know something we don't.

The girls stare out the window.

BUS DRIVER

I don't feel too good leaving you kids alone here. Is there someplace I can drop you that's close by. because I gotta tell you...I'm getting as far inland as I possibly can.

CLAIRE

We have to go to the Kennedy Space Center.

BUS DRIVER

That's toward the water.. not away from it.

CLAIRE

I understand. Let us off here. and we'll walk.

The bus driver shakes his head and sighs, as he puts the bus in gear and starts driving off with Claire and Loretta.

EXT. MAIN GATE - KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - NIGHT

The crowd is so big near the Visitors Center that the bus actually can't get too near. The driver opens the door, and the two girls jump out.

BUS DRIVER

You sure you girls know what you're doing?

CLAIRE

Yes. thank you. Thank you very much.

The driver closes the door, turns the big bus around and starts heading inland. Claire pulls Loretta alongside of her, and they

CONTINUED:

push and shove their way through the frantic crowd. Claire finally gets to the security shack. Everybody is shouting at the security guards. Claire tugs on the arm of one of them, and shouts:

CLAIRE
I'm Claire Seacord...Will Seacord's daughter.

SECURITY GUARD #1
What?

CLAIRE
(screaming)
I'm Will Seacord's daughter!

SECURITY GUARD #1
Of course you are, honey.

He starts to turn away and deal with some other people, when the second security guard looks at the two girls. He comes over to them.

SECURITY GUARD #2
Aren't you Loretta Saito?

LORETTA
Yes! Yes, I am.

SECURITY GUARD #2
I just saw you on TV.

EXT. SKY

The sky glows with the faint, unholy aura of Frag C and D's comet tails as they interact with the upper atmosphere. The earth is passing through the tails of the next two fragments which look like they're going to hit in a matter of hours.

INT. OVAL OFFICE

Secretary Burr is again on the phone with Gentling at Kennedy. He can see him through the closed-circuit monitor.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
Radar tracking is showing that one of the fragments will fall somewhere in the southeast. It could hit land. You boys better get that thing up before it does.

PRESIDENT BARRINGER
(whispering)
Jesus Christ

EXT. PAD 39A - CAPE KENNEDY - NIGHT

Atlantis sits bathed in powerful spotlights. Ice Crew CHIEF FORD RAINES is in the gantry structure, inspecting the spacecraft.

CONTINUED:

The ice crew are volunteers who are the last people to leave, reporting any physical problems they see to the launch center.

INT. CREW QUARTERS - NIGHT

Will, Viera, Bran, Kunetka, McCusky and Arbatov are sitting at a long table eating the traditional breakfast of steak and eggs. We can hear the forks scraping on the plate. Nobody seems to know what to say Bran looks like a condemned man.

BRAN

(to Will)

Is this the worst part? Knowing that this could be your last meal on earth?

WILL

No. This isn't the worst part

Bran looks like he's going to have a heart attack.

BRAN

What? What's worse?

KUNETKA

The diapers.

BRAN

The diapers? What diapers?

KUNETKA

The diapers we all put on under our pressure suits.

BRAN

I'm not wearing diapers I stopped when I was two.

WILL

Lying on your back for five hours... you'll be very glad you're wearing them.

Bran stares at Viera and everybody else. They remain straight-faced.

BRAN

I got a grandfather in Scottsdale he wears diapers.

Bran looks at the glass of water next to him. He picks it up, and starts to drink He stops as soon as the glass reaches his lips, and puts it down Will tries not to smile A man named LEWIS enters

LEWIS

Commander Seacord your daughter is outside

Will jumps from the table

INT. CORRIDOR - CREW QUARTERS - NIGHT

Will runs out the door and sees Claire. He embraces her fiercely. He is moved to tears.

CLAIRE

I hate launches

WILL

I know.

CLAIRE

I figured you could use the luck.

He looks at her. He sees the fear in her eyes

WILL

It's going to be okay, honey. I promise.

CLAIRE

Dad?

WILL

What?

CLAIRE

Kill that thing. Just knock it the fuck away. Okay?

WILL

Okay.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER - NIGHT

It looks like Mission Control. Houston doesn't take control until the shuttle is launched. Gentling enters the LCC.

EXT. CREW QUARTERS BUILDING - NIGHT

Corey rushes into a glassed-off area where people and the press are waiting for the astronauts to exit and enter the crew van. She finds Claire and Loretta. She runs over and hugs them, and starts to cry.

CLAIRE

I had to be here, Mom.

COREY

I'm too relieved to be angry

Loretta notices that, among the backup astronauts who are in the area is Ivgeny Schmulevich, who is speaking in Russian to another unidentified man

There is an enormous commotion as the crew exits the building. Bathed in the glare of video lights, they walk the gauntlet of the assembled press, and are barraged by a thousand strobes. Unlike the smiling, thumbs-up jauntiness of the past, Will sets a grimmer tone. He is all business.

CONTINUED:

He is almost through the short gauntlet when he sees Claire and Corey behind a glass wall with a bunch of VIPs. He walks over to the glass, and the photographers have to shuffle out of his way. This is not part of the usual ceremony. No astronaut has ever done this. Will locks eyes with Corey, and puts his hand on the glass. She raises hers on the other side of the glass, and their hands are pressed together. Will puts his other hand on the glass, and Claire does the same thing. Will smiles at Claire, and then he turns and leads his team into the back of the van that will take them out to their spacecraft.

INT VAN - NIGHT

Everyone is stoic except for Bran, who is watching the shuttle loom larger and larger

EXT PAD 39A - NIGHT

The crew gets out of the bus. It is the first time Bran really has gotten a look at the size of the whole thing. He cranes his neck up. It's like looking up at the World Trade Center. The crew is led into the elevator, and they start to go up the gantry.

INT ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Bran is close to hyperventilating

BRAN

God. .this thing's big.

WILL

Relax. You're about to go through an experience which most people think is completely routine.

BRAN

If it's so goddamn safe, how come nobody is allowed within three miles of here?

KUNETKA

Twentieth floor .men's sportswear, bridal apparel.

EXT 195-FOOT LEVEL - NIGHT

The crew steps out of the open cage elevator and walks into the entry room

INT ENTRY ROOM - NIGHT

Six members of the STRAP-IN TEAM go to work. They help the astronauts lock down their helmets and put their chute packs on their backs

INT FLIGHT DECK - ATLANTIS - NIGHT

Will and Kunetka are strapped in the two pilot seats in front. Will sits in the left seat as the Commander. Kunetka sits in the right seat as the Pilot. There are two seats in the back of the flight deck. Viera sits in the right-hand seat, as the Mission Specialist. Bran is strapped into the left seat, as the Payload Specialist. Arbatov and McCusky are strapped in the mid-deck seat, below the flight deck.

This sequence of everybody being strapped in, is INTERCUT with EXTERIOR SHOTS of the flood-lit Atlantis on the pad, Launch Control at KSC, and Mission Control in Houston. There is also a steady stream of dialog between Launch Control and Will, as Will and Kunetka are doing their pre-flight check.

GENTLING (V.O.)

Atlantis, be advised winds are gusting twenty-five knots and may cause problems

WILL

Atlantis is advised . and doesn't give a shit.

EXT ROOF - LCC - DAWN

Claire, Corey, and Loretta have made their way up to the roof of the LCC to watch with the other VIPs and their families. Valery is there, as well as Schmulevich. The sky is just beginning to show its pre-dawn glow. The meteor shower is getting stronger, and the terrifying tails of the inbound fragments are brighter. The coma of Bright Angel is angry and large. and the tail is streaking across the entire sky.

EXT. VISITORS STAND - DAWN

The stands are completely filled. Thousands more watch from parked cars outside the grounds.

EXT PAD 39A - DAWN

The liquid oxygen vapor which normally wafts downward is being blown straight to the left by the strong winds. The sky is fiery red behind the silhouette of the gantry.

INT LAUNCH CONTROL - DAWN

Gentling looks up at the clock. It says T Minus 10 Minutes.

INT MISSION CONTROL - HOUSTON

Lew Bondy is standing in the middle of Mission Control. The clock reads T Minus 9 Minutes.

BONDY

Launch Control, this is Houston. We are go for launch.

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

Will flips a switch marked "Event Timer" to the Start Position

WILL
Launch Control, this is Atlantis. Event
Timer started, over.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V O)
Roger, Atlantis Automatic ground launch
sequencer started.

Bran is nearly paralyzed with fear We can hear loud crackling
sounds from outside the spacecraft.

BRAN
What's that?

WILL
It's ice from the liquid oxygen

BRAN
Is that bad or good?

KUNETKA
You're sitting on top of four million
pounds of fuel and two nuclear warheads.
And you're worried about ice?

BRAN
What if something goes wrong?

KUNETKA
If something goes wrong--and I stress
if--then you release your shoulder
restraint and lean forward as far as you
possibly can..
(pause)
...and kiss your ass good-bye

WILL
Aren't you glad you're wearing diapers?

INT LAUNCH CONTROL

Raines comes running over to Gentling

RAINES
We've got a problem. We have an ice
buildup that's going to foul the
retraction of one of the cryo-booms

GENTLING
We're past the nine-minute mark If I
stop the clock now, I have to scrub the
mission Are you copying this, Houston?

BONDY (V O)
We're copying it here Fragment D is
about to impact any minute We may never
be able to launch again

CONTINUED:

GENTLING

If those booms don't retract it could
tear the thing apart on the pad

RAINES

Don't stop the clock! I'll get some guys,
and we'll chip the ice off.

Raines takes off in a sprint.

EXT. LAUNCH CONTROL BUILDING - DAWN

Raines and two men peel out in a NASA car, and go roaring off
toward the pad.

EXT. PAD 39A - DAWN

Raines and his men race out of the car after it has come to a
screeching skidding stop, and head for the elevator.

INT LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER - DAWN

LAUNCH WEATHER OFFICER

The winds are up to thirty knots. This is
getting really hairy.

GENTLING

Go for a walk or something.

The clock on the wall reads T Minus 6 Minutes.

EXT GANTRY - PAD 39A - DAWN

Raines and his two men are almost 200 feet in the air, looking
down at the nose of Atlantis. They're on a spindly open walkway.
The wind is howling. We can see the buildup of ice around the
cryo-boom Just standing on the walkway in this gale is
dangerous enough; however, the three of them are leaning over
with what look like chisels, chipping away at the ice

INT. ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

WILL

Launch Control, this is Atlantis.
Pre-start complete, powering up APUs,
over

KUNETKA

(to Bran)

Now, when you get up there, and you look
down, you may be in for a bit of a
surprise All the countries really aren't
different colors

INT LAUNCH CONTROL

Clock on the wall reads T Minus 5 Minutes

CONTINUED:

LAUNCH CONTROL
We copy, Atlantis.

EXT GANTRY

Gentling and his men are starting to make some headway. They can hear over the howling winds that the giant spacecraft is starting to come to life.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER

We can see the veins bulging in Gentling's temples.

EXT. ATLANTIS

The giant aero surfaces--that are like an airplane's ailerons--start to move

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
Atlantis, this is Launch Control.
Hydraulic check complete

WILL (V O.)
Roger, out.

EXT. GANTRY

Raines and his men are desperately chipping away at the ice, and trying at the same time not to be blown off the gantry.

EXT ATLANTIS

The three massive main engines slowly start to swivel as they are being adjusted.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL

GENTLING
Atlantis, this is ground control, main
engine gimbal complete

The clock on the wall reads T Minus 3 Minutes.

WILL (V O)
Roger, out

GENTLING
Jesus Christ. get the hell out of there!

EXT GANTRY

Raines is frantically chipping away at the ice. He turns to his two men and screams:

RAINES
I want you guys to go Now!

CONTINUED:

The two men start to leave to get to the edge of the thin walkway. They look at each other. They run back. They all start chipping away at the ice.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - ATLANTIS

GENTLING (V.O.)
Atlantis, 02 vents closed, looks good,
over.

WILL
Roger, ground, out

EXT. GANTRY

Raines and his men are flailing away at the last piece of ice.

RAINES
(screaming)
C'mon, you sonofabitch!

INT LAUNCH CONTROL

Gentling is staring at the clock. It says T Minus 2 Minutes.

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

WILL
Control, this is Atlantis. APU to
inhibit, over

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL

GENTLING
Roger, we copy, Atlantis. H2 tank
pressurization okay. You are go for
launch, over.

Gentling winces when he says this

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

WILL
Roger, we are go for launch my favorite
words.

EXT GANTRY

The last piece of ice is blasted away by Raines and his men.

RAINES
Go for the basket! Go! Go!!

They scramble through the gantry and reach the yellow escape baskets. They each jump in one and pull levers which release them. The baskets are attached to cables that stretch from 200 feet up the gantry all the way to the ground, about a quarter of a mile away. It would look like a fabulous ride in an amusement park if your life didn't depend on it.

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

Bran is trying to control his breathing Very quietly to himself, he is saying:

BRAN
Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be
thy name

EXT. GANTRY

Raines and his men are in the baskets.. their backs to the ground...as they are practically free-falling down the cables in the dawn light.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL

GENTLING
Atlantis, APU start is go You are on
your onboard computer.

The clock on the wall reads T Minus 25 Seconds.

INT. ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

Will is calmly and methodically scanning all the gauges.

WILL
Roger, out.

EXT GANTRY

There is a large net on the ground that is built to catch baskets. Raines and his men crash through the net There is a second net about 100 feet back for just such an eventuality. It stops the three baskets with a jolt Raines and his men rush to get out. They start to run for the blast wall in front of them.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL

The clock on the wall says T Minus 10 Seconds

GENTLING
T minus ten .

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

GENTLING (V O)
Nine

EXT GANTRY

GENTLING (V O.)
Eight

Raines and his men are approaching the wall

EXT ATLANTIS - MAIN ENGINES

GENTLING (V O)
Seven

CONTINUED:

The three giant engines ignite within three-tenths of a second of each other. The sight and sound and power are truly unbelievable

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

Bran's eyes widen as he feels the thunder beneath him.

GENTLING (V.O.)
Six...five...

INT LAUNCH CONTROL

GENTLING
We have main engine start...
three...two..

EXT. ATLANTIS

GENTLING (V O.)
One ..

K-V-R-O-O-O-M-M!! The titanic solid boosters ignite. The screen is enveloped in fire

GENTLING (V.O.)
Zero. SRB ignition.

Atlantis .all four+ million pounds of her...slowly starts to leave the earth.

GENTLING (V O.)
Liftoff! We have liftoff!

INT. ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

Bran can feel the indescribable power of the explosion underneath him Will is calmly reading every gauge.

EXT GANTRY

Atlantis is 300 feet in the air

GENTLING (V.O.)
The tower has been cleared All engines
look good Instituting roll maneuver

INT. MISSION CONTROL - HOUSTON

Everybody is staring at the large television monitor They are all holding their collective breaths.

EXT LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER - ROOF

Corey, Claire, Loretta, and the entire crowd are all willing Atlantis up and up

EXT MAIN GATES

The thousands of people camped outside are lit in the golden light of the huge pyrotechnical display from Atlantis. They are starting to cheer

INT OVAL OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE

The President and his group are huddled in front of the television set.

EXT TIMES SQUARE

Hundreds of people are gathered around an electronics store, watching the launch on the display televisions.

EXT GANTRY - DAY

Raines and his men have shielded themselves from a sound and blast so powerful, it could literally shatter their skulls. The shuttle is higher now. Raines cannot resist standing up and looking over the blast wall. The heat from the shuttle singes his eyebrows, and bakes his face red. He screams in a kind of primal exaltation. He is trying to push Atlantis skyward.

EXT. CAPE KENNEDY

Atlantis is a magnificent sight, high in the sky now, climbing into the clouds.

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

This is not the interior of a Lincoln town car taking a Sunday drive. The spacecraft is vibrating and shuddering. The roar is deafening. Will is watching the gauges and indicators which are blurred from the shaking.

BRAN

Give us this day, our daily bread

INT MISSION CONTROL - HOUSTON

The Cap Com, JUDE TAYLOR, is sitting at her console

JUDE (CAP COM)

Atlantis, you are looking good

WILL (V.O.)

Roger, Houston, cross winds are yawing us around. More stable now

EXT KENNEDY SPACE CENTER

We are looking down from 30,000 feet. The shuttle is like a bright match at the top of a fleecy pillar, rising straight up out of the cloud deck in the early morning sun

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

JUDE (V.O.)

Atlantis, three at 104, go at throttle up

CONTINUED:

WILL
Roger, go at throttle up.

Bran squeezes his eyes closed in fear.

BRAN
. as we forgive those who trespass
against us

There is a loud boom...and a concussive lurch. Bran cries out in panic.

EXT. ATLANTIS

We see the SRBs falling away as they burn out, tumbling back toward Earth. as the shuttle pushes on, its main engine at full throttle.

INT. ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

WILL
Houston, this is Atlantis We have SRB
sep, over

JUDE (V.O.)
Roger, Atlantis, we copy SRB set.

EXT. LAUNCH CONTROL - ROOF

Claire, Loretta, and Corey are all hugging each other.

INT. OVAL OFFICE

The President can't stop his leg from twitching.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE

The crowd is holding its breath.

INT. ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

All of a sudden, the huge ear-pounding rumble stops.

JUDE (V O)
Atlantis, we show Main Engine Cut-Off

WILL
Roger, Houston, we copy Mecos

EXT ATLANTIS

The huge engines have shut down

JUDE (V O)
Atlantis, you are go for ET separation

With a giant clang and a lurch, the orbiter separates from the now-empty external tank. It tumbles slowly away behind the ship.

INT MISSION CONTROL - HOUSTON

JUDE (V.O.)
 Atlantis, you are looking good You are
 go for orbit.

Mission Control erupts in wild cheering.

EXT. LAUNCH CONTROL - ROOF

Everybody is cheering and crying. Smoke is slowly swirling over
 their heads

EXT. TIMES SQUARE

The crowd is cheering.

INT. OVAL OFFICE

Even these people cannot resist applauding

PRESIDENT BARRINGER
 (to himself)
 Maybe...just maybe.

EXT GANTRY

Raines and his men are alone now. He is lying on his back, his
 arms and legs spread eagled on the ground, like a child making
 angels in the snow. His face is sunburned He is staring
 straight upward, smiling broadly, in total wonder and complete
 exhilaration.

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

All is silent Bran stares in complete awe, as his tie-down
 straps start to float Looking out the window to his left, he
 sees the great, brilliant blue arc of the earth's horizon

WILL
 Houston, we have MIR rendezvous in one
 point five orbits.

JUDE (V.O.)
 Roger, Atlantis...we show MIR rendezvous
 in one hundred twenty minutes. .mark

BRAN
 (to himself)
 Holy shit I'm .I'm in space

INT MID-DECK

Bran floats straight down the ladder from the flight deck There
 are no windows in the mid-deck . and Bran is immediately hit by
 vertigo He starts to slowly spin He closes his eyes

Viera floats by gracefully and effortlessly She is stowing
 some of the pressure suits Arbatov sees Bran and shoves a
 plastic bag in his hand

CONTINUED:

ARBATOV

Make sure all of your vomit is in the bag...and not floating around.

Arbatov floats away. Bran nods and brings the bag up to his mouth just in time.

VIERA

Find a visual focus point It will orient you.. and you will feel better

Bran nods and tries to catch his breath

VIERA

Most people get sick. Even people who have flown many times.

BRAN

Do you ever get sick?

VIERA

No.

I MINUS 59 HOURS

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - MAIN GATES - MORNING

Corey is trying to get out of the Kennedy Space Center with Claire and Loretta, in her rental. However, it looks like the Fall of Saigon. Huge crowds are swarming in front of impatient drivers. It is mass confusion as people stream away from the launch center

EXT. ATLANTIS

There is the barest of rim light on the spacecraft We see a quick plume of yellow as the OMS engine is fired to correct the orbit. The earth is a giant black disk . blotting out the brilliant star-filled sky.

INT. ATLANTIS

Bran is looking out of the window near Will

BRAN

Are you used to this?

WILL

You never get used to this

EXT ATLANTIS

In the blackness above the earth, the tails of incoming Fragments C and D paint the sky like an Aurora Borealis, from one side to the other

INT. FLIGHT DECK

WILL
We're in the fragment tails now.

BRAN
Look at that! Unbelievable!

Will and the others crowd to the windows.

KUNETKA
That's China

EXT. ATLANTIS

A billion scintillating points of orange light join into a vast carpet...a wild fire, roughly oval in shape, and over 500 miles across. At its center is a single light malevolent ember

What is worse ... Fragments C and D are about to enter the atmosphere.

INT FLIGHT DECK - ATLANTIS

Everyone is speechless.

KUNETKA
Sonofabitch!

EXT. EARTH - DAY

The two comet fragments enter the atmosphere over North America, going bright as suns. They flare into life against the blue of Earth.. flanked by a constellation of tiny, white-hot lines... smaller debris like cosmic buckshot.

NORTHERN MEXICO

Dawn hasn't yet occurred in Northern Mexico. The Sonora Desert and the surrounding wall of the Sierra Madres are just black silhouettes

Suddenly, Fragment C rips into the sky The desert floor and surrounding mountains are bleached by a light brighter than anything we have ever seen.

INT FLIGHT DECK - ATLANTIS

BRAN
Don't look!

Will and the crew shield their eyes with their hands just in time as the glare peaks, 20 times brighter than the sun, searing the interior of the shuttle with a blinding actinic light After a few seconds, feeling the glare die, the crew look out the window

EXT THE EARTH

Below and ahead. coming toward Atlantis over the flank of the planet is a great blazing wound in the earth's skin. It is just at the boundary between light and shadow. The fireball is so bright, it actually illuminates terrain features for what must be hundreds of miles around it. A roiling fireball already 20 miles in diameter grows rapidly, a monstrous dome of hellish orange. The shock front expands like a great soap bubble outward and upward through the stratosphere. Bursting through the top of the fireball, hurled up beyond the normal limits of the atmosphere, is a super-heated geyser of ionized gas and molten rock.

EXT ATLANTIS

As Atlantis is passing over this horrific sight and entering the terminator between night and day we can see this vicious cloud billowing up toward the spacecraft. It is like a beast that has taken a swipe at them, and its arm is just too short.

Ahead of them is Fragment D .shrieking toward the atmosphere, like a fiery bullet ready to inflict another wound in an already bleeding victim

EXT CARIBBEAN

The sun is bright, and the sky a bright blue. And still... everything gets much brighter in a millisecond. Fragment D plunges into the Caribbean. Like a molten fist it punches a huge hole in the ocean, and vaporizes the water in a millisecond

MARSH HARBOR - ABACO ISLAND - BAHAMAS

A small, picturesque tropical paradise where people go to fish, dive, and be unnoticed

The light is so bright that those who are caught outside are burned, and their clothing ignited. In a second, roofs are on fire

EXT CAPE KENNEDY

The crush of people trying to get out of Cape Kennedy pause long enough to see a brilliant fireball squatting on the horizon like a half-risen sun. Then a searing arc-light rips through the top of the fireball, leaping upward in a vertical launch of ionized plasma, like an incandescent blow torch

EXT MARSH HARBOR - ABACO ISLAND

People are staggering out of the burning buildings. They look up in time to see a pale, translucent curtain moving toward them at impossible speed. The bottom of the curtain, where it touches the water, is a brilliant white and straight as a ruler. It stretches from one horizon to the other. It is the mach front of air. It hits the island, snapping trees off at the base. Buildings explode to kindling. Cars and people are blown about like dry leaves

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

The normally stoic Viera, who is looking through a pair of high-powered binoculars, makes an audible gasp. She hands the binoculars to Will

VIERA

Look at the Caribbean!

EXT ATLANTIS

Moving below them is the obscene black flower of the hit. Rimmed in the white of super-heated steam, it opens its petals below them like a leprous rose. Out of its center, a stamen of incandescent gas arrows up toward them like a volcano erupting out of the vast mushroom cloud. The flower is 100,000 feet high, and already 30 miles in diameter. The column of hypersonic gas blasting out of the middle is double that height, tickling the boundary of space.

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

Will can actually see the column of gas and debris changing in perspective as the earth turns toward them. It throws a long shadow across the Caribbean in the early morning sun.

Will's reaction is one of horror. He sees something even worse.

EXT. ATLANTIS

Below them, moving outward from the flower, too slow to see, is a bright silver line. It is an arc as thin and perfect as if etched in glass. The sun is sparkling across the entire gulf in a broad sheen, and this one sharp line of light, bounded by a line of deep blue shadow, moves as slowly and relentlessly as the minute hand of a gas chamber clock.

EXT CARIBBEAN

A 500-foot-long container ship is steaming toward us. Behind it, the ocean rises like a serpent. We see now that the bright silver line we saw from space is in fact a wave. A wave from hell. The ocean rises in anger.

In an instant, the container ship is dwarfed like a cork. The wall of midnight blue rises and rises above the ship, and we can hear the crackling thunder of sonic booms, as displaced air races over the crest of the wave at supersonic speed. A churning bright contrail stretches across the top of the wave, where the ocean is literally vaporized in a thundering vortex.

The ship is lifted violently. Men running on the decks are thrown to the ground. The ship torques and begins to break up as its stern is thrown above its bow. Four hundred feet up in the air, it is twisted and torn apart, as if a furious child has picked up his toy and then thrown it down in anger.

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

Will snaps out of his transfixed stare.

CONTINUED:

WILL
Houston, this is Atlantis
(pause)
Houston, this is Atlantis, over.

All he hears is static

KUNETKA
Satellite links must be down. All the
ionization from the fragment hits.

WILL
I'm switching to directional high gain
antenna.
(pause)
Houston, this is Atlantis.

INT. MISSION CONTROL

We can see the difference in Mission Control. Attention level is
up a few notches

JUDE (CAP COM)
Atlantis, this is Houston. We copy you on
high gain.

WILL (V O.)
Houston, there is a tsunami caused by
fragment D. It's heading toward Cape
Canaveral. It's huge. It's going to hit
Grand Bahama any minute.

There are various images on the giant screens in the front of
Mission Control. One of them is actual news footage that appears
to be coming in. Another is an image from Endeavor.

JUDE (CAP COM)
Roger, Atlantis, we copy. We are
evacuating Cape Kennedy now. We've
ordered helicopters in to get the families
out

ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

WILL
Thank you, Jude. Fragment C looks like it
hit Northern Mexico

INT. MISSION CONTROL

JUDE (CAP COM)
We have confirmation on that. We are
expecting the ground shock to reach us
pretty soon. It's already been felt in
San Antonio. The news is not good

We see on the screen images of a devastated Los Angeles

CONTINUED:

JUDE (CAP COM)
The seismic wave hammered Southern
California. There's a lot of damage.

WILL (V O)
Houston, could you patch me through to Ben
Gentling at launch control?

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL - KENNEDY SPACE CENTER

The place is wild with activity, as everyone is scrambling to
evacuate Gentling stands at a console.

GENTLING
Will...this is Ben, over.

WILL (V.O.)
Ben ..Corey and Claire and her friend were
at the launch. You have to promise to get
them out

GENTLING
You have my word

MISSION CONTROL - HOUSTON

Jude reaches for her ever-present cup of coffee. Before her
fingers reach it.. it moves away from her hand The rumble is
huge...and all of Mission Control is undulating. Ceiling tiles
start to fall, and people dive under equipment.

JUDE (CAP COM)
(calmly)
Atlantis, this is Houston. We've got the
ground shock from fragment C We're
getting just a bit of a ride

We hear static. The signal has been cut off

JUDE (CAP COM)
Atlantis, this is Mission Control Do you
read?

INT. ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

The sound of static can be heard over the speaker.

WILL
Houston, this is Atlantis. Do you read?

LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER - KSC

Everybody is running around Gentling grabs one of his people,
DOYLE.

GENTLING
(shouting over the noise)
Has anybody seen Corey Seacord and her
daughter?

CONTINUED:

DOYLE

No They may have left the center.

EXT ATLANTIS

We can actually see the zone of white destruction passing over the brown land mass of Grand Bahama Island, as the wave devours it Its energy undiminished, the silver line crawls slowly across the Caribbean toward Florida

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

Will and the crew cannot take their eyes off the hideous and inexorable white line of destruction as it moves toward the recognizable outline of the east coast of Florida.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL - KSC

The chaos has increased Gentling is screaming at everyone to get out immediately. People are grabbing files, dropping them, scattering papers everywhere. Gentling keeps on screaming for everybody to get the hell out.

EXT PARKING LOT - KSC

The roar of military Huey and Blackhawk helicopters is louder than the clamor of the mob that is trying to get in them As soon as there are enough people in an aircraft, it lifts off, only to be replaced by another aircraft landing in its place.

The Russian backup crew, led by Schmulevich, is being hustled by their securities team onto a C Stallion The huge helicopter rises straight up, noses forward, and is away. Gentling is in the midst of this cacophony. Like everyone else, he is buffeted from rotor wash, and almost deafened from the roar of the massive turbines A man named MARKHAM runs up to Gentling carrying a fax

MARKHAM

(shouting)

You can actually see the wave on the satellite image!

GENTLING

What are they saying for time?

MARKHAM

Twenty-one minutes. It'll hit shore at West Palm Beach, and then roll up the beach It'll hit here fifteen minutes later

NASA CAUSEWAY - CAPE CANAVERAL

Corey, Claire and Loretta are in the rented Taurus barely inching their way over the three-mile-long causeway, which has become totally gridlocked Everyone has become insane People

CONTINUED:

are honking their horns maniacally They're screaming out the open windows of their cars. Motorcycles are roaring between the unmoving cars

COREY

How big is this wave going to be?

LORETTA

Really big

COREY

Have we gone far enough yet?

LORETTA

Not even close We have to get to high ground.

COREY

This is Florida. There is no high ground.

Throughout the time in the car, we can hear the local radio station continuously broadcasting the tsunami evacuation order.

RADIO VOICE

All causeways are gridlocked.

COREY

Thanks for the information

RADIO VOICE

Latest estimate is the wave will reach the coast in less than twenty minutes.

We can see Corey is scared to death. Claire looks at her watch

CLAIRE

We've gone twenty feet in two minutes. By my count, that should put us by that blue mini-van when the wave hits It's time to bail

COREY

We can't just leave the car

CLAIRE

Mom, it's a rental

COREY

We can't just block traffic

CLAIRE

This is not traffic It has to move to be traffic This is parking Mom, we're going to die if we don't get out of here Come on!

Corey sees a long flight of Blackhawk helicopters bound for the Kennedy Space Center She opens the door and almost gets hit by a motorcycle Claire and Loretta follow, and they start running

CONTINUED: 2

The three of them run along the pedestrian walkway. All traffic is going the other way. There are no lanes headed back toward the coast. A Jeep is driving down the sidewalk. They have to leap out of the way to avoid it. A lot of people are getting out of their cars and starting to run although all of them are running toward the mainland in the opposite direction. The sky starts to darken, much faster than is natural. Loretta looks up.

LORETTA

It's going to rain any second!

They keep running. Within moments, fat drops start to pelt them. Claire looks in horror at her mother's white blouse. The raindrops are black as India ink. Within a few seconds, everyone is drenched with what looks like black paint. This only adds to the panic.

LORETTA

It's from the fragment that hit in the ocean! It's vaporized rock from the ocean floor!

EXT. LAUNCH CONTROL - KENNEDY SPACE CENTER

Gentling is getting the last of his people aboard the remaining helicopters, the black rain only making the event look more like something out of Kafka. The last of the C140s are taking off. The parking lot is a shamble of cars and Jeeps, their doors left open, the contents blowing out in the increasing wind.

Gentling runs to his Chief of Security.

GENTLING

Is there any word on the Seacord family?

SECURITY CHIEF

She definitely left the center. The visitors gate security reported she signed out fifteen minutes ago.

Gentling wheels around in frustration.

SECURITY CHIEF

Traffic is so crazy out there, she probably didn't get off the Cape.

GENTLING

Do a last check of the buildings, and get your ass in a helicopter.

SECURITY CHIEF

What about you, Mister Gentling?

Gentling grabs the guy's hand radio and runs off. He runs up to one of the last helicopters. He has to scream at the top of his lungs to be heard over the roar of the engine.

CONTINUED:

GENTLING

Drop this load of people inland, and get
back out here as soon as you can.

NAVY PILOT

I'm going to have to re-fuel.

GENTLING

Just get here!!

He runs over to an abandoned van, and guns it for the entry
gates.

EXT. KENNEDY PARKWAY

Corey, Claire, and Loretta are running back toward the Launch
Control Center. They can see the huge VAB still miles ahead of
them. It doesn't seem to be getting any closer. There are no
cars. It is a terrifyingly eerie sight ..the black rain, the
empty parkway.. and the dark sky.

Corey can't run anymore. She holds her side, panting for breath.
Claire runs back to her, and takes her arm, trying to pull her
along

Loretta can't see through the black smears in her glasses. She
is starting to cry quietly. She glances out toward the ominous
gray ocean on their left. A van zips by them in the rain, and
then brakes so suddenly it slides out of control.

It turns and comes back, its wheels spinning on the asphalt. The
window rolls down

GENTLING

Jesus, Corey. I've been looking for you

EXT ATLANTIS

The Atlantis is floating over the Asian night. Ahead of them,
the MIR Space Station glints like a piece of black glass jewelry
At the great curve of the northern horizon, we can see the
dreadful glow of a million-acre forest fire burning out of
control in the Sichuan province

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

WILL

By the time we pass over Florida again,
that wave will have hit

VIERA

They'll get out

EXT KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - LAUNCH CONTROL

Gentling, Corey, and the girls are huddled in the van, waiting
for the helicopter to return. They search the darkened sky. All

CONTINUED:

is quiet except for the wind. Claire looks at Loretta's watch, and then out to sea. A small group of people comes running up, the last stragglers. They have been gathered up by Ford Raines, his face still bright red.

Claire's expression changes as she looks at the ocean.

CLAIRE

There it is!! I see it!

Everybody turns to see a dark gray band, almost charcoal colored, at the horizon, topped by the white edge of the vortex.

GENTLING

Helicopter eight eight nine Sierra Romeo, this is Gentling.

(pause)

Eight eight nine Sierra Romeo, this is Gentling, do you read?

NAVY PILOT (V.O.)

Eight eight nine Sierra Romeo is inbound
ETA ten minutes.

GENTLING

We don't have ten minutes!

COREY

Ben, the VAB! We can get up on top of it!

Gentling looks around. It's big and it's high.

RAINES

The VAB's no good! It'll fold like a cardboard box! Too much surface area.

GENTLING

Does anybody have a better idea?

Claire puts her hand on the ground. She can feel it trembling. They look out at the ocean. The ominous solid band stretches north and south to infinity, like a new coastline. The most horrifying part of it is that we can actually see the horizon starting to move.

RAINES

That thing is about ten miles out! It'll reach us in about six minutes!

We can hear the sound of it now, a distant booming that cracks across the water, like an artillery barrage. One man actually starts to wretch with fear.

NASA WORKER

To hell with this! The VAB is all we've got!

CONTINUED: 2

Most of the group that was with Raines turns and races for the nearest van. The tires shriek, the vehicle fishtails, and races off toward the massive building. Raines shakes his head.

CLAIRE

What about that?!! My dad said it's built like a brick shit house.

Gentling stares in the direction that Claire is pointing.

RAINES

We better go for it, boss. Better than dancin' here.

GENTLING

Let's go.

EXT. LAUNCH TOWER - PAD 39A

It is still hot from the launch. The rain causing it to steam. A small convoy of vehicles races up. They look like match box cars. Gentling leads the group at a sprint into the fire-blackened complex. The sound from the wave is deafening.

RAINES

Damn! Two hours ago I was runnin' like a dog from this thing!

Gentling goes to the elevator and pounds the button. There is no response. He tries another one. He kicks the metal.

GENTLING

The launch fried everything!

He leads them to the stairs, and yells something which can't be heard over the roar of the oncoming wave.

INTERCUT LAUNCH TOWER WITH THE WAVE

The wave looms closer and closer. Under the charcoal sky, it is a slate gray monolith, looking like a wall of liquid concrete. As it encounters the shallows offshore, it humps up on itself like a giant evil serpent. Two hundred feet. Three hundred feet. And still going. At the shore...the edge of the water pulls away, receding hundreds of yards. It leaves the inner reef exposed. Fish flop on the sand between the coral heads. The wave is voraciously drawing up the water into its towering mass from two miles out.

Claire and Loretta are helping Corey up the stairs behind Gentling. The levels seem to go on and on. Looking out through the open structure, they can see the wave, a vast gray wall that is noticeably rising. They come out onto the top deck. The wind-blasted crest of the tsunami is still above their eye level. It is howling with fury.

COREY

It's above us!

CONTINUED:

RAINES

Gotta hope it'll break on the reef far enough out. Come on, we gotta tie ourselves to something.

Raines frantically looks around and then opens a locker and starts pulling out fire hoses

The wave rolls up the shoreline. The hotels and condos of Cocoa Beach vanish under the thundering foam and spray. At pad 39A, the group atop the gantry has tied themselves down as tightly as they can. They are bracing themselves for the dreadful impact that is about to come. Everything is vibrating. They can feel the rush of air. Claire has her back to the water. She squeezes her eyes shut and won't look at it. She takes her mother's hand and holds it tightly. As the wave reaches the reef a quarter mile offshore, it topples forward in a perfect arc. It seems to fall forever until hundreds of millions of tons of water pound down with a force that deafens the people on the gantry...making them scream with the pain and fury of it. The ground shudders in a convulsion. The white water thunders forward like a horizontal avalanche. It is a churning, writhing mass now half the height of the gantry tower and faster than an express train.

CLAIRE

(with her eyes shut)

I'm not going to scream. I'm not going to scream.

The boiling mass hits the base of the gantry. The tower is jolted, and Claire screams. She is flung sideways, slamming against the fire hose wrapped around her chest. She sees through the grating floor a white explosion below, as the foam fountains up through the inside of the structure blasting through the levels. It is like a monster oil strike exploding up through a giant well. Several stragglers who were still running up the last levels are swept away in an instant.

The tower wrenches and bends, shuddering under the awesome forces. A monstrous geyser of water launches up in front of her, blocking out the world. It hits her, and she is hammered by the force. There is no more light. Everything is gray, and opaque, with a primal roar. Then, almost abruptly, the deluge is over.

There is that moment when Claire opens her eyes and looks around, first, to see if she is really alive. She rubs her eyes. Corey is next to her, jammed against the railing. She isn't moving, and there is blood on her face from a gash on her scalp. Loretta is gone. Gentling is nearby. He is coughing. There is no land around the gantry. There is simply boiling brown-white foam. In the distance, the VAB collapses like a cardboard box. It disappears under the milkshake of churning water. Dots on the roof, which are people, fall into the maelstrom.

The shore-break races inland, covering the space center. It goes on over Merritt Island to the mainland. The cars on the causeway vanish in seconds. Claire goes to her mother, who is unconscious.

CONTINUED: 2

CLAIRE

Mom...mom...

She cannot rouse her. Gentling staggers to his feet and comes over to her

CLAIRE

Have you seen Loretta?

GENTLING

No.

CLAIRE

What about Raines?

GENTLING

He spent all his time tying everybody in.
He didn't have enough time

Claire wipes the hair out of her mother's eyes. Corey's eyes flutter open, and she groans.

COREY

Are you okay, baby?

Claire nods. Corey tries to sit up, and shrieks in pain, clutching her right arm. She expertly palpates her forearm.

CLAIRE

Mom...what is it?

COREY

It's just a fracture. It hurts like
hell ..except you don't know how good it
is to be able to hurt like hell Where's
Loretta?

Claire shakes her head in fear. She hears the sound of a girl's voice from behind the stairwell. Claire staggers around the stairwell and finds Loretta, tangled in her hoses. Her glasses are gone and she is half blind. Claire takes her in her arms... and both of them start to cry.

LORETTA

I can't see too much

CLAIRE

I'll see for you.

LORETTA

Your idea about the gantry was pretty
smart

CLAIRE

I'm Will Seacord's daughter

I MINUS 44 HOURS

EXT SPACE

Atlantis hurtles eastward through the short orbital night. The earth is rim-lit in orange. The sky is filled with the blue and yellow streaks of the fragment tails. The nucleus, and its colossal ten-million-mile tail, would be a magnificent sight if it were not for the cataclysm it represents. As the shuttle silently streaks toward the horizon, the sun rises from behind the earth. Dawn light sweeps across the shuttle and as if a window shade were suddenly lifted, the MIR Space Station, is bathed in yellow white. Its solar panels are wider than the shuttle is long, and they glint like gold dragonfly wings. It is the largest manmade structure in space, consisting of three large cylindrical modules and three long, narrow solar wings. A Soyuz capsule is docked on one side. Discovery is hard-docked to the station, coupled to the permanent mating tunnel. Endeavor floats nearby, looking so different from its two sister ships. It has no tiles. It is still mounted on top of the huge E-tank. Three of the white SRBs have already been attached to the tank. A group of astronauts can be seen moving the fourth SRB to the tank. They are held to Endeavor by their safety cable tethers. The payload bay doors are open...waiting for the two warheads.

The second Soyuz capsule is attached to the airlock as Bran had instructed.

INT MIR SPACE STATION

Commander Dudorov is communicating with Will, as they are counting down the distance.

INT. ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

Will nudges Atlantis as close as he can to the space station, counting down the meters as he gets closer. After a few short bursts of the RCS jets, Atlantis comes to a stop. Will flips the switch for the payload bay doors.

EXT ATLANTIS PAYLOAD BAY

As the two 60-foot-long payload doors open, like upside down bomb-bay doors, a flood of Styrofoam peanuts spills out into space, dispersing into a vast twinkling cloud. The other EVA astronauts stop in their work, and Will hears cheering over the open channel. Viera is in a full EVA suit. She exits the airlock hatch and enters the payload bay. She looks like she is in one of those souvenir snow scenes that you shake, as the Styrofoam asteroids swirl around her.

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

WILL

Mission Control, what's happened at the Cape?

JUDE (V O)

Will, there's still no word on your family. We know most people from Kennedy have made it out. There are no

CONTINUED:

JUDE (V.O.)
communications right now, and we know
there's some flooding. I'm telling you,
most people made it out.

INT. NAVY SEA STALLION

Claire, Corey, Loretta, and Gentling are slumped inside the rescue helicopter. Claire is tying Gentling's lucky tie as a sling around Corey's broken arm.

EXT. FLORIDA

The helicopter is buffeted by strong turbulence. It is flying over rooftops that protrude from chocolate-colored water. Huge blue-white sheets of lightning crackle from horizon to horizon.

INT. HELICOPTER

Claire has pressed her face to the plastic window. The crew chief has gotten some pain killers from the first aid kit for Corey.

CREW CHIEF
(to Gentling)
We have to divert north to answer a
distress call. One of our aircraft went
down.

EXT. ATLANTIS

Viera and two other astronauts, are helping George Hayden, the Endeavor Mission Commander, move the warheads. It is an odd, silent ballet. White suited dancers with brilliant orange tethers float between the spacecraft. They are using their MMUs to propel them. Atlantis has one of the two remaining SRBs in the grips of its long spidery robot arm, the so-called Canadarm, or RMS arm. Will is expertly maneuvering this huge mass.

EXT. CRASH SITE

An old Navy Huey, painted Search and Rescue white and orange, lies on its side on a muddy bank amongst a strand of trees. The sea stallion sets down nearby on a short stretch of two-lane road, which is not underwater. Corey gets out to help

CREW CHIEF
Ma'am, you'd better stay inside. You're
hurt

COREY
I'm an ER nurse

She grabs the first-aid kit with her good hand, and runs through the mud

The CO-PILOT is talking to the sea stallion pilot

CONTINUED:

CO-PILOT

All of a sudden, it was raining black...I
couldn't see anything...I hit a power line
and lost the tail rotor.

The pilot of the downed helicopter and two of the passengers are
stretched out on the muddy bank, dead

Corey recognizes a couple of controllers from Kennedy who are all
right, and the two Russian back-up crew cosmonauts. One of them
is badly injured. Corey does what she can to try to tend to the
wounded man. Genya Schmulevich, the unhurt Russian, kneels
beside her. He nods a silent thank you. The wounded man,
VOLKOV, is covered with blood

Claire and Loretta get out into the mud next to the helicopter to
make room for two men who are carrying a stretcher with another
wounded man. The winds are whipping around them.

SEA STALLION PILOT

(yelling)

We better get out of here!

CREW CHIEF

Get in! Now!

Claire sees Corey through the trees.

CLAIRE

Mom! Come back! Run!!

LORETTA

What is it? What's happening?

Claire looks around her. Huge branches are ripped from trees and
are streaking toward the helicopter.

CLAIRE

Mom!!! Run!!!

The crew chief leaps to the ground and runs to Claire, grabbing
her by the arm and pulling her back toward the aircraft. The
pilot is pulling pitch, and the helicopter is starting to leave
the ground. Claire struggles to break free.

She won't leave her mother. She bites the crew chief on the
hand. He pulls back in surprise. He turns and runs to the
helicopter, jumping in as it's lifting up. Claire is running as
fast as she can, dragging Loretta behind her. The helicopter
banks to the left and roars away from them.

A hideous gust of wind slams the helicopter sideways. The tail
boom hits a nearby tree and snaps into. The aircraft spins and
drops like a crazed stone. The fuel tank explodes on impact.

Claire and Loretta have reached Corey and the others.
Schmulevich and Gentling are carrying the Russian cosmonaut on a

CONTINUED: 2

stretcher Claire sees a culvert which runs under the road about 100 feet away. It is too loud to speak. She gestures toward it. Everyone starts to run. They reach the culvert, a rectangular concrete tunnel half full of muddy water. Claire helps Loretta inside and turns back for Corey. She sees her knocked to the ground, struggling to get up with her one arm. Claire runs back to her, and pulls her toward the culvert. Schmulevich and Gentling, hunched almost double in the battering wind, are at the entrance to the culvert. A curtain of debris and tree limbs hammers them to the ground. The injured cosmonaut is pitched off the stretcher which whirls away like a piece of cardboard. A gash on Schmulevich's head is streaming blood which flies off into the wind. Gentling reaches him and drags him inside the culvert.

I MINUS 36 HOURS

TELEVISION SCREEN

CNN COMMENTATOR

The world, still reeling from the devastating effects of the first four comet fragments, now braces itself for the impact of fragments E and F, which are minutes away.

EXT MIR SPACE STATION

The three shuttles float, along with the shiny metal MIR Space Station. Below them, the earth is blue and beautiful

CNN COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

The astronaut crews are racing to place the last solid booster on Endeavor's external tank. Endeavor is scheduled to start its journey to rendezvous with Bright Angel in less than six hours

INT ATLANTIS AIRLOCK

Will is helping Bran seal his pressure suit, preparing for Bran's first EVA

BRAN

There are no leaks, right?

WILL

No leaks

BRAN

You'd tell me if you saw something, wouldn't you?

WILL

No, I'd keep it a secret

Will locks his helmet into place. He signals Viera, who is inside the mid-deck. She opens the valve to depressurize the chamber

EXT PAYLOAD BAY

Will comes out through the circular hatch of the airlock. He turns and pulls Bran out behind him. They are tethered together by a nine-foot leash. Bran looks up, through the huge open payload bay. Above him floats Endeavor. Its crew is EVA, maneuvering the third and last SRB. The long spidery Canadarm is being used to hold the massive solid booster, while George Hayden and his team prepare to lock it to the coupling bracket on the E-tank.

Tiverzin is underneath the huge E-tank, waiting to help guide the SRB into position. Ramsey and Strauss look like they're actually riding on the SRB, lashed to it by safety tethers. Viera is controlling the Canadarm inside Atlantis. Bran looks above him. He sees this miraculous sight. Above all of that, is the Planet Earth. He is actually outside in space.

BRAN

Oh. my. God

INT ATLANTIS FLIGHT DECK

Kunetka is in the command seat, standing by the RCS system.

EXT ATLANTIS

Will and Bran work their way out to the extended arm. Secured by their tether reels, they move along the SRB toward Endeavor, passing the work crew.

BRAN

I'm doing this. I'm really doing this

INT DISCOVERY

Shirley Pickett and Lebow are floating motionless, sound asleep, like corpses.

INT MIR

A couple of astronauts and cosmonauts are eating. Two others are sound asleep.

EXT. COMPLEX

They are passing over Bosnia when a new sun appears ahead, flaring to life below the horizon. Fierce as a welding arc, fragment E passes almost vertically through the atmosphere in less than two seconds. It impacts near the mouth of the Don River, 600 miles east of Odessa. Will can feel the heat of the flash through his gold reflective visor.

Several smaller sub-fragments come down like buckshot across a 1000-mile radius around the big one. Kaliningrad takes a nearly direct hit, as does Budapest, from these smaller chunks. They cease to be cities. Will looks again, in time to see the fireball of the central strike expanding out of the earth almost directly in their flight path. He can see already that the main

CONTINUED:

hit from fragment E is bigger than anything he's seen before. It has punched deep into the mantle of the earth and the gout of incandescent debris hurled out is almost unfathomable in its scale. He realizes that the fountain of molten ejecta is being hurled above the edge of the atmosphere, out into space. He can see it opening and expanding below and ahead of them as they race toward it. He can see the supersonic shockfront reach the edge of the atmosphere and punch through it like a bursting bubble.

That's when he realizes they are going to go right through it. The attenuating leading edge of the ejecta spray is already 200 miles high and still climbing. So thin he can see the earth through it, he knows it consists of molten rock and dust traveling at hypersonic speed. Soon it is a transparent curtain of white and orange, expanding across his field of vision, right ahead. A ghostly veil...full of whizzing molten tracer bullets. Atlantis, below him, shields him from impact of microscopic dust.

MIR is hit. Spektr, the new biomedical module, takes a strike from one of the orange tracers. There is a flash, and glittering chunks of insulation blow out in a cloud, leaving a gaping hole ten feet across.

Will can see tiny flashes like fireflies on the underside of Endeavor. Grains the size of sugar granules pockmarking the metal. They are being sandblasted. Bran, clinging to his handhold, watches the bullets flashing past all around him. He is hyperventilating, gasping rapidly for breath.

BRAN

This is bad. This is bad. This is bad ..

One of the tracers hits the SRB right in front of Hayden. He has a quick glimpse of a hole big enough to throw a basketball through appearing in a flash, blowing shrapnel toward him. Then chunks of metal rip into him like machine gun rounds, also blasting chunks out of his PLSS backpack. His O2 tank ruptures and the explosion blows Hayden's body clean out of his foot restraints. The dragonslayer, the hero of humanity, cartwheels away into the void like a discarded rag doll. A larger tracer, a molten blob the size of a marble, hits Atlantis just below its vertical stabilizer. The RCS fuel and oxidizer tanks are blown open, and the fuel explodes.

There is a brilliant orange flash and then everything starts moving. Will sees Atlantis begin a slow cartwheel, tumbling out of control. The MX-SRB, still attached to the arm, swings directly toward him. He can see the two astronauts attached to it, Strauss and Ramsey, jerked like tether balls, bouncing off the casing. One of MIR's solar wings is hit. A flash, then a huge plane of silver is tumbling away. Inside Atlantis, Viera hears a shrieking hiss and knows they have been holed. She can already feel her ears popping from the depressurization.

Outside, not ten feet from Will, Tiverzin is crushed between the nozzle of the massive booster and the hull of Endeavor. The SRB smashes his helmet against the hull and swings on, missing.

CONTINUED: 2

Endeavor completely Bran is floating right in the path of the SRB Will jerks on his tether and pulls Bran out of the way. His arms flailing, he crashes against Endeavor and Will makes him grab onto the underwing rack The SRB sails by them. Will can see the giant spider arm torquing and collapsing as Atlantis tumbles He looks over at Tiverzin, who floats limply in a constellation of faceplate fragments and scarlet droplets.

The whisker-fine orange streaks stop coming at them as abruptly as they started.

On the flight deck of Atlantis, Kunetka is working the RCS controls, trying to recover the cartwheeling ship The jets are not firing, because the fuel is gone, but he doesn't know that. Through the window he can see the MIR complex looming as they tumble right toward it. On the mid-deck, Viera and McCusky are trying to find the leak, to slap something over it and control the depressurization, but it is behind a panel They are ripping at the panel, as objects swirl around them.

VIERA

Get Brent! Tell him to get to the airlock. We're depressurizing and we can't stop it!!

On the deck above, Kunetka is panting for breath as he starts flipping switches to arm the OME (orbital maneuvering engine). But before he can complete the procedure, the MIR station fills his windows and --

KRUNNCHH!!! They slam into it Not going very fast, but with 100 tons of shuttle meeting 125 tons of station, the effect is devastating The cockpit is crushed in on the right side. The view ports shatter and blow out into the vacuum. The airblast jerks Kunetka out of his chair and sucks most of him out through the gaping front window. Will sees his good friend come flying out in a blast of gas and twinkling debris He is helpless to do anything but bear witness to the horror The interior of Atlantis becomes a blizzard of flying objects as the air rushes out. Then the entire roof of the flight deck is ripped back like the roof of a car going under a semi trailer. McCusky, at the crew deck hatch, gapes at the vacuum above him where the roof used to be He is almost sucked through the hatch and it takes all his strength to push himself away from the opening, through which everything not nailed down in the lower deck is whipping out into the void Viera grabs her bulky EVA suit, and desperately pulls herself with her remaining hand toward the airlock, her legs flapping like a flag Outside, the collision has a devastating effect on MIR as well Two solar wings are crushed, one shearing off at the base, and the communications boom cartwheels away into the void The main crew module is smashed in, causing an explosive decompression inside

The SRB, with two astronauts attached, is crushed between Atlantis and the MIR, forming a jumble of twisted metal Strauss, his tether snapped, spins away into his own orbit around the earth Worst of all, the impact snaps the docking tunnel out

CONTINUED: 3

of its mounts, and Discovery is suddenly detached. Since the hatches at either end of the tunnel were left open in the scramble to shut down the electronics, both the MIR and shuttle are suddenly wide open to the void. The tunnel, still sticking out of the bottom of the MIR complex, becomes a howling wind-tunnel as air rushes out of it at hurricane speeds. Will, still holding onto Endeavor, actually sees a human figure come rocketing out of the open hatch of Discovery, dressed only in blue flight coveralls. The figure jerks spasmodically, pinwheeling its arms and legs, swimming through the vacuum of space. Will is just close enough to see that it is Lebow. He helplessly watches the doomed astronaut clawing for a handhold, grabbing something and pulling himself back toward the airlock. He doesn't make it.

INT. DISCOVERY

Inside Discovery, it is a blizzard of flying objects, with Mission Commander Loper in the middle of it. He is going for the airlock when a flying clipboard clocks him in the temple, stunning him. Disoriented, he doesn't make it to sanctuary before he blacks out.

INT. MIR

Inside MIR, Semiardin, Dudorov and Shirley Pickett claw their way through the maelstrom of flying objects to the docking tunnel of the Soyuz return ship.

Dudorov pushes Pickett roughly into the tiny capsule, and makes it inside himself, turning back to see Semiardin lose consciousness. Dudorov actually comes back through the short tunnel to grab Semiardin by the hair, hauling him into the tiny Soyuz capsule. He closes the hatch, which seats with a WHOOMP!

INT. ATLANTIS

Inside Atlantis, Viera pulls herself inside the airlock chamber and pulls the door almost shut. She actually stops, looking for McCusky, who is still out there, yelling for him, but she can't see him. Swirling papers, food packets, and a thousand other objects obscure her view.

VIERA

McCusky!!

Finally, feeling herself starting to black out, she takes a deep breath and pulls the hatch to, dogging it down.

Viera, her movements rapid but not wasteful, turns the O2 purge valve. She is starting to black out as the oxygen blasts out of the wall manifold with a hiss that is deafening in the tiny space.

Her sight dimming, she sees a horrifying vision. McCusky, his features distended, appears at the window, scrambling frantically. His eyes are red as a demon's, scarlet with

CONTINUED:

eight-ball hemorrhages. Viera, fighting for consciousness, actually starts to turn the dogging wheel on the hatch. She is going to open the hatch and try to get him in. But McCusky's face, at the window, is gone. Viera's eyes roll back as blackness descends.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - ENDEAVOR

Arbatov kills the shrill alarm.

ARBATOV

This is Endeavor. Can anybody hear me, over?

(pause)

This is Endeavor. Can anyone hear me, over?

He goes to the rear windows over the boom controls and looks out. A hand slams against the glass. Arbatov jumps back. Will pulls his face into view, hanging upside down.

ARBATOV

Commander Seacord, can you hear me?

Will puts his helmet against the glass and motions to Arbatov to do the same.

WILL

(shouting)

See if you can get closer to MIR. I've got to get over there.

Arbatov nods.

EXT. ENDEAVOR

Will works his way back to Bran, who is clinging to a handhold at the edge of the payload bay. He puts his helmet against Bran's.

WILL

Stay here.

BRAN

I'll just stay here, if that's okay

WILL

I'll be back soon. Just be cool. Be cool, okay? Don't breathe too fast.

BRAN

No, that would be a bad idea.

Endeavor is closer to MIR now. Will takes careful aim. He flexes his legs, and pushes off without a tether. He glides across what looks like a desperately long gap to the wreckage. He works his way hand-over-hand through the twisted metal, careful not to let it tear his suit. Ramsey is crushed in the

CONTINUED:

twisted metal, dead. Will works his way along the hull of Atlantis. The shuttle is ripped and twisted, blackened by the explosion. Will forces his way inside through the torn roof. Bran watches Will disappear. He is out there by himself. He looks around.

BRAN

Okay...okay.. so, Bran, what are your impressions of space travel so far?

INT. ATLANTIS

Will floats through the twisted flight deck, like a diver inspecting an underwater wreck. He moves some wreckage and a body turns suddenly toward him as it is freed. McCusky's lifeless body floats by. Will finds the airlock. A shaft of hard-edge space sunlight reaches in and rimlights Viera. Her eyes are closed and she is floating, next to her EVA suit, helmet, and PLSS pack. Will pounds on the round porthole in the airlock hatch. He pounds again. Viera's eyes flutter open. He motions her to the window.

WILL

Can you hear me?

Viera, who has pressed her ear to the porthole, nods yes.

VIERA

How are the others?

WILL

It's bad.

VIERA

I have to get to MIR.

She starts to get into her EVA suit.

INT MIR SPACE STATION

It is dark and chaotic. Will and Viera float inside. Viera turns a body they find floating ..Cominsky. She pushes him aside and a cloud of blood drops swirl around them like little insects. They go through the short connecting tunnel to the next module. Loper and Khudoleiev are floating in a weightless ballet...dead.

They reach the hatch connecting to Soyuz. Viera bangs on the door and puts her helmet next to it. There is an answering tap.

VIERA

(Russian/subtitles)

Who is in there? Vanya?

DUDOROV

(Russian/subtitles)

Yes. And Semiardin and Picket.

WILL

This is Will. Are you all right?

CONTINUED:

Inside the cramped Soyuz, we can see Dudorov and Picket who are having difficulty breathing. Lev Semiardin is unconscious. His skin is pale. Blood is streaming from his nose.

PICKET

We've been better. Vanya and I have trouble breathing. Lev is badly hurt. Blood in the lungs.

VIERA

Do you have space suits, Commander?

DUDOROV

No. We have no options. I'm taking the Soyuz down right away.

VIERA

Yes, go. Good luck, Commander.

Shirley Picket looks directly at Will...and tries lamely to form a brave smile. There is a clunk and the Soyuz separates from the docking collar. Will sees her face get smaller and smaller as the ungainly capsule moves away, until it becomes a dot. Will looks below. The North American continent rolls by wreathed in cloud, its eastern side half in darkness. Vast sheets of lightning chase each other like demons.

FLORIDA

Corey, Claire and the others are slogging through the water. Sheet lightning pulses high in the clouds overhead.

COREY

If all of this was caused by one of the smaller fragments of the comet, how much bigger is the real thing?

GENTLING

About a hundred times bigger.

The rain still pelts them

COREY

Will's going to get it done. you watch When they named him Will, they didn't know how right they were

GENYA

There's a house up there! I can see it!

There is a farmhouse ahead of them, barely visible through the rain. They all start to run for it. The front door of the obviously abandoned old farmhouse is hanging open. Claire and Loretta are the first to get there, followed by Genya. Corey and Gentling seem to be lagging behind

GENTLING

You know it's funny I'm not feeling too well

CONTINUED:

COREY
We're almost there.

GENTLING
No... really...you go ahead.

COREY
Ben!

GENTLING
I'm fine...I just need to sit down.

He sits in the water His breathing is labored. He turns to Corey There is almost a faint smile on his face as he rolls over and lies down face-first.

COREY
Ben!!

Genya and Claire run out of the house, back into the torrent, and see Corey on her knees, rolling Gentling over. She touches his carotid artery with her fingers. There is obviously no pulse. She looks at Genya and Claire. Claire starts shaking her head, and then looks up at the sky and screams.

CLAIRE
This isn't fair! Leave us alone!! Leave us alone! Goddamit. .leave us alone!!!

I MINUS 26 HOURS

INT ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

Will, Viera, Bran, and Arbatov are together.

WILL
Discovery is intact. We still have our ticket home We still have the mission ship. We still have two of the five crew who trained for the operation, and we still have some time

ARBATOV
It's over! We're cut off. We have no ground support, and the mission pilot is dead.

VIERA
Will can fly the mission

BRAN
Uh we're short one SRB, in case you haven't noticed We don't have enough power to get out there without all the solid boosters

ARBATOV
This is stupid

CONTINUED:

WILL

Okay...so--we don't do anything and the world comes to an end. That's smart. I don't know about you, I'm taking this shuttle and I'm going up, and I'm going to stop that mother or die trying. Anybody wants to get off this bus... there's the door.

VIERA

I like this bus

BRAN

Awesome...absolutely awesome.

WILL

Thank you.

BRAN

Not you...me. I think I got it!

WILL

What are you talking about?

Bran floats toward the window.

BRAN

Sometimes I actually amaze myself.

(he looks out the window)

The moon. We use the moon!

VIERA

We sling-shot.

BRAN

We go out and hook a one-eighty around the moon like...what's his name in "Singin' in the Rain," swinging around that lamp post. Then we barrel back toward Earth actually going faster. In fact, we pick up about a half mile a second from the moon's orbital motion...free energy...free direction change. Are you loving this? Then we run the comet down between the moon and the earth.

WILL

It would be much easier to rendezvous, because we're going in the same direction. I'm buying it. Can we do it without all six solids?

BRAN

We can get to the moon with what we have. Barely. It's tight. When we sling-shot around we use the main engines and the fuel from the E-tank

CONTINUED: 2

VIERA

Do we have the time?

BRAN

This is where it gets a little dicy. Once the comet passes the moon, it will be four hours till impact. That means once we do our sling-shot, we've got to catch that thing pretty quickly. There's not much of a window left.

WILL

We need to roll in two hours

ARBATOV

Ready for the burn in two hours? That's impossible

BRAN

Excuse me Did I miss the part where you outlined your plan to save the world?

WILL

How many hours does that give us actually on the comet?

BRAN

About.. uh, let's see. .maybe two.

VIERA

Two hours to place the bombs? I thought it took eight

BRAN

Well .that's how long it took the last time somebody landed on a comet and placed hydrogen bombs Who the hell knows?

WILL

We'll figure that out later Can you get the burn firmed up in two hours? We're not going to have ground tracking on this.

BRAN

It sucks without ground tracking I can get us in the pipe With star sights and all that crap, I can get us close We'll need a mid-course burn, maybe a couple of them, to dial it in

WILL

Viera, can you help him with the sights?

VIERA

Certainly

CONTINUED: 3

BRAN

You gotta know something here...to make this hook shot work, we're going to be mowing the lawn ..I mean, we're going to be very close to the lunar surface as we go around.

VIERA

How close?

BRAN

Big-time close.

WILL

What would that be in, say, miles?

BRAN

Uh ...less than one.

INT. HOUSE

There is over two feet of black water swirling through the ramshackle farmhouse. Corey and Loretta are seated on an ancient formica table. Claire comes from outside. She has found a flashlight.

CLAIRE

(to Genya)

There's a boat in the garage. Maybe you can get it started.

GENYA

If it has an engine...I can get it started.

COREY

We should stay here. Someone will find us.

CLAIRE

Mom, the water's still coming up. We're going to have to go somewhere else, and it's too deep out there to walk.

GENYA

Let's look at this boat.

I MINUS 24 HOURS

The screen is filled with white-hot fire. It is the ignition of the solid boosters. The green Endeavor, riding on top of the orange E-tank, pulls away from camera, propelled toward the moon.

INT ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

Bran is crushed back into his seat from the G forces. He lets out an involuntary grunt. The vibration and roar are even louder than the launch.

CONTINUED:

VIERA

One minute twenty seconds...one minute ten seconds.

The skin on Bran's face is being pushed back. His eyes are starting to roll up in his head.

VIERA

Fifty seconds. forty seconds.

EXT. ENDEAVOR

The battered and broken MIR Space Station is already gone from sight, as the spacecraft roars away from Earth.

INT. ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

BRAN

(choking)

How much longer?

WILL

(calmly)

About another thirty seconds. You told me you needed as much burn as possible.

BRAN

I was only kidding.

VIERA

Twenty seconds

BRAN

Please...please ..

VIERA

Jettison in ten.. nine .eight. .

WILL

No I'm going to milk them right to burnout.

VIERA

If one burns out before the other, we'll go into a spin

BRAN

(screaming)

Listen to her!

VIERA

Two one Mark!

Will waits, and waits, just a little longer. Even Viera starts to look at Will with growing concern. Finally, he flips the switch. BOOM! The explosive bolts holding the SRBs to the E-tank are blown

EXT. ENDEAVOR

The boosters, trailing incandescent gas, and spewing huge ropes of molten fuel residue, tumble end over end behind them. The problem is, one of the SRBs still remains coupled to the tank.

INT. ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

Everything is quiet. There are no more G forces. Bran is breathing normally again

BRAN

(panting)

When we go back, remind me to pick up my asshole I think I left it back there.

A red light is pulsating on the control panel.

WILL

One of the SRBs hasn't separated.

VIERA

We'll never make it around the moon with that extra weight, and drag.

WILL

We're going to have to go out and cut it off.

VIERA

We don't have that much time before the moon.

WILL

We'll go out in shifts, to limit fatigue. We'll all have to do it.

BRAN

There's no way I'm going back out there.

WILL

You're going out there. Think of it as on-the-job training for when we set the bombs.

BRAN

I don't do that part

WILL

Yes, you do

BRAN

Yes, I do

There is a crackling sound of static over the speakers Arbatov is at the transmitter

BONDY (V O)

uston .an oo ead, over?

Arbatov adjusts the transmitter, excitedly

CONTINUED:

WILL
Houston, this is Endeavor. You're
breaking up Do you copy?

BONDY (V.O.)
This is Houston...it's good to hear your
voice.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - (INTERCUT WITH ENDEAVOR)

The Control Center looks like it has been ransacked. Some
consoles have been knocked over. Ceiling tiles are all over the
floor. Fluorescent lights are hanging vertically, and some have
crashed and broken. Everybody reacts with joy when they hear
Will's voice

BONDY
I know we've taken a hit...however, we've
been tracking your deep penetration radar,
and we have you heading to the moon. Can
that be right?

WILL
Do you know what happened at MIR?

BONDY
We got a report from the Soyuz crew. We
know about the explosion

WILL
Did they make it back okay?

BONDY
They're still in orbit...trying to find a
place to land Moscow was rocked by
fragment F...so we're going to bring them
in They're going to be okay.

WILL
We didn't have enough boosters to meet the
comet, so our man Bran here figured out
that if we sling-shot around the moon, we
can meet it on the way back

BONDY
That could actually work Sonofabitch.

WILL
We've got an SRB that didn't separate
We've got to get out and cut it off before
the sling-shot

BONDY
I'm sorry about the others

WILL
We all are

CONTINUED:

BONDY
Will...?

WILL
Yes?

BONDY
Uh...I'm glad you didn't take my advice
and retire.

WILL
Think of all the fun I'd have missed.

WATER - NIGHT

A single light shines through the rain, reflecting on the black water. Claire, Genya, Corey, and Loretta are in a Zodiac with an outboard motor. There is a pathetic piece of plastic that they've thrown over their heads that does not do a lot of good in protecting them from the downpour. Judging from how deeply the trees are submerged, they are in 15 to 20 feet of water. It is other-worldly.

I MINUS 16 HOURS

EXT. ENDEAVOR

Ahead of them, the moon has entered the vast tail of Bright Angel. At 40,000 feet per second, the ionized plasma wraps around the moon, forming diamond-shaped shock waves on the "down wind" side.

And Bright Angel itself is an awesome spectacle, its tail crossing space from one side to the other, dwarfing the moon.

INT. ENDEAVOR

They are all preparing for their first EVA, selecting tools and readying their pressure suits. Viera is alone in the mid-deck. Bran floats by, just as she grabs a vomit bag and wretches inside

BRAN
Hey, what happened to the famous cast-iron
stomach?

Viera just glares at him Will has been looking down.

WILL
Are you okay?

VIERA
Of course Fine

INT MISSION CONTROL

BONDY
Endeavor, this is Houston

CONTINUED:

WILL (V.O)

Roger, Houston

BONDY

We've crunched the numbers here, and strangely enough, they check out. Your sling-shot orbit will bring you within one thousand meters of the lunar surface. You're going to be very low, and very fast

WILL (V.O.)

We'll try not to hit anything.

BONDY

I was going to suggest that.

(pause)

Also...while you're getting rid of the SRB, you might want to get rid of the payload bay doors with the radiators. They're about three tons each.

WILL (V.O)

I was also thinking about the rudder, and the elevons.

BONDY

Every pound you lose on that thing is going to help.

WILL (V.O)

I'm keeping the CD player, I don't care what you say.

EXT. ENDEAVOR - MONTAGE EVA

Will and Arbatov fly untethered to the remaining SRB. Viera and Bran have successfully cut through the hinges of the first payload bay door with an oxyacetylene torch. They grab a foothold and push the huge door upward. It starts its slow tumble toward the edge of the solar system. Behind them, the earth can be seen over the huge tail of the shuttle. Its entire disk is now visible, an indication of how far they have traveled.

INT. MISSION CONTROL

People are feverishly working at their consoles, trying to calculate weight and payload factors

EXT ENDEAVOR

Bran and Viera are working on the second payload bay door. The earth has now shrunk dramatically. The moon is now looming larger than the earth. Bright Angel's braided and pulsating tail fills most of the sky. The second payload bay door does its slow-motion ballet as it spins free of Endeavor.

FLORIDA - NIGHT

Genya is steering the Zodiac down the main street of a flooded rural town. The engine sputters, coughs, and then dies. There is no more gas. Genya reaches down and takes a paddle to keep the little boat going forward.

It's a small town. A couple of stores, the sign of an Exxon Station protruding from the water, and the roofs of 15 or 20 houses. There is a hill toward the end of the street. On top of the hill is a church, and in front of the church is a cluster of cars. Maybe 20. As the boat floats nearer, we can hear music and voices coming from the open church door. It looks like a welcomed sanctuary.

Above the front door of the church is a large hand-painted sign on a piece of flapping canvas. It reads "THE HOUR IS COME." Claire and the others clamor out of the Zodiac and climb the stairs to the church door.

INT. CHURCH

Claire hurries in and then stops. She has a look of horror on her face. The others coming in behind her also stop, gaping. Inside the church is a giant screen television set, blaring full volume, placed on the altar. A choir is singing on the screen. In front of the choir is the Reverend Jimmy Buell, looking like he hasn't slept in three days.

Lying on the floor and slumped in the pews in front of the altar are the bodies of the congregation. Men, women, children, old people are lifelessly huddled together. Strewn around them are small paper cups. Many of the cups have a green residue. By the television set is a large bowl filled with green liquid. On the floor below the bowl is a tin of gofer poison with its skull and cross bones leering at the ceiling, a bottle of horse tranquilizer, and a bunch of empty Gator Ade bottles. The Minister is slumped on the steps of the altar. Corey grabs Claire by the arm and pulls her toward the door. Claire is numb, allowing herself to be pulled. Staring behind her at the TV screen.

REVEREND BUELL

And it shall rain for forty days and forty nights, and the world shall be cleansed of the wicked

EXT JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - MAIN GATE

Police and Security Guards are clashing with a crowd of thousands of black-robed, shaved-head Buell followers, who are throwing bottles, rocks, and molotov cocktails, which burst into orange balls of fire and black smoke. Some are brandishing guns.

INT MISSION CONTROL BUILDING

Lew Bondy hurries through the lobby. As he passes the lounge, he stops and watches the CNN coverage on television. It shows the madness that is going on outside.

There is a security guard nearby.

CONTINUED:

BONDY

Tell everybody to stay inside the building and keep the doors locked in case any of those wackos get past the perimeter fence. I want National Guardsmen inside this building, and I want them locked and loaded.

INT. MISSION CONTROL ROOM

Bondy enters and takes his seat next to Jude Taylor. He takes a .45 automatic and sets it on the console with a bang. Jude Taylor looks at him.

BONDY

Do not...I repeat.. do not fuck with us during a mission.

I MINUS 8 HOURS

EXT. ENDEAVOR

The moon is as big as the earth used to be when they were in orbit. We can actually feel it getting bigger as Endeavor races toward it. The earth is a beautiful and distant sphere peaking behind Endeavor's tail. Bright Angel is off to the side...a giant glowing light in the sky preceded by its endless tail. It is actually starting to pass the moon.

Viera and Arbatov are finishing cutting through the last of the aft bolts on the SRB. Bran is in the payload bay.

INT. ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

Will is at the controls

WILL

You better wrap it up.

VIERA (V.O.)

Almost done

BONDY (V.O)

Atlantis, you have one more course correction burn to do. We have your trajectory as being a little low

WILL

How low?

BONDY (V.O)

You don't do that burn in the next few minutes and you're going to be leaving skid marks on the lunar surface

EXT ENDEAVOR

The fiery sparks of the torch have cut through the last of the bolt Viera and Arbatov give a push and the SRB floats free

CONTINUED:

VIERA

We've got it. We're on our way in.

Viera, who is at the end of a long tether that is attached to the payload bay, gives one pull . and floats effortlessly back. Arbatov is flying back toward the spacecraft, using the thrusters of his MMU. Bran has unclipped his tether and is preparing to come in.. and that's when it happens. Alexei pulls back on the joystick thruster control and nothing happens.

ARBATOV

Something wrong...valve stuck open...

Viera sees him accelerating toward them, building up speed. He is frantically working the MMU controls. The thruster is still stuck, full open, spewing nitrogen gas.

VIERA

(in Russian)

Grab something!

Arbatov starts grabbing for part of the spacecraft. He barely gets a hand on part of the payload bay for a split second, then slips off. The result is that he is sent spinning. The thruster is still firing, so his course becomes even more erratic.

Making a desperate grab, Arbatov catches Bran's foot in both hands as he sails past. Bran's grip is wrenched loose and the two go tumbling free. Arbatov, still accelerating, loses his hold on Bran and hurtles right toward Endeavor's 25-foot high vertical tail.

Wham! He slams into it, face-first, then goes cart-wheeling past the huge engine nozzles and away from the ship. Groggy from the impact, he looks up to see several fracture lines criss-crossing the faceplate of his helmet. He puts one hand up toward it ..touching it gently.

ARBATOV

(in Russian)

Oh shit...

His faceplate blows outward in several pieces, without warning. He screams a silent scream.

Will hears a pop and Arbatov's truncated scream. Then nothing

WILL

Alexei? Alexei?

BRAN

(sounding freaked)

He's dead I saw it He hit the tail

WILL

Are you okay?

CONTINUED: 2

BRAN

Yeah, but I'm uh .I'm getting pretty far
away Shit sorry, Will Shit!

Will looks out the rear windows of the flight deck. Bran is
already a doll-like figure a hundred yards away.

WILL

Viera, get out on the arm.

VIERA

On my way.

Will activates the RMS arm controls. The moon is looming,
literally getting bigger as he watches.

INT. MISSION CONTROL / INT ENDEAVOR / INTERCUT

JUDE (CAP COM)

Endeavor, I'll feed you the numbers for
your correction burn

WILL

I'm going after Bran, you're going to have
to wait a second.

JUDE (CAP COM)

You don't have too many seconds. You're
going to hit the lunar surface.

Bran, who can hear the whole dialogue, is starting to freak out

BRAN

Houston, stay out of this, okay?! Will!
Come and get me!

WILL

Working on it

Viera is going hand-over-hand out the arm faster than it's ever
been done. You can hear her panting over the open circuit. Even
as she is climbing, Will is extending the arm to its full reach,
straight out from the ship The moon is looming Literally
growing as they watch

BRAN

(panic in his voice)

I can barely see you guys! Where are you?
Are you coming or what?

WILL

Bran, we're going to get you back Now
just relax and keep breathing

The moon fills the sky Visibly moving toward them, appearing to
rotate as they start to swing around it. The stars crawl up over
the horizon Viera locks her feet into the foot restraints of
the arm's end-effector

CONTINUED:

VIERA
I'm locked in. Ready.

WILL
Hold on, I'm vectoring.

Will fires the maneuvering thrusters to go after the drifting Bran.

VIERA
Watch your pitch.

WILL
Watching my pitch.

BONDY
Endeavor, abort the EVA now. You've got perigee in six minutes. I need you to start setting up for your burn.

WILL
Negative, I'm not leaving him.

BONDY
Pick him up after the low pass.

WILL
Sorry, Houston. Can't do it. He's moving away too fast, it's now or never.

BRAN
I vote now, if it makes any difference.

The moon has become a vast unrolling landscape of plains and craters, still growing larger. For the first time, we are starting to get a real feeling of their velocity. .40 times the speed of sound.

BONDY
Will, listen to me. We show you low... repeat, you are inserting low. You will have to make a burn immediately

WILL
(working the thrusters)
Copy that How low?

BONDY
Maybe three hundred meters . wait, more like two-fifty But that's an average value You could hit You understand? A mountain.. some high terrain we can't plot this fast enough

WILL
Copy you, Houston Could impact Viera, you see him?

CONTINUED: 2

VIERA

I see him. About two hundred meters and closing.

She looks at the curved horizon and can actually see mountains coming out of the sun's glare toward them. She pulls a tie-down tether from her tool pouch, tying a torque wrench to one end.

BONDY

Abort now, Endeavor! That is a mission directive. Do you acknowledge?

WILL

(ignoring him)

Try to stabilize your tumble, Bran, if you can, we need you facing us.

BRAN

(turning helplessly)

Shit. How am I supposed to do that?

BONDY

Jesus, Seacord! Will! You have to orient for a burn RIGHT NOW!!

WILL

Lew, with all due respect, either help us or shut the fuck up at this time. Over Bran, you okay?

BRAN

The moon is in my way. Other than that, I'm just fine, thank you.

WILL

Focus on us, Bran Don't think about the moon

ON BRAN drifting Below him, FILLING FRAME, the lunar landscape is unrolling at dizzying speed.

BRAN

What moon?

The lunar surface is growing and growing. Hundred-mile wide craters go by in a few seconds, and still they are dropping Bondy gives the com back to Jude, giving up

JUDE (CAP COM)

(cool)

Endeavor, Houston Three minutes fifteen to perigee You will need a twelve-second burn at sixteen forty-two oh two about two minutes from now

WILL

Roger, Houston Stand by with the attitude numbers Bran, you see us?

CONTINUED: 3

BRAN

You're right in the sun. I can't see
shit.

(a shadow covers him)

Got you now Shit, you better slow down.

WILL

No time to brake It's a one-er. Just
grab for Viera as we come by you.

BRAN

Oh shit--you're kidding Oh shit .oh
shit

They are going too fast relative to the drifting astronaut
They're going to pass him. There will only be time for one grab.
Below them, the landscape seems to be getting impossibly close.
Fierce sunlit hills and crater rims, impenetrable black
shadows...and the whole thing racing past beneath them. Ten-mile
wide craters going by in a second. Bran's figure looks like a
spider hanging about an inch above freeway pavement at 70 miles
an hour.

BRAN

(hyperventilating)

Where's the arm? I can't see the arm.
You're in the sun again!!

POV INSIDE HIS HELMET.. We hear his rapid breathing, ragged and
terrified, and see nothing but flares across the visor. Endeavor
is a big black shape descending on him

VIERA

(calm and steady)

I'm right here, Bran.

JUDE (CAP COM)

One minute thirty to burn. You better
take your attitude numbers

WILL

Wait one, Houston

(to Viera)

Range one hundred meters About twenty
seconds You ready, Tovarisch?

VIERA

Ready When I have him, I say GO! You
turn and burn.

WILL

Got it

Eyes unwavering from his human target, Will blips the maneuvering
thrusters Sweat beads detach from his forehead and float free,
forming little constellations around him Endeavor is so low
that the lunar surface is a racing blur Bran can see the

CONTINUED: 4

Endeavor's shadow below him now, jet black and racing over the ground. So close...and getting closer. The shadow leaps toward them and snaps away as the terrain rises and falls.

BRAN

This is not happening... This is not happening.

Mission Control, everyone tense, watching the clock in agony.

JUDE (CAP COM)

One minute.

TECH

He's gotta take the numbers. Why doesn't he take the numbers? How can he burn without the numbers?

BONDY

There's no time. We'll go visual.

TECH

Go visual?!

EXT. ENDEAVOR

..going 12 miles a second, flashes over the top of a mountain range. The massif blurs by in a couple of heart beats.

BRAN

Oh shit, you're too far You're gonna miss me. It's too far! It's too far!!

VIERA

Roll right five.

WILL

Rolling right five.

Will rolls the ship and the big arm scythes across space, closing the gap Viera is at the end, reaching for Bran's approaching figure. Bran reaches for her. Still, you can see it...they're going to miss. Viera takes a breath and holds it. Bran is hurtling toward her. She throws the torque wrench at him

VIERA

Grab it, Bran! GRAB IT!!

Shocked into reacting, he catches the wrench Tied to the wrench is the kevlar strap He fumbles to grip that with his other hand

VIERA

Hold on tight!

The strap goes taut Bran snaps like a bungee jumper at the end of his fall Arcs around her, screaming Viera is almost ripped

CONTINUED:

loose from her footholds The whole arm sways with the load. Bran, holding the tether, rebounds toward her with his feet pinwheeling.

BRAN

YAAAAHHHH!!

They crash together, smacking helmets together with a sharp CRACK! She gets both arms around him. Bran can feel her muscular grip right through the bulk of his pressure suit.

VIERA

GO! GO! GO!

WILL

Turning. Hang on!

With a big blast of the attitude thrusters, he pitches and rolls the ship.

The arm swings the two suited figures in a huge arc Even as he is rotating, Will is setting up for the burn.

WILL

Main engine sequencer enable...master engine arm on...primary fuel pumps on...check valve purge switch on.

JUDE (CAP COM)

Take a visual for attitude.

WILL

Visual...any clues?

BONDY

Try up.

WILL

Up sounds good.

Will fires the maneuvering jets, picking the nose up. Endeavor's shadow is 200 feet below, flashing over the brilliant airless plain of the lunar surface Viera sees an ink-black wall of mountains come over the horizon ahead. They are actually below the tops of mountains Bran stares as the mountains race toward them.

WILL

Maybe I should put the gear down

BRAN

That's not funny, Goddamit!

WILL

Main engine on

CONTINUED: 2

Thunder.. skull-shaking, heart-pounding thunder as the engines ignite, fueled from the massive E-tank. Everything floating around the cockpit. Pens, clipboards, laptops, food wrappers...falls to the floor with a clatter Endeavor leaps forward and upward.

The fragile arm swings with the squeal of metal under the acceleration. It arcs down toward the hull, shattering at the main joint. Viera and Bran hold on desperately as they are slammed against the cowl of the orbiter, ten feet forward from the exhaust nozzles of the flaming engines. Viera is knocked unconscious. The arm, held to the ship only by its hydraulic lines, bangs repeatedly against the hull of the shuttle. Bran, holding on like a drowning man, stares terrified into the glare of the exhaust which seems like a wall of fire filling the sky.

JUDE (CAP COM)

Ten seconds to impact.

Will watches the mountains racing toward them like a wall. He is utterly unmoving. Endeavor goes through a gap between two peaks, actually below the mountaintops on either side. The mountains fill the frame and they are gone in an instant.. falling away behind them. Endeavor is starting to gain altitude. A second rill of mountains passes below them at a safer distance. Will flips a switch. There is silence.

WILL

Main engine cutoff.

With a loud series of pops, the explosive bolts release the now-empty E-tank. The momentum sends it tumbling back toward the lunar surface, where it lands in a cloud of dust.

Will sits back in his seat for a second, and then launches himself to the rear windows. He sees the collapsed Canadarm.

WILL

Viera? You okay? Bran?

VIERA

I think we are both all right. Dochard has a small crack in his visor.

BRAN

I do? Oh shit. I have a crack in my visor?!!

WILL

Well, I guess you'd better come on in then.

In Mission Control, everyone is sitting back, relieved. Bondy looks at the 45 on his console and shakes his head.

INT ENDEAVOR - MID-DAY

Viera hands Bran a pouch of juice. He is still shaking.

CONTINUED:

BRAN
(gulping the juice)
Can we go home now?

WILL
There are just a couple more things we
have to do first.

BRAN
Uh.. thanks for.. you know

WILL
Bran, you're going to get back I told
you.

BRAN
So, what the hell do we do about arming
the bombs? Alexei had the code

VIERA
No one in Moscow can help us. Only two
generals knew the code, and they were at
ground control in Kaliningrad... so they
are dead. We cannot open the firing
computer with our tools. We need the
number code.

WILL
Houston, this is Endeavor

JUDE (V.O.)
This is Houston, over.

WILL
Arbatov is dead We don't have the code
You've got to find Genya. He was the
backup. so he must have the code.

JUDE (V O)
We'll do all we can, Endeavor.

WILL
You find him and you find him fast. We
came out here to do a job you better get
your shit together down there

BRAN
He could be anywhere He could be dead

WILL
If he's dead I'll kill him

I MINUS 4 HOURS

CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT

Bright Angel fills the heavens its tail stretching from one
horizon to the other Thousands of people are seated, staring up
at the sky silently

TELEVISION SET

We are looking in a store window. The set is displaying a full-frame shot of Genya Schmulevich.

CNN COMMENTATOR (V O.)

.the helicopter was last reported in the town of Sanford, Florida Anyone in the Orlando or the Daytona Beach areas who has seen this man, or has any information...

SMASH! The store window is broken, and the TV is ripped out of the display rack.

FLORIDA - NIGHT

The wind is howling. Claire, Corey, Genya, and Loretta are in the Zodiac. Genya is valiantly paddling. Claire and Loretta are helping with their hands.

CLAIRE

It's getting worse!

GENYA

Much worse! It is definitely a hurricane.

COREY

Why not?

Ahead of them is a roadhouse restaurant sitting by itself. Shingles are being ripped off the roof. A sign that reads "Bobby Ray's Peel'n Eats--All You Can Eat Shrimp" swings wildly on its frame

INT. BOBBY RAY'S

The group is sitting on the bar so they can stay dry. Claire starts looking around. She finds a battery-powered Watchman TV and turns it on. The image is fuzzy; however, we recognize it.

REVEREND BUELL

And from the revelation of Saint John .
"I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black .."

EXT. ENDEAVOR

The moon is behind them, shrinking in size In front of them the earth is growing Its beautiful blues and swirling whites look innocent Off to the side, Bright Angel is spread across the entire sky in all its luminous glory, its head a blazing white, its unbelievable tail striking the earth and continuing for almost 10 million miles It looks as if someone has shined an interrogating flashlight and captured the earth in its beam.

INT BOBBY RAY'S PEEL'N EATS

Genya futilely tries to see if the telephones are working They are not. He slams the receiver down

EXT. ENDEAVOR

The spacecraft has entered the edge of the coma itself, and is surrounded by the rarefied luminous gas. Endeavor actually casts a long shaft of shadow through the diffuse mist. For the first time, through the vast corridor of incandescent gas, we can actually see the nucleus itself. A glinting mass of dark ice, it sits in a pearly fog of carbon monoxide and methane, like a malformed black diamond

INT. ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

Will, Viera, and Bran are strapped in. They are lit from the glow of the coma. Bran is working the radar scanner. He is watching the readout on a screen.

BRAN

Houston, are you copying the radar scan?

JUDE (V O.)

Roger, Endeavor, we are copying

WILL

Has anyone found Genya yet?

JUDE (V.O.)

Not yet. We're doing everything we can.

WILL

You better do more.

JUDE (V O.)

Endeavor...we show you one hundred miles from Bright Angel, and closing.

WILL

Roger, Houston...we copy one hundred miles. Preparing for OMS burn.

EXT. ENDEAVOR

The small RCS jets on the port side of Endeavor's nose spit a few brief yellow flashes ..and the spacecraft begins a slow yaw.. presenting its side . then finally, its tail to the advancing nucleus

JUDE (V O)

Looking good, Endeavor

WILL (V O.)

Roger, Houston starting OMS

The larger OMS jets that face aft flash to life. The retro burn acts as a brake and the rate of closure between Endeavor and Bright Angel slows. The comet has grown. It is no longer a small, distant object inside of a huge glow. It is a large craggy body and Endeavor is inside the comet's own gossamer-like daylight. Another short OMS burst, and Endeavor has stopped. The rendezvous is accomplished.

CONTINUED:

WILL (V O.)
OMS complete.

JUDE (V O.)
Roger, Endeavor

INT ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

The three of them are absolutely spellbound at what is in front of them. Their faces shimmer in the pulsating light.

WILL
Houston, it's time to move close to that thing

JUDE (V O.)
Roger, Endeavor. you go get 'em, Will.

EXT. ENDEAVOR

Another wink of the jets...and Endeavor stalks forward, toward the staggering sight shining ahead.

INT BOBBY RAY'S

The incessant pounding of the storm has suddenly stopped. The quiet is odd. Claire looks up from her futile attempt to get any kind of reception from the little Watchman.

GENYA
The storm hasn't stopped. It is the eye of the hurricane.

Genya, Claire, and Loretta step outside.

EXT. BOBBY RAY'S

The three of them blink in amazement at what they see. The great black arcing wall of cloud has passed them on one side, forming a 60-mile tunnel, revealing a crystal clear night sky. Bright Angel is almost like a new sun...much bigger and brighter than the moon, dominating the night, vibrating and radiating streaks of pale blues and yellows. Loretta feels the light on her face. Even though she can't clearly see it, she can make out its brilliance. Corey comes out to take a look.

LORETTA
I wish someone else's name was on it.

Claire's Watchman crackles to life with some static. She adjusts the dial. A flickering image of Will appears on the tiny LCD screen.

CNN REPORTER
Mission Control reports that Commander Seacord has successfully rendezvoused with

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
Hey! .. Look at this!

CNN REPORTER
the comet. The actual contact with Bright
Angel...

CLAIRE
It's my dad! .. Why is he...

Everyone crowds around the tiny screen

CNN REPORTER
..shortly Mission...

The picture breaks up, and then returns. This time it is Genya's
face, taken from his NASA ID badge photo.

CNN REPORTER
..extremely important.. locate .. anyone
who... this...immediately...

Genya gapes at the flickering image.

CLAIRE
Why is my dad in command? ... And why are
they showing your picture?

GENYA
Because everyone else must be dead,
including Arbatov. He had the arming
codes for the warheads. Something must
have happened to Strategic Command in
Russia, so they don't have the codes!
That's it! They don't have the codes!!
We've got to get to a phone!

CLAIRE
How long does this eye thing last?

GENYA
About an hour

CLAIRE
Then we'd better get going. Mom, you stay
with Loretta. Genya, come on!!

EXT ENDEAVOR

Bright Angel is a dark malevolent thing up close. Will has
maneuvered the shuttle to within a mile of the nucleus, which
floats before them as a slowly turning mass of gleaming black
ice. It is an irregular ovoid, three kilometers long by one and
a quarter across the narrow axis.

INT. ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

Viera stares through the window, transfixed, when she should be paying attention to Bran. Bran is reading the radar scans and is making a drawing on a metal clipboard to show the two sites he has selected.

BRAN

There's a cleft here, near the polar axis, with a crevasse at the bottom that's just deep enough. The first warhead goes here at the bottom of the crevasse--

(he indicates with an X)

The second site is here, on the other side. There is an outgassing tunnel, that's very deep. The whole area is riddled with tunnels that are venting gas. It could get pretty intense.

I MINUS 2 HOURS

EXT. FLORIDA

Claire and Genya paddle in the little Zodiac. The remnants of a farm jut through the ink-black water. Broken telephone poles are floating near them. The whole scene is lit by the pulsating glow of the comet.

GENYA

The eye is passing over. The storm will come soon again.

CLAIRE

There has to be a town somewhere... someplace where the phone lines are not down.

GENYA

Claire, you must listen to me. I'm going to give you some numbers and I want you to remember them.

CLAIRE

You mean in case you die? You're not going to die. I won't let you.

GENYA

You are a remarkable girl. You would make a wonderful cosmonaut. Now you and I are going to practice these numbers. 090
503 161 218 Now with me 090 .

CLAIRE

090

The wind is starting to pick up, and we hear a clap of thunder.

EXT. ENDEAVOR PAYLOAD BAY

The three astronauts finish locking themselves into restraints on the lander they call the Bomber. Through the veil of luminous gas, they can see the earth, which has grown dramatically larger.

BRAN

What the hell are we doing placing these things, if we don't have the codes?

WILL

If Houston can get us the codes, we can arm the warheads by radio. That will at least give us some time

Will hits a switch, and the locking clamps are blown away by the explosive bolts. He fires the maneuvering jets and the Bomber floats free of Endeavor. They start the descent to the surface of Bright Angel. They fly over an utterly alien landscape. The ravages of the close pass by the sun have left the comet a tortured, twisted place. Its surface ripped and exploded, shattered and melted. They move from the dark side, which faces Earth, to the sunlit side. Will avoids the taller geysers, but still feels the buffeting effect. The Bomber is unstable, and it is hard work to move the lumbering thing around.

Below them, a 100-foot-long chunk of icy crust is suddenly blown out by a pocket of gas beneath. Twinkling shards and glassy sheets fly up past them, some striking the lander

WILL

Don't ever say I don't take you to glamorous places. Do you know where you are at all?

BRAN

It looks way different from here. I, uh . shit

WILL

No pressure. Tell me when you see something you recognize.

BRAN

(pointing)

Go that way

Bran gets them to the big cleft near the pole. Then sees the crevasse and gets all excited. Will makes his approach. With a burst from the descent engine, he kills their downward speed and bumps to a nice gentle landing near the edge of the crevasse. The gravity is very slight, barely enough to stick them to the ground. They unclamp their feet. They are about to set foot on a new world. Viera is suddenly intensely aware that she is a Russian and Will an American.

VIERA

You go first

CONTINUED:

He steps off the Bomber and drifts like a feather to the ground. CLOSE ON his feet touching down on the alien ice. The first manned landing on another world since the moon in 1969.

WILL

No time for speeches. Somebody hand me the piton gun.

Viera and Bran drift down next to him. Viera hands Will a massive torqueless piton gun. Will blasts a steel piton into the ice near one of the lander's feet. Clamped to the foot is a tie-down loop, a short cable. He clips that to the piton with a carabiner, anchoring the vehicle. Meanwhile Bran just looks down at his feet in wonder.. standing on an alien world.

BRAN

Neil Armstrong can kiss my ass in the town square

EXT. FLORIDA

THWACK!! Claire and Genya are illuminated by a blue-white bolt of lightning. The rain is coming down again.

The wind is resuming its angry howl.

GENYA

(loudly)
two one eight!

CLAIRE

Two one eight!

GENYA

Again 090 .

CLAIRE

090..

Another bolt of lightning

EXT. BRIGHT ANGEL

AT THE EDGE OF THE CREVASSE, Will stands looking down. It is about 15 feet across and at least 200 feet deep. He can't tell if it gets narrower further down. Bran comes up next to him, fumbling with a bulky tube. It is a rocket-propelled grenade launcher (RPG) which has been modified to shoot an explosive expanding-anchor. Bran readies the weapon like they showed him during training. He clips a pulley block onto the business end of the rocket. Then he snaps the pulley over the cable, between a bulky spool lying near him on the ice, and the length which goes back to the Bomber.

BRAN

You wanna do it?

CONTINUED:

Will takes the launcher and leans out over the edge. He aims deep into the crevasse and pulls the trigger. V-WHOOMP! The rocket leaps out and down. The cable pays out of the spool like line from a fly-fishing reel. The high-tech harpoon disappears into the depths of the crevasse, lighting the ice as it goes CRACK!! The rocket slams into the bottom of the crevasse and the explosive anchor fires spikes laterally into the ice. Will and Bran return to the Bomber, pulling themselves along the cable, and then cut off the cable near the spool. They crimp the free end to a cleat on the first warhead. This completes a loop, or "endless" cable system. The cable runs over a drive capstan, which Viera controls with a hand switch. It works like a breeches buoy or a backyard clothesline. At over five tons of mass, the bomb is unwieldy in the micro gravity of the comet. They can't just push it around or try to carry it, because they couldn't get any traction in the light gravity. Will releases a series of heavy latches, and the bomb is free to move.

VIERA

(to Viera)

Run the cable out slowly

She does, and the bomb slides off its rack, hand-guided by Will and Bran. They ease it to the ground and Viera winches it to the edge of the crevasse.

With Will talking her through it, they inch the massive warhead over the edge. The ice crumbles, and Will slips, but holds onto the cable.

WILL

Take a mark.

VIERA

Mark

WILL

Okay, pay out slowly

Viera feeds out more cable. The bomb starts its descent into the crevasse, bumping gently down the rough icy wall. It hangs up on a ledge about 50 feet down. Will pulls up on the cable by hand and drags it sideways ten feet, then lets it back down. The bomb continues its descent. Finally it stops, far down in the darkness.

VIERA

Sixty meters

WILL

Let's anchor the cable

BRAN

That's one down

EXT. FLORIDA

The Zodiac is being swept along the storm-driven flood waters, which are now like rapids Genya and Claire are shouting with all their might.

GENYA

090!! .

CLAIRE

090!! . .

GENYA

503!! ..

CLAIRE

I know it!! I know it!!! No more. .

GENYA

503!! .

CLAIRE

503!! ..

I MINUS ONE HOUR

WILL FLIPS DOWN THE GOLD SUN VISOR on his helmet to guard his eyes from the flash of the rocket. Bran hands him the launcher and he aims it down the black maw of the tunnel. Will has to brace himself against the wind of methane and CO2 howling from the mouth of the hole, which corkscrews almost straight down into the nucleus

They are at the second site, a venting tunnel on the dark side of the comet V-WHOOMP!! The rocket stabs downward, ricocheting off the polished walls of ice and snaking off into darkness. The cable pays out for a long time .then stops. As Will crosses back to the Bomber, we get a wider view of the landscape at the second site. Lit now only by Earthlight and the fluorescing gas of the coma, the black glass landscape is much harder to see. But what we can see is a twisted nightmare of sculpted ice. It is laced with tunnels, and in places the surface looks like wormwood

JUDE (V.O)

Endeavor . fifty-nine minutes to impact

WILL

(over the com)

What about the arming code?

JUDE (V.O)

We're working on that

WILL

You keep saying that

CONTINUED:

BRAN
(over the com)
Well, you guys better get your shit
together 'cause we're rockin' here, and if
the world ends, it's not our fault, got
it?

INT MISSION CONTROL

JUDE (CAP COM)
Got it, Endeavor.

Jude rubs her eyes and reaches for her 47th cup of coffee. There is still sporadic gunfire audible from outside. She sees her hands shaking.

EXT BRIGHT ANGEL

THE SECOND BOMB bumps down the glassy wall of the tunnel. Chunks of ice blow up past it, carried out of the tunnel by the venting gases. At the surface, Bran and Will are guiding the cable as Viera pays out. They hit a snag at 30 meters...halfway down. Will and Bran try to free it. They pull the bomb up and lower it again. No good It's stuck.

BRAN
Not deep enough. The gag won't work
unless we get it to sixty meters

WILL
Okay then Be right back.

Will dives over the edge, catching the cable in his hands. He pulls himself down into the windstream hand over hand along the cable. Bran watches him disappear down the shaft. In the tunnel, the methane wind howls past Will as he works his way down. It gets darker as the tunnel twists and turns. It is an amazing structure...occasionally opening up into grottoes, then narrowing down to a smaller throat. Other tunnels branch off, some tiny, some huge. Gas jets pour into the main throat from some of these tributaries. It is like a circulatory system.. or a giant bronchial tube. He hears a crackling in his headset, and bits of words

WILL
You're breaking up Say again?

Deeper now, he gets no reply

AT THE SURFACE, Bran is starting to freak

BRAN
Will, how you doin'? Will?

VIERA
Will, do you copy?

BRAN
Damn

CONTINUED:

He bites his lip, knowing Will shouldn't be down there alone. Knowing that Will's protective sense of duty would not allow him to ask Bran to buddy him. And that he may be in trouble

BRAN

Ah, shit.

He grabs the cable and pulls himself down into the tunnel. He has to fight his way down against the wind, which buffets him from side to side.

Passing a grotto, Bran sees a huge section of the ice wall give way and go rocketing over his head, up the tunnel. He goes on, after his buddy.

AT THE SURFACE, Viera hears a sharp CRACK-BOOM! She looks around and sees a 200-foot shelf of ice blast loose from the surface nearby. It shatters into pieces which tumble up into the sky. What a hellish place. She looks at her watch. Then looks up at the earth looming overhead. BRAN reaches Will and the bomb. Will smiles when he sees him.

WILL

Why, Bran ... how nice to see you.

The warhead is jammed at a tight spot. Straining together, they try to work the bomb through the narrow throat. No joy. Will clambers past the bomb, getting under it. He chips away at the ledge with an ice hammer. Bran works it from above. The warhead shifts. Then lurches downward.

Will is pinned between the wall and the warhead. He strains against it, but can't get any leverage. His hands are slipping on the ice.

WILL

I'm stuck

BRAN

Hang on.

Bran crawls through a narrow cleft between the warhead and the tunnel wall. The CO2 wind shrieks around him like a gale. He is grunting with the effort, but we see that he is not afraid. He is focused. He is doing it.

He gets under the bomb and wedges himself in next to Will. He starts chopping with the ice hammer, trying to widen the space. The wind shrieks past them, whistling insanely in the constricted space.

EXT FLORIDA - NIGHT

Claire and Genya are in the middle of a maelstrom. The rushing water is now a torrent, driving and spinning the Zodiac onward. Genya is screaming to the point that his lungs are going to burst.

CONTINUED:

GENYA

161!! .

CLAIRE

161!! ..

A fallen power line that is spanning the river strikes Genya in mid-chest, slamming him off the Zodiac and into the water. Claire screams and ducks just in time, the thick black wire passing over her head. She stares in horror at Genya's disappearing face. Without hesitation, she dives in after him. She desperately grabs for his jacket. She gets a hand through one of the epaulets as the two of them are swept along, completely out of control.

The epaulet breaks and Genya is wrenched away. He disappears under the water. Claire flails around frantically looking for him. He never surfaces. Her young body is tossed around the raging water, and she lets out an endless scream.

INT. ICE TUNNEL - BRIGHT ANGEL

Bran helps Will get free

WILL

Go back up the tunnel, and act as a signal relay. I'm going to stay and guide the bomb down.

Bran nods and pushes himself toward the top.

Viera is at the winch

BRAN (V O.)

(very faintly)

Start to pay out the cable

She starts the winch. Inside the tunnel, Will guides the bomb down through the twists and turns in deepening darkness. At 60 meters, the warhead stops.

BRAN (V.O.)

That's it. The position is good.

Will pulls himself over the bomb and back up the tunnel. He reaches Bran and they climb together back up the cable toward the light.

Suddenly, there is a tremendous concussion. Will looks down as the side wall of the tunnel blows in right below them, sending a ton of ice in glassy slabs and shards, rocketing upward in the vortex of wind. Bran is slammed by the ice, and dragged scraping upward over the jagged outcroppings. He manages to grab the cable and stop himself, as Will pulls him into an alcove.

BRAN

We're not gonna make it!

CONTINUED:

WILL

You complain too much

He starts to climb, hauling Bran up the tunnel. Ice and chunks of debris continue to swirl around them from below.

WILL

No one said saving the world would be easy.

Near the surface, Viera appears next to Will. She helps him haul Bran up the rest of the way and get him to the Bomber.

WILL

You secured the cable?

VIERA

Done Ready to go.

WILL

Just grab on! No time to lock in!

Viera wraps her legs around Bran, and her arms through the now-empty frame of the lander. Will fires the engine and the Bomber leaps off the surface of the comet, heading back to Endeavor. Will watches the shuttle grow larger. It is framed against the earth...which now seems to fill the entire sky.

EXT FLORIDA

Claire is being tossed down the flood water like a rag doll. She is beginning to lose consciousness. She ricochets off something solid which spins her sideways toward an embankment. Thick roots are jutting out, and with what is clearly her last effort before giving in to the water, she grabs ahold. The force of the water pulls at her shoulders and hands; however, her will is stronger than the storm. She holds on.

A bolt of lightning illuminates the embankment. She is in fact underneath a small bridge. With all of her might, she claws her way up the embankment. The wind is vindictively slapping her face. She makes it to the top and lies panting on the hard surface of a road.

Behind her, a fierce glow appears on the horizon of the road. It comes toward her, rising slightly. The brilliant flare becomes two distinct hellish lights. Claire turns around and faces the light. Lying on her side. She shades her eyes with her bloody hand.

The wide-bodied Humvee squeals to a stop. Three drenched Marines stare ahead at the young girl who is caught in their headlights. One of the Marines lifts up his radio and starts to shout above the growl of the storm. The other two leap out of the Humvee and run toward Claire.

INT. ENDEAVOR MID-DECK

JUDE (V.O.)
Endeavor, this is Houston, do you read?

WILL
This is Endeavor, over

JUDE (V.O.)
There's someone here who needs to talk to you.

WILL
This is Seacord.

CLAIRE (V.O.)
This is Seacord, too

Will cannot hide his astonishment.

INT. MARINE COMMAND POST

It is a temporary setup in a local school. Claire is talking on a satellite phone. She is surrounded by Marines. There is a large television set up nearby with CNN's live coverage of the mission. Claire is wrapped in a blanket, still drenched, bruised, and bleeding from a number of small cuts.

CLAIRE
It's me, Daddy. It's me.

WILL (V.O.)
Are you okay?

CLAIRE
I'm okay. Mom's okay. Daddy...I have what you need. I have the numbers. Here, write this down. . 090 . .

INT. ENDEAVOR MID-DECK

Claire's voice is coming over the speaker. Viera is writing them down.

CLAIRE (V.O.)
503 .. 161 .. 218

Viera punches the numbers into the arming computer on the detonator box

WILL
You're wonderful, Claire. I love you more than you will ever know

BRAN
Will you blow the goddamn comet away, already!

WILL
I have to go, honey

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE (V.O.)
I love you, Daddy.

I MINUS 25 MINUTES

INT. ENDEAVOR

Viera activates the arming computer. She sends the signal to the bombs, telling them to arm, ready for detonation. She scowls. Punches the transmit button again. And again. She resets the computer and tries again.

BRAN
(seeing her expression)
What's wrong?

VIERA
I'm only getting an arm light on one of the warheads.

BRAN
What!?

He hauls himself over to the detonator, with a wracking cough. There it is .one green light and one red light.

WILL
It's the one in the tunnel.

BRAN
Did you reset?

VIERA
Twice. It must be the comet interfering with the signal

WILL
Yeah

Bran laughs, a very bleak laugh.

BRAN
Sonofabitch

WILL
(to Bran)
Is there a chance with one bomb?

BRAN
No

Will doesn't hesitate. He's still wearing his pressure suit, so he just grabs his glove and heads for the airlock

WILL
I could punch it in manually. There's time

CONTINUED:

VIERA

There won't be time for you to come back.

Will looks at her and opens the airlock door.

VIERA

I should go. These are Russian warheads.
It is my duty.

Will doesn't even answer. He starts to close the airlock door.
She pulls it back open. Tears are forming in her eyes.

WILL

Viera, let me close the door

VIERA

No. I will go. I will go!!

Will looks at her for a long moment.

WILL

Me too.

With a sudden shove, he pushes her away from the door. She is
launched backward. Before she can return, he has closed the
hatch and jammed it from his side.

VIERA

No! No!! Will, please! It is my duty,
not yours!

She is crying Will is quickly checking his suit gauges and
couplings.

WILL

Your duty is to life, Senior Captain
Chernayev. You've been throwing up since
this mission began and, with you, it's not
nerves

He goes to the window, and takes his last look at her.

WILL

Your duty is to your child

He puts his helmet on and rotates it, locking it into place.
Tears are streaming down her face

WILL

Life is all that matters Life is why we
are here

(flatly)

Com check

(pause)

Com check!

VIERA

(almost inaudible)

Check

CONTINUED: 2

WILL
Clear to vent.

VIERA
Clear.

I MINUS 12 MINUTES

EVERYWHERE

The whole world is holding its collective breath. We see the skyline of Paris...the great Pyramids of Egypt...London... New York... Chicago... farms...villages...the plains. Everyone is standing outside staring spellbound at the sky, or huddled around television sets that are blaring commentary in every conceivable language.

INT MISSION CONTROL

All of them Jude, Bondy, Tarnauer, every engineer, all of them are watching the screen

INT. MARINE COMMAND POST

Claire and the Marines are huddled around the television.

EXT. ENDEAVOR

Will flies the Bomber toward the heart of Bright Angel. He is totally alone. Endeavor is shrinking behind him

WILL
Get going. Minimum safe distance is one hundred miles

INT. ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

Viera is at the controls. She hits the OMS switch. Tears are streaming down her face.

EXT ENDEAVOR

Will turns back in time to see the OMS engines ignite. Two small lights blink on, and Endeavor begins to move away faster. He turns away and faces the approaching comet

WILL
Give me the numbers again

VIERA (V O)
090 . 503 . 161 . 218

Will repeats them to himself quietly as the surface rushes up to meet him. When he is 50 feet above the mouth of the tunnel, he kicks free of the Bomber and falls spread-Eagle, carried by inertia. The shaft yawns below him like an open mouth waiting to swallow him

INT. TUNNEL

He enters the tunnel, slowed by the wind blast, and grabs along the slick wall for the cable. He makes the catch, slamming hard against the wall. Without stopping, he pulls himself hand over hand. He charges down through the serpentine curves of the tunnel like a human bobsled. His breathing is loud, as he whispers the numbers over and over again.

EXT ENDEAVOR

Endeavor is streaking away from the nucleus

INT TUNNEL

Will continues downward. He reaches the bomb and pries the cover off the firing computer.

WILL

Endeavor, I'm at the warhead. Do you copy?

(pause)

Endeavor? Viera?

(nothing)

Didn't think so.

With a screwdriver from his tool pouch, he punches in the arming code.

INT. ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

Viera stares as the second light turns from red to green.

VIERA

Houston, Endeavor. I have two green lights. Ten seconds to minimum safe distance.

INT. MISSION CONTROL

There is no movement. Everyone is frozen like so many statues. No one is breathing.

JUDE (CAP COM)

(whispering)

Roger, Endeavor

INT TUNNEL

Will climbs toward the earth above. Its blue light reaches toward him, glinting down the icy walls. He is looking upward. He is climbing toward home. He is smiling.

WILL'S POV as he reaches the tunnel mouth and it opens slowly, like an iris, showing the beautiful earth gloriously filling the entire sky.

We track in closer and closer on Will's eyes. We see his memory, clear and sharp. The memory of him singing and playing the

CONTINUED:

xylophone with Claire It's not the home video It's the moment itself Corey is there, with the camera, grinning Claire's face and her bright three-year old's laughter fills the universe.

3-YEAR-OLD CLAIRE

Twinkle, twinkle, little star. how I wonder what you are. . Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky.

INT ENDEAVOR FLIGHT DECK

Viera watches the ranging radar.

VIERA

(hoarsely)

Minimum safe distance. We are go for detonation

Viera closes her eyes Her finger reaches for the button She pushes it.

3-YEAR-OLD CLAIRE'S FACE

The smiling face flares suddenly brighter and brighter, until the universe goes white In space, Endeavor is a tiny black leaf against a field of pure white light When the glow fades, a large chunk has been vaporized in the side of Comet Daito-Wolf. Millions of tiny pieces fall like broken glass. The bulk of the comet is wrenched off its fearful path, and streaks off to the right. What follows is the most remarkable light show that the human race has ever witnessed. The millions of pieces from the pulverized chunk of Bright Angel turn into a meteor shower as they are ignited by the edge of the earth's atmosphere. Golden streaks of light race from horizon to horizon

And then Bright Angel lives up to her name All over the world, people watch as the comet grazes the very edge of the atmosphere Everywhere in the world where there was night, there is now day, in an instant In the parts of the world where it was already day, it is suddenly brighter than anything that anyone has ever seen. Sonic booms ring across all the continents The skies blaze with trails of brilliant starbursts It is the 4th of July. It is the primal light of nature herself, reminding all of us of our mortality The world, bathed in light, watches, as Bright Angel, with one final, seering, magnificent statement, caresses the outer limits of the sky, like a celestial stroking of the world's cheek and then continues toward the rest of the universe Nothing reaches the ground It is over

DISSOLVE TO:

TELEVISION SCREEN

A space shuttle deploys its landing gear and begins its flare over the runway at Edwards Air Force Base in California

CONTINUED:

CNN REPORTER

. pilot Viera Chenayev and mission specialist Bran Douchard, the only two survivors of the Endeavor mission, were able to rendezvous and transfer to Discovery. Only minutes ago, they made a successful re-entry into the earth's atmosphere

EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE

Discovery shimmers like a mirage as white smoke punctuates the tires touching down on the hot runway. Discovery is now surrounded by support vehicles that have rushed up to greet it.

We can clearly see the burned and charred scars of re-entry. The stairs are rolled up to the spacecraft, and the crew door opens. Viera and Bran come out into the sun. At the bottom of the stairs, Bran drops to his knees and kisses the ground. Viera walks forward, a little unsteadily--however, with her shoulders squared. Photographers are swarming all around them.

President Barringer and Tarnauer are there. The President warmly greets Viera and Bran.

TARNAUER

I spoke to the chairman of the astrophysics department at Berkeley. He told me to tell you that, after long deliberation, they had elected to give you a passing grade on your paper.

Bran grins. Viera sees something. She starts to walk toward the crowd. We see what she sees. It is Corey and Claire, who are standing together. She goes over to them. She stares at Claire.

She stands in front of her, and then slowly she salutes her. Claire stares at her, trying to control her tears. And the two of them fling their arms around each other and hug. Then she turns to Corey.

COREY

I never came to these for Will.

VIERA

I know. You honor him now.

The two of them look at each other for a long time.

COREY

Welcome home.

THE END