

EVOLUTION

Written
by
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A MONTAGE: A hummingbird hovering, an explosion of wild flowers, a hyena on the Serengeti, elephants in Kenya, an eagle soaring over the American Rockies, a lizard in the Nagev... Whales in the Pacific, lions, birds, soaring redwoods, a snake in a rain forest, a spider, ants running in an ant hill ...

A song to life on Earth...

SMASH CUT TO:

The cold glitter of SPACE. An iron meteorite, about to skim by the Earth, catches just enough of the atmosphere to arc down into the lower regions, where it begins to GLOW red and green.

INT. COCKPIT - 747 - FLT. 118 - 33,000 FEET - NIGHT

SUPER: DAY 1

United Airlines Flight 118, headed east. The CAPTAIN points out the green-red fireball to his CO-PILOT. They both watch the meteorite headed over Arizona toward New Mexico. The Captain picks up his mike.

CAPTAIN

Ahhh.. TRAC-COM 2, Albuquerque. This is United 118 -- We just had a very fine meteor show out here to our west -- over Arizona and New Mexico -- Quite a sight.

TRAC-COM (O.S.)

Ahh.. Copy that United 118. We have it too.

Seconds later it explodes in mid-air.

PILOT

Whooooaaa ... that was spectacular.

EXT. - SKY-WATCH FACILITY - NEW MEXICO - NIGHT

A cluster of fireballs arc down over the mesa. Multiple CAMERAS track the fireballs, recording them exactly as they were designed to do.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM - KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE - NEW MEXICO - AFTERNOON

CAPTAIN PERKINS, U.S. Air Force, preparing to brief helicopter search and rescue TEAMS. Perkins, crisp, 29, on Special Assignment. The base C.O. introduces him:

C.O.
Gentlemen, Captain Perkins,
Sandia Labs.

Perkins steps forward. A search area outlined on the map behind him.

EXT. - TARMAC - KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE - DAY

Double-timing it across the tarmac to their waiting copters.

LIEUTENANT 1
(to his C.O.)
I don't get it. What do they want
with pieces of this thing?

C.O.
People like to look for this kind of
shit. Don't ask me why.

EXT. SKY - OVER DESERT - NEW MEXICO - LATE DAY

Four copters in formation -- over the desert like dragon
flies -- CLATTERING -- looking -- looking, for something.

ROLL TITLES:

COPTER PILOT 3
Able-Baker 2, do you want to turn
back? It's getting dark.

The C.O. looks at Perkins.

PERKINS
I guess so.

COPTER PILOT 2
(breaks in)
What's that at 2 o'clock? See it?

COPTER PILOT 1
We're circling back --

They circle right and hover above a dark jagged HOLE
punched through the top of the sandy, white mesa.

EXT. DESERT - NEW MEXICO - LATE AFTERNOON

Two copters land, two hover. They all get out and walk
over to the jagged hole, perhaps five feet across.

One of them shines a light down into a vast, dark space.
A cavern. They expected to find a crater, not this.

C.O.

Looks like it punched through into a cave. No telling how far down it went.

PILOT 2

Carlsbad's twenty miles that way. There are a lot of cave systems in the area.

The C.O. looks at the setting sun. Fifteen minutes of light, max.

C.O.

We're running out of light. Mark the position, Lieutenant.

(the Lt. punches it into a hand-held, military GPS.)

We'll come back first thing in the morning. We may be able to get in through the cave system.

INT. CARLSBAD CAVE SYSTEM - NEW MEXICO - MORNING

SUPER: DAY 2 9:00 A.M.

Two SPELUNKERS lead two EIGHT-MAN teams -- Army Special Forces -- and Perkins through a vast underground cave system. Their bright flashlight beams the only source of illumination in the cavernous darkness. The only SOUND is DRIPPING WATER. They pass through large rooms filled with beautiful stalagmites and stalactites, closing on the position.

COL. MASON BOOKER, 35, Afro-American, Army Special Forces is in charge of the teams. His POINT MAN shouts back.

POINT MAN

Colonel, the G.P.S. says we're 300 feet straight ahead and 200 feet to the right .

(confronts a narrow passageway)

I think we can get through here ...

They work their way through, single file.

INT. CAVERN - 9:51 A.M. NEW MEXICO - DAY

They enter a huge, underground, natural amphitheatre. Immense. They all look up at the jagged hole in the ceiling, over 100 feet above them. Shafts of sunlight streaming in -- partially illuminating the room. Their eyes follow along an imaginary trajectory to the ground. And then they see it: At the far end of the cavern --

where the ceiling slopes down and meets the floor --
 an eight-foot-high SHARD from the iron meteorite,
 IMBEDDED, dagger-like, in the floor.

PERKINS

Christ, that's the biggest one
 I've ever seen. It's huge!

Perkins walks closer, the team following behind him. His
 bright flashlight beam illuminating the glistening black
 meteorite. Water drips into a shallow pool nearby.

Perkins steps closer. His flashlight beam picks up some
 blue-green mold on the surface of the meteorite shard.

PERKINS

Damn. It's covered with moss.
 They like these things as
 uncontaminated as possible.

Perkins turns to his assistant, LT. COX.

PERKINS

Okay, who's our wizard de jour?

LT. COX

(works his laptop)
 Some guy at Stanford. Alex Decker.

PERKINS

Call him.

INT. DECKER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - PALO ALTO - MORNING

ALEX DECKER, forty-two, tall with patrician good looks,
 is having a pleasant breakfast with MAGGIE DALTON --
 thirty -- striking-looking. Bagels, lox, good coffee.

A full professor of Biological Sciences at Stanford,
 Decker's specialty is biodiversity and the origins of
 life. Media friendly, he's a PBS superstar. He's on the
 fast track for a Nobel Prize and he knows it.

DECKER

You didn't tell me what you thought
 about my paper.

MAGGIE

(beat)
 I thought it was extraordinary.

Maggie could pass for an undergraduate. She's an
 associate professor of microbiology at Berkeley.

She pours him some more coffee.

DECKER

Maggie, I think it's time to
formalize our relationship --
don't you?

She looks at him. Hesitates. He waits, studying her.

DECKER

Come on, Maggie ...
(grins)
Let me make an honest woman
of you.

MAGGIE

Alex --

His beeper buzzes -- he checks it. His cell phone rings.
He looks at Maggie --

DECKER

Hold that thought.

DECKER

(into phone)
Hello. This is he. Who?
Where...?

Maggie starts clearing the table.

DECKER

Yes. As soon as possible.
(writes it down)
Alameda Naval Air Station
-- an hour. I'll be there.

He hangs up -- an intrigued look on his face. Turns
and looks out the window at the Stanford bell tower.

MAGGIE

Maybe you're right, yes.

DECKER

Yes -- what?

He's completely forgotten about his semi-proposal. A
little hurt but mostly relieved, Maggie changes the
subject.

MAGGIE

What was it?

DECKER
(intrigued)
A meteorite -- New Mexico.

MAGGIE
Anything interesting?

DECKER
It could be ---
(beat)
Are you going to be around the
lab this afternoon?

MAGGIE
Yes -- why?

DECKER
I'll call you. I have to get
packed.

With a quick peck on the cheek he heads off to the
bedroom to pack. Maggie watches him go.

EXT./INT. COPTER - OVER NEW MEXICO - DAY

A military helicopter moving through a blue New Mexico
sky. Decker being ferried in with SLOAN, thirty-one, an
associate professor of microbiology at Stanford and a
giant fan of Decker.

DECKER
This is probably another fucking
wild goose chase, Sloan. God,
it's gorgeous out here.

They look down at the site. Military vehicles, copters
on the ground.

INT. THE HUGE ROOM - CAVERN - NEW MEXICO

Decker enters the huge underground amphitheatre and looks
up at the jagged hole in the ceiling. Shafts of sunlight
coming through.

PERKINS
Dr. Decker, I'm Captain Perkins, this
is Colonel Booker, Special Forces.
... It's over there.

Decker's attention is already on the meteorite shard at
the far end of the room. Big lights have been brought

in, all directed at the meteorite shard. Decker approaches it as one might approach the Pieta.

PERKINS

The moss grew for a while --
then it stopped.

Decker walks around it, staying a distance from it. A thin coating of blue-green moss on it.

DECKER

Has anyone touched it?

BOOKER

No.

Decker kneels down. Looks at the base of the shard.

DECKER

How far down does this thing go?

BOOKER

We did a magnetometer probe.
There's another eight feet.

DECKER

Let's get a few samples.

Decker climbs into a hooded field bio-suit, slips on some gloves, takes some sterile instruments from Sloan's kit, and begins removing small samples of moss -- puts them into sterile glass SPECIMEN CASES. He chips off a sample of the meteorite itself. Then he takes samples of soil from around the shard. He puts each of those in separate specimen cases -- then places all of them in a heavy metal BOX -- air crash safe. Bio-hazard labels all over it.

Attaching a cable to the box, he nods to Booker. They watch as the box is YANKED up through the hole in the ceiling -- by a hovering copter.

DECKER

(to Sloan)

Make sure Zack takes a look at
these, ASAP. I want Maggie
there too.

BOOKER

Where's it going?

DECKER

To a Bio-Level 4 facility near
Phoenix.

BOOKER

I thought the only Bio-Level 4 labs
were at Ft. Detrick and the CDC
in Atlanta?

DECKER

Did you?

As the box disappears out of the cavern.

DECKER

Let's back off and create a buffer zone
between it and us -- just in case.

BOOKER

Just in case what?

DECKER

Just in case.

EXT. SKY OVER NEW MEXICO - DAY

The copter carrying the box, racing over the desert,
followed by two chase copters.

EXT. LANDING ZONE - PHOENIX - S-2 FACILITY - DAY

The copter lands and is met by waiting TECHNICIANS in
bio-suits. Seconds later another copter lands -- Maggie
gets out.

INT. S-2 FACILITY - BIO-SAFETY-LEVEL-4 - DAY

THE BOX -- being transported through the bowels of the
facility, up to the secure lab.

ZACK, 36, is a virologist/microbiologist; razor-sharp,
he loves his work. His BIO-SUIT isolates him from the
specimens he's working on. The SOUND of HISSING air
being pumped into his suit through his overhead air
hose. He and his ASSISTANT are joined by MAGGIE --
suited up also. Zack sees her -- nods.

ZACK

Hi there, Maggie. Perfect timing.

She observes as he opens the box and carefully begins to
examine the sealed specimen cases.

ZACK
(to his assistant)
Give me optical and electron
microscopy on this.

His assistant sets up the specimen cases. A TV monitor displays a view of what their high-powered microscopes see:

ON SCREEN: In the bright center of the optical field are several odd-shaped, single-celled organisms with a nucleus. They're active -- moving around, some of them dividing.

ZACK
Take a look at this.

Zack's assistant, busy preparing other samples, stops. Maggie looks too.

MAGGIE
They're the only things moving.

They watch as one of the single-celled organisms splits down the middle and forms two smaller organisms.

ASSISTANT
What are they?

In the b.g. we see numerous one-celled and multicelled terrestrial organisms -- all dead.

ZACK
Do a quick work-up on the DNA and
biochemistry.

ASSISTANT
I'm on it.

INT. CAVERN - THE HUGE ROOM - DAY

Decker pacing. A two-way satellite video links them to the lab. Zack and Maggie's excited faces suddenly appear. They're buoyant, bursting with information.

ZACK (on screen)
Alex, it's Zack. I'm here with Maggie.

DECKER
Hi, Zack. Maggie. What do we have?

MAGGIE
You're not going to believe this
Alex.

Displayed on part of the screen is a direct feed from the high-powered optical microscope. 400X power. The ONE-CELLED organisms moving about in the bright field.

MAGGIE (O.S)

We're looking at a carbon based, one-celled life form. Their amino acids are left handed -- like ours, but their DNA's got 10 base pairs, not four.

DECKER

Are you sure?

MAGGIE

Yes. Alex, they're not from here.

(beat)

Alex, are you there?

Her VOICE hangs in the silence. Reverberates. Decker is stunned.

DECKER

Yes ... I heard you.

ZACK

(pumped up, chimes in)

They run at a higher metabolism than we do -- and at a higher temperature. Our lab population has doubled in the last twenty-five minutes.

(beat)

All the ones on the surface of the meteorite, above ground, were dead. The ones below ground are alive and well.

DECKER

(interrupts)

They don't like oxygen.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

-- Correct. They're making a living off the sulfur and nitrogen compounds in the soil. They're giving off hydrogen sulphide and ammonia. Lots of it.

She's pumped.

MAGGIE

Congratulations Alex, you're standing at ground zero of the greatest scientific discovery of the century -- maybe of all time.

(big smile)

I'll be there in the morning.

Decker takes some time to savor the moment. Looks around the cathedral-like cavern. He turns, looks at the shard. Brilliant in the filtered afternoon sunlight. Eerie.

Booker approaches him.

BOOKER

What are they saying -- it's a simple form of life?

DECKER

Not so simple. It took three billion years for life on Earth to develop a one-celled organism with a nucleus.

(beat)

It's actually quite advanced.

PERKINS

How did it survive?

DECKER

I don't know.

Decker, staring at the shard, turns to Booker.

DECKER

Seal it off. I don't want it contaminated -- by us. We're going to need a lot of equipment moved in here.

BOOKER

That's going to be pretty tough. How are we going --

DECKER

(snaps)

I don't care if you have to build a fucking road in here. Do it.

Booker looks at him, hesitates, looks over at Perkins. Decker sees the look.

DECKER
Perkins, this is a "Condition One"
situation. Unless I'm mistaken,
I'm in charge until you get a
Presidential override.

PERKINS
(informs Booker)
He's right.

Sloan flips up the screen of his laptop. It LISTS
experts all over the world.

-- ABE ROBINSON... UNIV. OF CHICAGO, DEPT. OF BIOLOGY
-- JEROME LEVIN ... UNIV. OF TEXAS, DEPT. OF BIOLOGY ...

SLOAN
Who do you want to call?

DECKER
(smiles)
Call them all.

Sloan presses a single command key and BEEPERS, bells and
whistles -- go off:

Around the world:

-- ABE ROBINSON, 65, Nobel Prize winner and grand old man
of biology, is lecturing to a packed class.

SUPER: ABE ROBINSON, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Robinson has the room in the palm of his hand.
Just then, his beeper goes off --

Surprised, he looks at the message. Stares. Silence.
His class waiting.

ROBINSON
Oh my...

He looks over at his GRADUATE ASSISTANT.

ROBINSON
Lloyd, can you please come up here
and finish up for me... I've
got to run.

He steps off the stage and hurries out of the hall.

-- JEROME LEVIN, 36, in his Porsche talking with a
colleague on a digital phone.

SUPER: JEROME LEVIN
 PROFESSOR OF BOTANY, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

His beeper goes off. He checks the message. Stares.

LEVIN
 (into phone)
 Larry, ahhh ... I've got to go.

He pulls over to the side of the Texas road and pulls a big U-turn in a cloud of dust, while neatly avoiding two cars. Driving like hell, he punches in a number.

INT. CAVERN - THE HUGE ROOM - NEW MEXICO - DAY

Sloan looks up from his laptop at Decker.

SLOAN
 What about Bridges?

Long beat. Decker, a pained expression, like someone just put sugar on his eggs.

SLOAN
 The protocol says --

DECKER
 (snaps)
 I know what the protocol says.
 (frowns at the laptop)
 You can't get him with that thing.
 Give me a phone.

Someone hands him a phone. Booker watching this exchange.

BOOKER
 What's with this Bridges character?

INT. FARMHOUSE - STUDY - VERMONT - DAY

An ancient, black rotary PHONE rings. Next to it, on a window sill, is a stuffed, dried piranha and the bleached white skull of a Neanderthal. An old Royal manual and a pile of handwritten pages on the desk. No answering machine, no computer in sight...

The CAMERA MOVES past an eight-foot RUBBER TREE and some vines to reveal BENJAMIN R. BRIDGES, thirty-four and ruggedly handsome. On sabbatical from Princeton, he's retreated to the country, where he lives alone with his yellow Labrador, SAM. Ignoring the phone, Bridges continues drawing an elaborate ecosystem on a large piece of paper mounted on his wall. WATER, AIR, TREES, ANIMALS

... with flowing ARROWS connecting everything to everything. Mind blowingly complicated -- an Escher drawing running amuck. The winner of a McArthur "genius" award -- he's busy trying to figure something out. The PHONE continues to RING....

Dusting the chalk from his hands, he grabs the phone.

BRIDGES

Hello...

(surprised)

Decker. What can I do for you?

INTERCUT BRIDGES and DECKER, in the cavern, as NEEDED.

DECKER

We have a "situation." According to the protocol it looks like we're going to need your expertise...

BRIDGES

You're sure about that?

Bridges studies his drawing as he talks.

DECKER

No, Ben, I haven't checked the data first hand. Maggie ran it. Look if you don't --

BRIDGES

How do I get there?

Bridges looks into the kitchen, at a photo of Maggie on the refrigerator.

Decker hands the phone over to Perkins. He consults a laptop.

PERKINS

Sir, where are you? Can you be at Pease Air Force Base in --

EXT. FARMHOUSE - VERMONT - DUSK

Bridges locks up the house and tosses a duffle bag into the front seat of his green pickup truck. He looks around, whistles for his dog.

BRIDGES

(shouts)

... Sam!

He smiles as Sam runs up to him, wagging his tail.

Bridges opens the door and Sam jumps up onto the front seat. The pickup truck backs down the long, curved dirt driveway and turns onto the two-lane road.

Bridges drives a half mile down the road to his neighbor CHARLEY, 60. Charley greets them. Bridges crouches down to say goodbye. Sam nuzzles him.

BRIDGES

I'll be back, Sam. You be good.

Bridges gets back in his truck, starts to roll down his window to tell Charley something. Charley walks over.

CHARLEY

No, I won't forget to water the plant.

Bridges smiles. Sam and Charley watch him drive away.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - SITUATION ROOM - OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

The President's national security advisor, JIM MOYERS, 34, is briefing the President and his advisors. The PRESIDENT is 50, a smart Al Gore.

MOYERS

It's a simple form of life, Mr. President. One-celled, but it is extraterrestrial.

PRESIDENT

(a science buff)
One-celled -- like algae or plankton?

MOYERS

Yes, sir. You could say that.

PRESIDENT

(jokes)
Wow. Just six months before the election.
(beat)
Who's there?

MOYERS

The Air Force and Army Special Forces. USAMRID, CDC are en route. I'm on my way out there now.

PRESIDENT

(regards him)
Good. Who's in charge?

MOYERS

Right now? Two guys. Alex Decker --
from Stanford and a guy from Princeton
-- Bridges. Crisis protocol.

PRESIDENT

I know Decker. He's a good guy.
He keeps lobbying to be my science
advisor.

(beat)

Let them handle it for now.

MOYERS

Yes, sir.

EXT./INT. COPTER - OVER SITE - NEW MEXICO - MORNING

SUPER: DAY 3

Abe Robinson, being helicoptered in with his COLLEAGUES.
Peers down at the site. There's an air strip under
construction. Other heavy earth-moving equipment is
gouging out a ramp allowing access to the cave.

ROBINSON

What's all this equipment?

MAGGIE

They're digging an access ramp into
the cavern.

He quickly turns around.

MAGGIE

You must be Professor Robinson.
I'm Maggie Dalton.

ROBINSON

(charmed)

I know your work -- delighted
to meet you.

EXT. MESA - SITE - DAY

Robinson hops out of the copter with Maggie and the
others. They are taken down into the cavern via a
recently excavated access shaft.

INT. CAVERN - THE HUGE ROOM - NEW MEXICO - DAY

A buzz of activity. People moving in equipment. Wooden
CRATES labeled HEWLETT PACKARD, IBM, SUN MICROSYSTEMS,
BECKMAN INSTRUMENTS.

Robinson looks at a huge, floor-to-ceiling, clear plastic tarp, that seals the section with the meteorite shard off from the rest of the cavern. Bright spots shine in through the tarp at what lies beyond. He spots Decker, walks over to him.

ROBINSON

(loaded with irony)

Thanks, Alex, for inviting me to the biggest scientific discovery of all time.

DECKER

(his smug smile)

You're welcome.

ROBINSON

(turning to Maggie)

I've spent forty years looking for life all over the solar system. Mars, the moons of Jupiter ... and bam, here it lands right in his lap. He's always been lucky that way.

DECKER

(smiles)

I see the two of you have met.

ROBINSON

She's beautiful. Now I have two reasons to be jealous.

Decker puts his arm around Maggie. Pride of ownership. She blushes. Then all business:

ALEX

(to Maggie)

I want you to arrange for a mobile lab unit. We can't waste time shipping --

MAGGIE

(ahead of him)

Done.

ROBINSON

Is Bridges coming?

EXT. - AIRPORT - TARMAC - OAKLAND - DAY

Bridges, fuming, chases after an AIR FORCE CAPTAIN as they load heavy equipment into the belly of the C-130. He's looking at his watch.

BRIDGES
Oakland!? What the fuck are we
doing in Oakland! I'm supposed
to be in New Mexico.

AIR FORCE CAPTAIN
Sorry, sir, but we have our orders.
As soon as we get this equipment
loaded we'll be on our way.

Bridges walks over to a pay phone, takes out a piece of
paper and fumbles for some change.

BRIDGES
(into phone)
Hi, it's Ben Bridges -- This flight is
fucked up --
(listens, irritated, can't hear)
What? No, my goddamn phone is fine.
It must be your satellite phone.
Tell Decker ... never mind!

Slams the phone down.

INT. BIO-LEVEL 4 - LAB - PHOENIX - DAY

Zack's watching a number of the one-celled life forms
through the microscope. Suddenly one of them is engulfed
-- and eaten -- by a larger creature.

ZACK
(jolted)
Whoa --

ASSISTANT
What happened?

ZACK
Something just ate that thing. Run
back the tape ... slower... slower ...
Right there -- in the middle of the
screen!

On the video playback they see a larger, multicellular
creature -- amoeba-like -- engulf the smaller creature.

ASSISTANT
Where did that come from?!

INT. CAVERN - THE HUGE ROOM - SAME MOMENT

Robinson is standing close to the tarp, peering in.
Decker pointing out something, Maggie looking on.

SLOAN

Alex, Maggie -- they want you on
the satellite link.

Decker looks at him, goes over. Zack's face appears.
Agitated. Excited.

ZACK

Alex, something just ate one of
those single-celled creatures. We
have active multicellular organisms
in our samples. At first we thought it
was a terrestrial life form, some
contamination from the cave -- but
they're dividing too fast.

ROBINSON

Multicellular? Are you sure?

ZACK (on screen)

Yes. I don't know what's going
on, but if we're seeing it here,
it may be going on there too.

DECKER

We'll take a look.

(turns to Robinson)

Want to go see our new friends?

Robinson's eyes light up.

INT. STAGING AREA - OUTSIDE THE TARP - DAY

They suit up -- in full bio-containment suits with self-
contained oxygen-packs. Their helmets have two-way
radios linking them to each other and to the outside.

ROBINSON (radio filtered)

What's the atmosphere like in
there?

DECKER

Pretty toxic. Hydrogen sulphide
and ammonia. Ready?

They enter through the floor-to-ceiling clear plastic
tarp, stretching across the cavern, sealing the shard off
from the main cavern. An inflatable airlock allows them
to simply part the tarp -- and step into another world.

INT. INSIDE THE TARP - CAVERN - NEW MEXICO

Light mist. The only illumination coming from the large
lights outside the tarp and from the hole in the ceiling

80 feet up -- also outside the tarp. A red LASER beam periodically sweeps through the gloom measuring the precise concentrations of gases.

Decker and Robinson make their way toward the shard -- visible now, in the rising mist of low grade sulphuric acid. Their flashlight beams cut through the eerie landscape --

DECKER

The gases in here are building up.
(points to the mist)
It's forming dilute sulphuric acid...

They walk slowly, across the uneven cavern floor -- toward the meteorite shard -- a hundred feet away.

DECKER

You okay?

A small TV CAMERA mounted on the side of Decker's hood sends back live video to the people outside.

Robinson approaches the meteorite -- reacts to its size. The way it stabs into the ground like a dagger. Decker smiles.

DECKER

Let's check it out.

He kneels and looks at the soil around its base.

DECKER

Hold on, guys. Wait a second.
Robinson, take a look at this.

MAGGIE (O.S.; on radio)

What is it?

DECKER

(excited)
... there are hundreds of small
worms around the base. Can you
guys see this?

The transmitted picture showing hundreds of grey-white FLATWORMS burrowing in the soil at the base of the iron meteorite. Maggie watching outside on the monitors.

MAGGIE

We see them.

Decker and Robinson kneel down. Decker shines a powerful flashlight on them. He looks more closely --

DECKER
 Grey-white, half a centimeter
 in length -- and there are hundreds
 of them. How could I have missed them?

Robinson sweeps the light over them again. No response.

ROBINSON
 They're blind.

Decker tries to collect several of the flatworms in a
 glass specimen case.

ROBINSON
 (stares)
 I don't recognize the species.

CLOSE

the worms try to wriggle away.

While Decker works, Robinson examines some discolored
 patches on the meteorite and some nearby cave rocks.

ROBINSON
 Something's growing on the
 meteorite -- and on these rocks.

DECKER
 That's the moss I was telling you
 about.

ROBINSON
 I'm not talking about moss.

Decker looks up, comes over.

EXTREME CLOSE UP

moss-like plant growth -- tiny purple buds.

DECKER
 What is that?

ROBINSON
 I'm no botanist, but I've never
 seen anything like this before.
 Have you? The shape of the bud ...

DECKER (into radio mike)
 Maggie -- Do we have a botanist
 in the house?

They do.

ANGLE ON -- Jerome Levin, the guy we saw earlier in his Porsche. He's studying the pictures.

LEVIN
(into mike)
Jerry Levin here, Decker.

ROBINSON
(knows him well)
Jerry -- what do you think?

LEVIN
I don't seem to recognize it either.
Get me a sample.

DECKER
(a sudden thought)
Maggie, give me a readout on the atmosphere in here.

Maggie checks the laser read-out.

MAGGIE (O.S. r.f.)
52 percent hydrogen sulphide, 28% ammonia, 14 % nitrogen.

DECKER
No oxygen?

MAGGIE (O.S.)
Four percent.

DECKER
Oxygen's way down, hydrogen sulphide's up.
Jerry -- do you know of any vegetation that grows in an atmosphere like this?

LEVIN (O.S, r.f.)
None that I can think of.

DECKER
Neither can I. Nothing on Earth.

ROBINSON
Are you saying they're alien?

Decker looks at him. A stunning possibility.

CLOSE -- THE SMALL PLANTS.... BUDS ...

ROBINSON
You're saying they weren't able to grow until the atmosphere in here changed enough to support them.

Staggering to contemplate.

OUTSIDE

A ripple of excitement among Maggie, Levin, and some thirty assembled scientists.

Decker takes some samples of the "plants."

DECKER

We're on our way back.

INT. CAVERN - HUGE ROOM - OUTSIDE TARP - DAY

Decker and Robinson, perspiring, pulling their suits off.

They watch as the samples are yanked up and out of the cavern by a copter as before.

Maggie, Sloan and Levin join them for a satellite conference with Zack in the LEVEL-4 lab.

DECKER

(to the screen)

Zack, we're sending you off some worms we just found near the base of the meteorite.

ZACK

Were they grey, flat and half a centimeter in length?

Alex is startled -- looks at Maggie and Robinson.

ZACK (continues)

We just found one too -- inside one of our sealed specimen cases. I'm looking at it right now.

Zack shows them a close-up of the specimen CASE in their lab. In a corner of the case they can see a small WORM.

MAGGIE

That's impossible.

ZACK

I know for a fact it wasn't there yesterday when we did our census. There was nothing but one-celled organisms. There's no place it could have come from --

DECKER
(looks at Maggie)
... Unless ...

Decker can't quite believe what he's about to say.

ROBINSON
Unless what?

And now it's clear to him. A staggering thought.

DECKER
It evolved. The multicellular
organisms evolved from the single-cell
organisms. And the worms...

ROBINSON
(completes the thought)
... Evolved from the multicellular
organisms... Then the worms in
there are alien too.

DECKER
-- That's right.

Thunderstruck silence. Stunned. Both of them now know
it's true.

MAGGIE
But that's impossible! Complex,
multicellular life -- in four days?!
It's too fast.

Robinson looks at them all.

ROBINSON
Compared to what, us?
(looks at them)
Have you ever considered, maybe
we're slow?

The thought hangs in the air.

Suddenly, CHIMES go off in Zack's LAB. His eyes go to
the digital output that monitors the BIOMASS contained in
all their samples.

ZACK
Guys -- the biomass of the
material in our sample cases has
increased 50% -- in the last 6 hours.

Decker and Robinson look at the huge tarp and what's
behind it.

ROBINSON
Single-celled microbes ... worms ...
small plants. It's an ecosystem.

DECKER
(looks at Robinson, at
the tarp)
Expanding outward and upward --
as it evolves.

Robinson looks back at the huge tarp.

ROBINSON
It couldn't have happened without
you putting up that tarp, Alex.
(grins)
You built them an airlock.

Decker is uncertain how to take that.

ROBINSON
When's Bridges getting here?

DECKER
(defensively)
Sometime today. Why?

ROBINSON
Good. This is right up his alley.

INT. COPTER - RACING OVER NEW MEXICO - LATE DAY

Bridges is peering down at the SITE. The mesa's been sliced open -- a dirt ramp now leading down into the cave system. Tents and equipment all over. They land and he jumps out.

The place is bustling with activity. The Army Corp of Engineers has put in a makeshift, ten-story construction elevator down into the cavern staging area.

He's headed for the elevator when Maggie sees him.

MAGGIE
Ben.

BRIDGES
(stops)
Maggie.

The look on their faces says it all. She gives him an awkward hug. Bridges steps back, smiles, an admiring look. It's obvious they have a history. They fall in together, talking as they walk.

BRIDGES
How's Alex?

MAGGIE
Fine. You know Alex. He's Alex.

Bridges smiles.

BRIDGES
But the important thing is you
still like him.

MAGGIE
Thanks, Ben. I know what you're
thinking. But I'm not here because
of Alex, I'm here because I earned
it.

They reach the elevator, get on and ride down in the
open, chain link cage. Seconds go by. Bridges turns.

BRIDGES
You didn't marry him, did you?

MAGGIE
No, I didn't marry him.

Still going down.

BRIDGES
Good.

MAGGIE
What about you?

BRIDGES
My life now's only about work, Maggie.
(eyes her)
There was just one of you and two
of us. Survival of the fittest.
Darwin and all that -- I understand
totally.

She looks at him with some affection.

MAGGIE
You are such a jerk.

BRIDGES
Thanks.

MAGGIE
Besides writing, what else do you
do in Vermont?

BRIDGES
I joined the Brattle, Vermont
volunteer Fire Department. Best
thing I've ever done.

That gets a smile.

MAGGIE
You're still funny.

BRIDGES
That's me. A regular riot.

The elevator stops. As they get out.

BRIDGES
What do we have?

INT. CAVERN - THE HUGE ROOM

Bridges walking into the huge cavern with her. Sees the huge tarp all lit up -- and the jagged hole in the ceiling, directly above him, sunlight pouring through. His heart skips a beat.

BRIDGES
(joking)
Pretty big operation for a one-celled
organism, isn't it?

MAGGIE
You're not going to believe it. We
now have multicellular organisms.

BRIDGES
(stops)
Alex said --

MAGGIE
Things have changed.

Bridges looks surprised, follows her into a large tent set up as a briefing area.

INT. BRIEFING TENT - THE HUGE ROOM - CAVERN

SIXTY SCIENTISTS -- microbiologists, biochemists, zoologists, molecular biologists, entomologists, evolutionary biologists -- the world's top people, are crammed into the tent.

Decker is in front, about to begin his briefing, when Bridges comes in with Maggie. Decker's face changes.

Ben. DECKER

Alex. BRIDGES

DECKER
(a chilly smile)
Just in time. Grab a seat.

Bridges works his way to the back of the room -- 60 pairs of eyes follow him, he is a superstar. On the way he acknowledges a colleague here, a colleague there and Robinson, his former mentor. Decker begins his briefing. Huge monitors and a chalk board behind him.

Decker surveys the room. Grins.

DECKER
Welcome ladies and gentlemen to
"Ground Zero" ...

LATER - MID-BRIEFING -

Bridges listening, excited, jots down notes.

DECKER
We're looking at an alien ecosystem.
Single-celled microbes, worms ...
small plants ... A world in a glass
bottle -- plastic actually.
(smiles, measuring the effect)
The microbes and larger multicellular
organisms act as food for the worms.
The plants live off the gases produced
by the microbes and God knows what
else in there.

LATER --

Bridges listening carefully.

DECKER
... The biomass is not only
expanding outwardly, it's evolving
upward at a colossal rate. That we
are encountering alien "life" is
astounding. That it is evolving at
this rate is unfathomable.

There's stunned silence in the room.

DECKER

Starting with single-celled organisms the evolutionary process took three days to evolve the equivalent of a flatworm. That process took millions of years here.

(quips)

I call this "evolution with a bullet."

Laughter.

BRIDGES

Do we have any idea how it's doing that?

Heads turn --

DECKER

No. None. We're monitoring it 24 hours a day.

MOYERS

Can it be moved -- to a more ... secure location.

DECKER

(firmly)

It's too fragile. We'd risk destroying it. It stays just where it is.

(addressing their concerns)

The cavern offers excellent geological and biological containment. There are no underground streams anywhere in the area. If you were to pick a location, you couldn't have picked a better one. Plus; their biochemistry is oxygen intolerant.

Decker looks around the room.

DECKER

Ben?

BRIDGES

I know you love it, Alex, but I think you have a tiger by the tail.

There's a ripple in the room. This is a bombshell statement in this setting.

DECKER

That's what I admire about you, Ben. Your ability to mince words.

Even Bridges laughs. Robinson rises and addresses the room.

ROBINSON

I think we all hear what Ben is saying, but I have to agree with Alex here. This is too important an opportunity.

He sits down to vocal agreement. Moyers, sitting next to Levin, whispers.

MOYERS

I take it Bridges and Decker don't see eye to eye.

LEVIN

(smiles)

They're yin and yang. Decker is lights, camera, action. Bridges could care less if nobody ever heard of him. They're two of the finest biologists in the world and they hate each other.

The meeting disbands. Decker and Bridges approach one another and walk away, talking.

MOYERS

(confused)

What is it they disagree about?

LEVIN

Let me put it this way. Alex believes that life here is special, unique, different from any other life, anywhere in the universe, past or future.

MOYERS

Special? How?

LEVIN

(smiles)

It includes Alex.

ANGLE - BRIDGES AND ALEX

BRIDGES

Was my little stopover in Oakland your idea?!

ALEX

Sorry, I didn't think you'd mind.

Vintage Alex. Bridges looks at him --

BRIDGES

We both know the rules, Alex.
Anytime either one of us wants
to pull the plug on this -- it's
pulled -- and we all go home.

Moyers catches up to them. Alex and he are bosom buddies
already. He introduces himself to Bridges.

MOYERS

I'm Jim Moyers, national security
advisor to the president.

(Bridges regards him)

I've read your work. The origins
of life, bio-diversity, rain-
forests ... All the things you --

BRIDGES

What's your question?

MOYERS

You have some concerns?

BRIDGES

Yes. Some.

Moyers looks at Alex.

MOYERS

There are safeguards in place.

BRIDGES

I know.

Up ahead are people from USAMRID (Army Military Research
Institute of Infectious Diseases) and the CDC.

BRIDGES

This place is crawling with military.

ALEX

No one else has the resources to
mount an operation like this.
Come on, I'll introduce you.

Alex walks him over.

ALEX

Col. Richard Fowler, Fort Detrick,
and James Marcotti from the CDC...
Dr. Benjamin Bridges.

MARCOTTI, 40, curly haired, an MD and FOWLER, 45, Army medical doctor, shake Bridges' hand.

COL. FOWLER

We understand your concern but we feel the chances of being infected by one of their microbes is extremely low.

MARCOTTI

They'd have to multiply in our bodies. With their biochemistry being so radically different, it's extremely unlikely.

BRIDGES

But not zero.

COL. FOWLER

Nothing is zero.

BRIDGES

Let's cut the bullshit. No one's ever dealt with a situation like this before. You don't have any experience with something like this.

ALEX

Nobody does.

COL. FOWLER

(looks over at Marcotti)
You've got what looks like pretty good biocontainment. We're going to let you guys run with this for now.

They walk away. Bridges looks bothered.

BRIDGES

I didn't like that, "for now."

Bridges walks over to the tarp, stands a moment, staring through at the other side. The tarp BOWING out now due to the buildup of gases inside. Robinson joins him.

ROBINSON

Ben, you have to admit it's an incredible opportunity.

BRIDGES

I just hope we don't fuck it up.

They're joined by Alex.

ALEX

We just got word on the meteorite.
(looks at them)
It's not from our solar system.

BRIDGES

(reacts)
How do they know?

ALEX

Isotope ratio -- Iridium/Thorium --
is wrong.
(looks toward the tarp)
It's from another star.

They look at each other.

INT. INSIDE THE TARP - NIGHT

An illuminated, eerie landscape. Increasingly populated by new, small species of plants -- their growth being recorded by cameras and sensors.

In the dark -- one small plant growing -- blossoming -- its small "tendrils" -- feelers -- reach out toward the lights outside.

EXT./INT. ALEX'S TENT - MESA - NIGHT

Alex getting ready to turn in. He looks at Maggie.

ALEX

Coming to bed?

MAGGIE

Zack's arrived with the lab. I'm
going to check it out.
(kisses him on
the cheek)
Don't wait up.

EXT. BRIDGES' TENT - MESA - NIGHT

Bridges alone. Looks out at the starry sky a while, then parts the entrance to his tent.

INT. MOBILE LEVEL-4 SUITE - NIGHT

Glass terrariums hold all their samples -- worms, moss, plants and other multicellular organisms -- some barely visible to the naked eye.

Maggie works late into the night.

INT. CAVERN - STAGING AREA - DAY

SUPER: DAY 5

Activity continues to build outside the tarp.

Bridges, Alex and Robinson are talking when Maggie runs up to them breathlessly.

MAGGIE

We just figured out how they're evolving so quickly.

They look at each other and follow her toward the new mobile BSL-4 facility -- a large inflated lab, airtight and isolated by multiple walls from the cavern and people outside. They enter through a complex airlock-doorway.

INT. MOBILE LEVEL-4 SUITE - CAVERN - DAY

Bridges, Alex, Robinson gathered now, looking in at Zack and Maggie through thick, secure glass windows.

Maggie and Zack move around inside the lab, in maximum bio-safety suits attached to air hoses.

MAGGIE

(over her head-set radio)

They don't find partners to reproduce. Sexual reproduction takes too much time.

Maggie directs their attention to a magnified view of a small flatworm -- now in a specimen case with dozens of others.

MAGGIE

They're "budding" -- and dividing across all phylla. Usually you see that only in plants.

As they watch: a fissure appears down the middle of the worm as it divides -- bisymmetrically -- forming two slightly different and smaller worms. The two new "halves" crawl off on their own. TWO new individuals.

MAGGIE

Here's the beautiful thing...

We HEAR the CLICK-CLICK-CLICK of a sensitive geiger-counter.

MAGGIE

They're taking naturally occurring radioactive trace elements in the soil, and concentrating them in their bodies to increase their mutation rate. That leads to wild genetic variations in the offspring. Clever, huh.

Alex looks at Bridges and Robinson.

ALEX

What about the radioactivity?

ZACK

Their lives are so short and their metabolism's so high, they don't care.

Bridges looks at Robinson.

BRIDGES

(excited)

This I have to see.

INT. CAVERN - THE HUGE ROOM - DAY

Bridges approaches Levin, who's tossing a football with Marcotti from the CDC.

BRIDGES

Levin, we're going to need a botanist in there. You interested?

Levin can scarcely believe his good luck.

LEVIN

Am I. I was 16 when I discovered my first new species of conifer.
-- Are you kidding?

Levin, not watching, as the football bounces off his chest.

LATER - STAGING AREA

Robinson, Alex, Bridges and Levin, suiting up in the new USAMRID BIO-SUITS. Fowler points out their features.

COL. FOWLER

These are designed by USAMRID for biological and chemical warfare.

Gone are the clumsy old Moon Suits with their soft hoods and plastic visors. Mylar-covered, tightly fitted, the new suits have goldfish-bowl helmets of clear lexan plastic with a 360-degree view.

Bridges and the others screw the clear helmets onto the necks of their bio-warfare suits.

COL. FOWLER

These helmets allow you to hear everything that's going on around you. They're lighter than the old suits, they carry two hours of recycleable air.

Booker joins the group.

COL. FOWLER

Colonel Booker will be going along with you.

Bridges walks over and shakes his gloved hand, suit to suit. Booker smiles.

BRIDGES

How you doing, Booker.

BOOKER

I feel like Buzz Lightyear in this get-up.

ALEX

(tries his radio mike)

All set?

BRIDGES

Let's go.

They approach the tarp -- and go in. Five men.

INT. INSIDE THE TARP - NEW MEXICO CAVERN - DAY

A vast, spooky, tented landscape.

Alex leads them past the remotely controlled video CAMERAS and lights which record the developing ecosystem.

Bridges, Robinson, Levin and Booker follow. Their flashlight beams cutting through the haze.

The jagged hole in the ceiling of the cavern, on the other side of the tarp, adds its dim, diffuse light.

Bridges and Alex SEE that the strange new alien world has grafted itself onto the natural features of the cavern. The rocks and stalagmites are now covered with alien vegetation. Some PLANTS near the tarp are as high as three inches. A haze of poisonous gas hangs just above ground.

Small INSECTS, gnat-like, buzz in the air, flitting around their lights. Alex is startled.

ALEX

Insects.

BRIDGES

I see them.

They pass by a bush ... like a coral with leaves -- blossoming, blooming. Completely new.

LEVIN

Look at this. I feel like a kid in a candy store.

Alex checks back with Mission Control outside the tarp.

ALEX (on his radio)

You guys getting all of this?

MAGGIE (O.S.)

We're getting it all.

Twenty feet further, they see a TREE. Levin stares. Two-foot high, with tiny blue blossoms and black leaves.

LEVIN

My God -- a goddamn tree from another planet.

ALEX

Should we remove it?

LEVIN

No leave it there. We'll get a cutting.

ALEX (on radio)

What's the atmosphere in here now?

MAGGIE (O.S.)

20% hydrogen sulphide, 70% ammonia, 8% nitrogen, trace carbon dioxide. No oxygen. Watch it in there, guys.

The tendrils of a four-foot high plant move very slightly, sway, stretching toward the powerful light on Alex's helmet. Levin looks at it. Did it move or was it his imagination?

ALEX

Let's keep going.

Booker takes a step. A CRUNCHING SOUND.

BOOKER

Shit.

They all freeze, look down.

He lifts his boot slowly to reveal a dead alien BEETLE. The hard shell of the crab-like creature has been crushed. Suddenly TWO more of the crab-like creatures appear out of nowhere and jump up on Booker's boot.

Their small multiple legs pumping furiously, tearing at the heel of his boot. Booker stomps his foot but they hang on. Booker kicks them off off with his other boot. His men crush them with the butt of their rifles.

BOOKER

(rattled)

Damn.

They look down at the creatures.

ALEX

They're like crabs, or beetles.

ROBINSON

Feisty little things.

One of the "dead" ones suddenly scuttles away.

Bridges chases it down -- it freezes and sits motionless. Bridges shines a light on it. It doesn't respond.

LEVIN

They don't respond to light.

ROBINSON

Most cave-dwelling animals are blind. Why should these things be any different?

As Bridges leans down to pick it up ... it makes a hissing SOUND, jumps up at his glove -- he grabs it and puts it into a specimen case.

INT. STAGING AREA OUTSIDE - THE HUGE ROOM - DAY

Maggie and the others are standing around incredulous, watching the monitors and taking all this in. It's like the first moon walk. Enormous excitement in the air.

INT. INSIDE THE TARP - DAY

Something running along the ground. Robinson sees something out of the corner of his eye.

ROBINSON

What was that?

Bridges looks -- sees a four-inch high creature with a gash of a mouth and two slits where it's eyes should be.

It's trapped against a rock. Bridges catches it in his hands -- puts it in a glass specimen jar.

INSIDE the jar they can see now -- the small CREATURE has a small, oblong head and a neck that allows it to turn slightly from side to side. Its skin dry and fuzzy. Bridges looks closer. He seals the jar --

BRIDGES

Cute little thing.

Hands it to Booker who carefully places it into a large metal collection box.

LATER

Their powerful flashlight beams cut through the gloom illuminating the meteorite, imbedded in the floor -- dead ahead. Bridges walks toward it, shining his light down at the base of the meteorite. Most of the worms are gone. Robinson is puzzled.

ROBINSON

Where did all the worms go?

BRIDGES

Maybe they're dying out.

He kneels at the base of the shard and starts to dig.

ALEX

What are you doing?

BRIDGES

I want to know how our one-celled organisms are doing.

He takes a sample of the soil and seals it in a jar.

LATER

Headed back. Moving cautiously, laden with samples of alien life forms. Several of Booker's MEN are collecting all kinds of creatures -- plucking them from small bushes as they go. Life all over the place.

INT. CAVERN - THE HUGE ROOM - LATER - DAY

They've climbed out of their suits. Sitting around, reflecting on where they've they've just seen.

Robinson looking behind him at the tarp.

ROBINSON

If it landed anywhere up top -- the sunlight and air would have killed it. Instead it lands down here. Figure the odds of that.

Bridges walks over to the tarp, stares through it. Maggie joins him.

MAGGIE

What are you thinking?

Bridges -- reflecting on where he's just been.

BRIDGES

If someone told me I'd be studying an extra-terrestrial life form one day -- even a billion year old fossil -- I wouldn't have believed it.

MAGGIE

What's it like in there?

BRIDGES

(moved)

Like watching all of creation unfold before your very eyes.

She looks at him with some affection.

BRIDGES

It's the little questions that bug me.

MAGGIE

Like what?

BRIDGES

For starters; take a one-celled organism, leave it to its own devices, give it enough food, water, time ... and it evolves into something more complex -- all by itself. How? Why?

Alex suddenly interrupts.

ALEX

We don't know. It just does.

Bridges turns.

ALEX

I see you two are renewing old acquaintance. Come on, have a drink with us.

Alex has a bottle of wine. He puts his arm around Maggie's waist and kisses her.

BRIDGES

I could use a cigarette.

(grins)

Let me guess. This is a non-smoking cave.

Bridges walks away.

INT. CAVERN - HUGE ROOM - BRIEFING TENT - NIGHT

CLOSE: A TV SCREEN -- Nightline's on. Maggie, Robinson, Levin, Bridges ... watching. TED KOPPEL, staring straight at the camera, cool, calm and collected.

TED KOPPEL

We do know one thing. Tonight there is a new form of life on the planet -- Not life as we know it, but life nevertheless. It sits 100 feet down below the New Mexico desert, in the southwest United States, brought here by a meteorite. Tonight we are joined by a distinguished panel of scientists and theologians -- to discuss the ramifications of this most remarkable event, which everyone we've talked to calls the most important scientific discovery of all time. We'll be back after this.

LATER -- a JESUIT on one of Ted's split screens.

FATHER GIBBS

(addressing Koppel)

Ted, if you believe in God, he's God of the entire universe -- not just this planet. Since he directs all life he's directing this life form too.

KOPPEL

Joining us tonight, directly from the site, in New Mexico, the Land of Enchantment, is Dr. Alex Decker. Dr. Decker, as many of you know, has been a frequent guest on our show. What say you, Alex?

Alex appears on another split screen -- direct from the cavern.

ALEX

Nice to see you again, Ted. No offense to Dr. Gibbs, but this seems like awfully fuzzy thinking. I'm not at all convinced there is a God and if there is, I'm not sure he's directing this --

Bridges walks out. Maggie watches him go.

INT. DIAGNOSTICS TENT - THE CAVERN - NIGHT

Bridges is working, analyzing the data from all the systems monitoring the ecosystem.

Alex sticks his head in. Bridges looks up.

BRIDGES

The ecosystem biomass is nearly two tons. That's 30% bigger than it was yesterday. Still think it's fragile, Alex?

Alex looks at him. Bridges goes back to the screens.

INT. THE CAVERN - MOYERS'S - COMMUNICATION TENT - NIGHT

Moyers on the phone with the President.

MOYERS

Mr. President -- the area's been secured for 20 miles around. No visitors, no tourists, no curiosity seekers.... No, we're not giving any more interviews.

INT. BIO-LEVEL 4 SUITES - CAVERN - DAY

An entire add-on ZOO -- built to BIO-LEVEL-4 standards -- housing the live specimens they've retrieved from the other world.

Levin is growing a bush from the cutting they brought out. It's one foot high already, growing inside its glass case. They're monitoring its life signs.

Large, glass terrariums house plants, the beetle-crab-like creatures and all the other creatures they've collected. They're all breathing the alien atmosphere that floods the room.

Zack and Maggie show Bridges, Alex and Robinson, all wearing bio-suits, through the facility.

As they walk through the zoo -- they can hear the small creatures in the terrariums and metal cages MEW and HISS -- snapping at them as they walk by. Robinson looks at them, gives them a wide berth.

ZACK

They all die at temperatures below zero degrees centigrade and at oxygen concentrations above 5%...

TECHNICIANS are dissecting the creatures, their internal organs displayed.

ZACK

(standing over a creature)
We think that's the mouth. These are the internal organs. The problem is we don't know what any of them do.
(points out two blue sacs)
These must be the lungs, we're guessing. It'll take years to sort it all out.

BRIDGES

Are we anesthetizing them first?

ALEX

We can't. We don't know enough about their biochemistry --

MAGGIE

This is what I really want to show you.

As they follow her to the other side of the room, they pass a case with the small, "cute" creature with fur-like skin. Alex stops, looks in.

ANGLE

The 4-inch high thing with the small head. It looks emaciated.

ROBINSON

How is this one doing? It looks like it's starving.

ZACK

So far it's refused everything we try to feed it. We have no idea what it eats. Plants, animals, insects...

CLOSE - THE 4-INCH FURRY CREATURE

Sightless, it's facing away from Alex as he leans over the case. We notice a small shaving cut on Alex's face behind his plastic visor. The cute creature -- we'll call it the blood-thirsty creature later -- SENSES Alex's presence behind it -- more precisely the blood. As Alex moves right, the small head swivels right. As Alex moves to the left, the head swivels left -- tracking Alex and the cut. Alex steps away. It sits quietly.

Maggie continues over to a case containing SIXTEEN of the crab-like creatures. They peer in at them. ONE of them sitting very still.

MAGGIE

The outer shell of terrestrial crabs and beetles is made of sugar protein. These things extract copper -- from the soil. Their skin and teeth are metallic; but here's the most interesting thing.

They all lean over the case.

MAGGIE

(continuing)

The one you brought in was blind. These are four generations in. Watch the one budding right now...

The one sitting very still suddenly develops a FISSURE running its vertical length. The fissure CRACKS and divides -- producing two new, smaller creatures, each slightly different.

Bridges looks at Robinson. They all exchange looks.

MAGGIE

Notice the discolored spots. It started two days ago. I think those spots are light sensitive.

(beat)

I think they're eyes.

CLOSE -- two discolored spots on the top of the latest crab-BEETLE thing.

Bridges, Robinson and Alex exchange a stunned look.

MAGGIE

Watch --

She shines a strong light at the latest generation BEETLE. It turns and tracks the light.

ROBINSON

Now they can see us.

Levin comes over.

LEVIN

In four generations? That took millions of years on Earth.

They all stare at the crabs. Just then ALARM BELLS SOUND -- SIRENS go off. Zack freezes.

ZACK

Oh shit!!

ALEX

What?!

ZACK

We've lost containment.

Bio-Level 4 panic. Zack turns, alarmed.

MAGGIE

How?! Where?!

Zack -- thinking.

ZACK

(furious with himself)

Shit. We fucked up! All our seals in here, all our hoses -- are rubber. They're food for the microbes. They eat sulfur!

CLOSE -- the SEALS on all the vents and the hose connections.

The look on Zack's face is priceless. They all look at their gloves, the air hoses --

Bridges and Alex look at him. What do they do?

ALEX
... FUCK! Everybody out of here now!

In the rush to get out, they KNOCK over two of the glass terrariums. The terrarium with the BEETLE-LIKE things and the one with the small, 4-inch creature. They shatter on the floor.

Bridges looks at Zack -- at Maggie.

BRIDGES
(screams into his head set radio)
Flood the room with oxygen!
Do it now!!

Oxygen starts surging in through one-way ducts -- filling the room.

Bridges stares as the small furry, blood-thirsty creature runs across the floor and jumps on Alex's leg! It claws and races its way up his suit to his visor, trying to get at the cut on his face. Alex panics.

Bridges steps in and knocks it off Alex's helmet hard. It flies across the room and lands hard against a wall. It SCREECHES, rights itself and starts again toward Alex. As the oxygen hits it, it suddenly chokes and spasms. They watch as it dies in agony.

ALEX
Damn, the fucker attacked me!
Is it dead?

BRIDGES
Yes -- the oxygen killed it.

Bridges looks down at the broken case of BEETLE-LIKE things, dying too. One of them buds as it's dying -- As the two halves separate the edges glow and sparks appear -- then flames.

The oxygen and their high metabolism. Bridges stares -- looks at Zack. They've never seen anything like this.

BRIDGES

Kill that oxygen before we all
burn to death!

Zack's breathing hard, shaken. They all are.

ALEX

Christ, they're all dead! Now we'll
have to start all over again.

ZACK

We'll have to replace all the seals
and hoses in here ...

ALEX

(suddenly, alarmed)
Shit -- the tarp.

BRIDGES

(quickly)
It's plastic.

MAGGIE

Jesus.

BRIDGES

(to Maggie)
Got a cigarette?

She looks at him -- all that oxygen in the air.

INT. THE HUGE ROOM - CAVERN - STAGING AREA - DAY

SUPER: DAY 10

The tarp's been MOVED BACK and expanded out to
accommodate an ecosystem that's grown in size.

They're taking in the full team -- Bridges, Robinson,
Alex, Levin, Maggie, Booker -- and SIX of his SPECIAL
forces COMMANDOS, all armed with M-16s. Bridges looks at
Alex.

ALEX

(explains)
They're going to help us
retrieve specimens.

BRIDGES

With M-16s?

ALEX

There may be some specimens in there that don't want to be retrieved.

Alex looks at Maggie.

ALEX

Are you sure you want to come?

Maggie looks at him -- at Bridges, unsure.

BRIDGES

Why the fuck not?

MAGGIE

Give me a suit.

ANGLE SUITING UP

Maggie changes into a bio-suit along with the guys. Removing most of her clothes and climbing into the snug bio-suit.

She isn't modest. Bridges can't help noticing she has a pretty terrific figure.

Booker briefs his six COMMANDOS.

BOOKER

Take off your helmet and you die.
Breathe that atmosphere and you die.

The helmets screw on and lock down. The safeties come off their M-16s.

BRIDGES

How do you fire an M-16 with gloves on?

BOOKER

(grins)

The same way you fuck with a rubber. Carefully.

(to his commandos)

People -- remember: we've got two hundred people working on the other side of a tarp -- half an inch thick. Watch it.

INT. INSIDE THE TARP - ALIEN ECOSYSTEM - DAY

In their bio-suits they move into the vast, spooky tented jungle. Lights blazing through the heavy plastic tarp. Things scuttle, peculiar plants blossoming and budding in the artificial light. A thin haze of poisonous gases hangs over the upper branches of the trees -- now 18-20 feet high, with strange swollen pods and thorns on their bark. An utterly surreal, beautiful alien landscape.

The alien ecosystem has completely grafted itself onto the New Mexico cavern. A jumble of roots and vines criss-cross the cavern floor. The UNDERGROWTH growing rapidly.

Booker looks up through his lexan helmet.

BOOKER

Christ, National Geographic should see this.

ALEX

Interstellar Geographic is more like it.

They move forward -- with a perimeter team and POINT MAN. Alex and Bridges up front with Booker.

The CAMERA MOVES along at ground level ahead of them -- a mist of poison gas wafting through the bushes and root covered ground. UNSEEN by Bridges and the team, FOUR-LEGGED -- and EIGHT-LEGGED and TWENTY-LEGGED creatures, move out of the way, hiding in the bushes.

Bridges stops, looks around -- bothered, looks at Alex.

BRIDGES

This place is a rainforest, without the rain.

He looks at the trees, the bushes, the huge ecosystem. All the vegetation.

BRIDGES

Where's it getting its water from?!

Alex picks up a handful of soil. A rock crumbles into dust.

ALEX

Look at this -- All the moisture's been extracted.

BRIDGES

The microbes and worms must be extracting it. From there it goes right up the food chain to the plants.

Alex looks at the dripping stalactites. More water dripping down from the mesa, up top.

ANGLE

Booker, walking with Alex and Bridges, stops.

On the cavern floor in front of them is a large, hard shelled, black SPIDER-like thing, with a body nearly a foot across and 16 legs. It seems to stare at them -- blocking their way.

BOOKER

(swallows hard)

Is that a spider?

ALEX

(looks at Bridges)

That -- or the alien equivalent of one...

Suddenly a larger SPIDER leaps out from the underbrush and attacks the first one. The larger spider kills the first and begins to eat it as it drags the carcass back into the bushes.

The team stares. Bridges exchanges a look with Maggie.

Maggie points to some smaller spiders crawling up the far cave wall -- toward the dark ceiling.

MAGGIE

Look -- they're all over.

They watch other spider-like things climbing up stalagmites, scuttling away from their lights. Booker's men trap two of them. One of them, LOVETT, a young recruit, prods them into metal boxes with spring doors. Tricky job.

BOOKER

Careful Lovett.

They move forward -- video-taping everything.

An ANIMAL SUDDENLY steps out from some bushes. It wobbles on ten, long spindly legs. Everyone stops. Its body, two feet off the ground, is cylindrical, like a log. Six-inch spikes running the length of its back. It has no obvious head or tail end. There's a circular MOUTH on what we'd call its underbelly.

A bizarre extraterrestrial walking "log."

BOOKER

What is that thing? It's all legs!

Bridges stares -- he has no idea. It looks at them.

BOOKER

Is it coming or going?

ALEX

We don't know.

Weapons leveled at it. No way to gauge its intentions. No rules of engagement. As they watch it:

Bridges notices a long CURTAIN of wet, pearl-like beads, hanging down from the limb of an alien TREE behind it -- like Spanish moss. The "living curtain" sways slightly.

As the spindly, 10-legged creature starts to trot away it brushes the curtain. Suddenly the tendril-like tentacles SPRING to life, grab and wrap themselves around the helpless animal. Enfolding it, they lift the struggling creature off the ground. It makes small BLEATING sounds.

Alex, Bridges and the others look on with a mixture of revulsion and fascination. Carried up into the upper branches of the "tree" where the tentacles enfold it completely. The struggle's over. Vicious, violent and final. Seconds later the drained carcass, just skin and bones, drops back onto the floor of the cavern --

BOOKER

Damn. That tree just ate it.

Small, scuttling SCAVENGERS, beetles, alien "crabs" and insects cover the carcass and consume it.

BRIDGES

(looks around)

Everything in here is food for something else.

The tree's curtain drops back down, ready for a new victim. Bridges and Maggie look at each other. Suddenly a SOUND -- and a swollen pod on a tree breaks open and THREE small creatures -- "animals" -- emerge. They watch them scuttle up the trunk.

MAGGIE

That tree just gave birth to an animal!

LEVIN

(looking around)

I think I know what's going on --

(they look at him)

For us -- the line between the Plant and Animal Kingdom is very clear. Here the line isn't so clear. It's fascinating; not only do they eat each other, but because they all bud, you have plants giving birth to animals -- and animals giving birth to plants.

(looks at Bridges)

Animals eating plants, plants eating animals! Christ, it's a mess!

As they spread out the small tendril-like BRANCHES of one of those "living curtains" -- touch the back of Maggie's bio-suit.

CLOSER: the ends of the tendrils are vibrating at high frequency -- like tuning forks. Maggie doesn't notice.

Bridges looks over -- sees the "curtain" starting to get agitated.

BRIDGES

Maggie!

He grabs and pulls her away just as the branches start to clutch and curl. Maggie looks back. Shaken.

MAGGIE

Thanks.

They all look at the tree now. A close call.

Booker -- a sane man -- looks around the cavern at the sheer diversity of life developing.

BOOKER

Where are all these new creatures coming from anyway?

ALEX

(patiently)

How do you think the Earth got to be the Earth. It took more time but this is exactly how it happened.

Booker contemplates that mind-bending thought.

BOOKER

You're telling me -- this is evolving from what arrived?

ALEX

Unless you believe in Santa Claus, colonel; every plant, every animal, every dinosaur, every elephant -- every living thing on Earth evolved from one single-celled organism, billions of years ago.

BOOKER

(looks at him)

That's nuts.

ALEX

(a look)

That happens to be the case.

BRIDGES

(to Booker)

That includes you, me and the New York Yankees.

BOOKER

You believe that Bridges?

BRIDGES

I see your problem, Booker.

The move forward cautiously. Approaching ground zero -- the meteorite shard. Dense vegetation growing all around it -- reaching toward the ceiling.

Suddenly something that looks like a two-foot long Moray EEL on legs pops out from behind the meteorite shard. It has spikes set into its back and an ugly, teeth filled mouth.

BOOKER

Whoa. What the hell is that?!

The thing turns and races away -- heading for a niche in the cavern wall, leaps up and disappears inside.

They're all stunned by its speed.

ALEX

Let's get it.

They cautiously approach the dark, gaping hole in the wall. Booker and TWO of his MEN shine powerful flashlights into the dark crevice. The thing's wedged itself inside. They HEAR a strange hiss and a growl.

They extend two animal snares into the crevice and try to grab it. It snaps at the snares -- a CRUNCH and the two men jump back -- the metal snare pole's been bitten off.

The other snare is bent. Looks all around.

BOOKER

Now, there's a specimen that doesn't want to be retrieved.

Another growl from the dark hole.

BRIDGES

I don't want to fuck with it.

A quick look -- between Bridges and Booker. Booker raises his M-16. He motions them back -- away from ricocheting rounds and empties a clip into the niche. GUNSHOTS echoing through the small jungle. A screeching sound from inside and then silence. Alex, incensed.

ALEX

You just killed a frightened animal.

BOOKER

You can study the carcass.

They slip a snare over the carcass and haul it out of the crevice. It lands on the ground, dead. A strange looking thing.

BRIDGES

Alright, Alex. That's enough for today.

Bridges turns back with the others. They head for the tarp -- and the outside world.

TWO even larger "eels on legs" that they missed -- stick their heads out of the crevice and stare after the men.

INT. BL-4 SUITE - THE ZOO - DAY

Alex is proudly showing off his zoo of new creatures to Marcotti, Fowler and Moyers. Bridges with them. Some of the creatures are caged, the rest inside their terrariums.

They snap and snarl at Fowler and Marcotti -- intimidating creatures. There are strange alien YELPS and SOUNDS. Moyer looks on, nervous.

Zack points out a peculiar looking plant/animal.

ZACK

We don't know where it fits in, how it interacts with the whole system. That's its anus, and that's its mouth.

Booker looking on.

BOOKER

You mean it shits where it eats?

BRIDGES

(smiles)

You could say that.

MARCOTTI

(frazzled)

This thing's hitting on all cylinders. We're working around the clock to keep up but we can't. Four new phylla ... 500 new species a week.

BRIDGES

We're trying to catalogue a couple of million years of evolution in less than a week.

(looks at them)

It can't be done.

Moyers looks uneasy.

INT. DIAGNOSTICS TENT - DAY

Robinson studying the screens that monitor the system. Bridges comes in, stands over Robinson looking at the screen. Robinson sees the expression on his face.

ROBINSON

Don't be shy, I'm a doctor.

BRIDGES

I want to know what the fuck this thing is going to do and I don't have any way to gauge it.

ROBINSON

Welcome to the club. Alright, let's think. What runs the system?

BRIDGES

The worms and microbes run the show.

ROBINSON

Maybe that's your answer.

Bridges looks at him, smiles.

INT. THE HUGE ROOM - OUTSIDE TARP - CAVERN - DAY

Bridges and Alex, talking with Moyers, having an animated discussion.

ALEX

Terminate it?!

MOYERS

I'm merely conveying my concerns.
(trailing after them)
The fauna is becoming aggressive...

Alex, furious and impatient with Moyers.

ALEX

This thing is a cornucopia. You don't "terminate" the Amazon rain-forest just because there are spiders or jaguars in it --

MOYERS

(somewhat chastened)
Bridges?

Alex looks at Bridges. Bridges hesitates.

BRIDGES

He's right. It's too valuable.

ALEX

It's all a matter of knowing
who's the host and who's the
guest.

INT. MICROBIOLOGY SECTION - BSL-4 LAB - DAY

Maggie's examining microscopic samples. Bridges and
Moyers come in together. She looks up at Bridges.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

Guess what, you're dead on. The
microbes and worms extract most of
the water and energy for this
system.

Walks over -- checks the data.

MAGGIE

(continues)

The biomass ratio between them tells
us how healthy the system is -- we
can more or less tell when it's
running a temperature, Moyers.

Moyers looks reassured, not that he understands.

BRIDGES

What's the ratio now?

MAGGIE

2:1. It's been constant since
Day three.

She shows him the data -- 2.1, 2.0. 2.11, 2.12 ...
Looks up at him.

MAGGIE

You guessed that.

He looks at her, smiles. Yeah, he did.

INT. DIAGNOSTICS TENT - CAVERN - HUGE ROOM - DAY

SUPER: DAY 14

Alex comes in with Moyers. Bridges and Robinson,
sitting analyzing data. Alex looks like the cat that
swallowed the canary.

ALEX

We isolated a protein from one of those spiders. It kills all high metabolism cells -- ours as well as theirs.

BRIDGES

(anticipating)

You're telling me it kills cancer cells ...

ALEX

(beaming)

I'm saying it may lead to a cure for cancer -- If it holds up.

(beat, looks at Moyers)

I'd call that an unexpected benefit -- wouldn't you, Ben?

Moyers looks happy.

ROBINSON

Throw in a cure for male pattern baldness and you'll make my day.

Bridges looks at him.

ALEX

(to Bridges)

We're going to fill in the President. There's plenty of glory to go around. Why don't you come along and say a few words.

Bridges looks at Robinson. Perhaps he should.

INT. BRIEFING TENT - STAGING AREA - CAVERN - NIGHT

The scientific community at work in the cavern has been brought together for an ULTRA SECURE BRIEFING by Bridges and Alex. The President and his Cabinet present on closed circuit TV.

Alex is finishing up his presentation. The President and his PEOPLE are impressed.

PRESIDENT

Well, that certainly is good news, Dr. Decker.

ALEX

Thank you, Mr. President...
 Dr. Bridges has a few words....
 (with a flourish to Bridges)
 They're all yours.

Maggie, Alex, Zack -- and the others -- settle in to listen. Bridges has a huge slide projected behind him. Bridges doesn't like speaking the way Alex does.

He begins haltingly, then picks up speed.

BRIDGES

Mr. President -- in there, only a few feet away -- life's exploding across all phylla and classes. Every biological niche is open. There are no natural enemies in place...
 (jokes)
 Except maybe us.

Bridges throws a compelling SLIDE up. An illustration from a high school textbook.

BRIDGES

(referring to the slide)
 We've all seen this in high school, but just to refresh your memory... This is a pretty good picture of evolution.

THE SLIDE: depicts the "Evolution of Life on Earth" as a serpentine, yellow brick road with the first single celled creatures, the first sponges and plankton, simple plants, insects, fish ... illustrated with simple drawings showing where, in the scheme of things, they first appeared. The "road" unfolds in ever widening spirals showing ever more complex life forms.

BRIDGES

It's only been two weeks but I think we're right about here on the yellow brick road --

His pointer falls on a section -- the Cambrian Era, the Earth's first crawling creatures, plants and animals.

BRIDGES

We've seen their first worms, insects and simple plants, crabs and crawling reptiles. At the rate they're going the first alien equivalents of dinosaurs, reptiles and small mammals should begin to appear soon.

His POINTER passes over pictures of life forms --

BRIDGES
... followed by apes, birds....

There's a collective inhale in the room as they see where he's going.

BRIDGES
(moving the pointer, looks
at the audience)
If we wait long enough, we may
see --

There's a RIPPLE in the crowd as his pointer stops on the last creature on the yellow brick road -- a figure representing MAN. HOMO SAPIENS.

The President, seeing where he's going with this.

PRESIDENT
(stunned)
You mean ...

BRIDGES
(enjoying the moment)
Yes. The equivalent of homo sapiens.
The top rung of the evolutionary ladder.
Whatever -- he -- she -- that --
is.

There's SILENCE in the room.

A moment goes by as the staggering implications of what he's saying play over the crowd.

MOYERS
My God. Mr. President, this is
going to be a bombshell. The public --

MAGGIE
Ben -- how long do you think?

BRIDGES
At the rate we're going -- weeks.

PRESIDENT
(grins)
So we're waiting for Godot.

BRIDGES
(beat; grins)
You could put it that way.

ALEX

(privately to Robinson)
Imagine -- a conscious, intelligent
being is going to come out of that
jungle.

(beat; thinking)

What an interesting way for our
friend Godot to arrive. It sends
its genes and hopes it gets lucky.

Bridges is looking at the tarp. They all are.

EXT. MESA - TENT CITY - NEW MEXICO - SUNSET

Maggie and Bridges, walking, under a New Mexico sky at
sunset. Life on Earth with all it's color and vibrancy.
High overhead, a HAWK, circling against a red-orange sky.

BRIDGES

Look --

Maggie follows the hawk with her eyes.

BRIDGES

From so simple a beginning endless
forms most beautiful and wonderful
have been, and are being evolved.

He looks at her.

MAGGIE

Charles Darwin.

BRIDGES

I can also do a wonderful version
of Walt Whitman.

MAGGIE

I'm curious. This "Godot" character,
will it look like us?

BRIDGES

Why should it? It could look like
anything, as long as it has a brain
and consciousness.

MAGGIE

What about a soul?

BRIDGES

Who knows.

(beat)

I've waited all my life for this.
Now that it's here...

MAGGIE

What?

BRIDGES

I don't know.

She looks at him. A long look. Something on her mind.

MAGGIE

You're still wondering why I chose to be with Alex, aren't you?

BRIDGES

Sort of -- I am. Yes. It's something I could never figure out.

MAGGIE

You're so different from Alex.

BRIDGES

(a look)
Really? How's that?

MAGGIE

Alex knows what Alex wants and he goes after it.

BRIDGES

So that's why you're going to marry him?

MAGGIE

(angry)
He asked me.

That stops Bridges.

BRIDGES

Maybe I can trade in my famous sense of humor.

MAGGIE

You shouldn't. You're you.

She wants to say more but she can't. She looks at him tenderly.

She walks away, thinking. Bridges watches her go.

Robinson joins him.

ROBINSON

A successful organism, Ben, is one that reproduces.

(beat)

That girl's in love with you. I've been around a while.

(looks out at the mesa)

Best sunsets on Earth.

Bridges looks at him.

INT. BRIDGES' TENT - MESA - NIGHT

Bridges wakes up -- someone shaking him. Maggie. He looks at her.

MAGGIE

We've got a problem.

Bridges looks at her.

INT. MAGGIE'S BIO-LEVEL-4 LAB - NIGHT

Maggie takes him over to the closely monitored biomass sample he brought back. Shows him the read-outs.

MAGGIE

(shows him the data)

Look. The ratio's changing. It's now 2.5 to 1 ... and climbing.

Bridges looks bothered, frowns.

BRIDGES

Something's going on.

INT. DIAGNOSTICS TENT -

The tent is crammed with equipment -- banks of monitors and Army personnel, zoologists, botanists... all busy.

Military SENSORS -- lasers, U.V., infrared -- peer in through an increasingly dense jungle, monitoring and recording the growth of trees and vegetation and the movement of animals through it.

Suddenly -- some fairly large shadowy, green murky shapes on FOUR and SIX legs appear on their infrared scans -- Everyone sits up.

ARMY EXPERT 1

Whoa -- what the fuck was that?

ARMY 2
(to his buddy)
I don't know. You want to go
in there and find out?

Bridges and Maggie enter.

ROBINSON
(turns to Bridges)
We're getting increasing bioactivity
in the upper tree branches. Any
idea why?

Bridges shakes his head. A set of screens, monitored by
Army personnel gives them a complete "eco-picture" of the
growing forest system. A 3-dimensional topographic
display from a high angle.

Bridges takes Alex aside.

BRIDGES
Alex, our ratio's all over the
place and the atmosphere's changing.
We have to go back to ground zero.

ALEX
It's too risky. It's doing whatever
it's doing.

BRIDGES
I see -- As long as you're getting
your fifteen or twenty species a day
out of there you don't care what
it's up to.

Bridges looks at him.

BRIDGES
You're doing it again.

ALEX
What?

BRIDGES
You're fucking with me.

ALEX
Get over it, Bridges. That paper
didn't exactly do our careers any
harm.

Bridges glares at him. Alex follows after him.

ALEX

Ben, there are some fairly large predators in there. We don't know their patterns of behavior. Ben!

INT. THE HUGE ROOM - STAGING AREA - TARP - NIGHT

Bridges, suiting up. Booker turns to his commandos.

BOOKER

Who wants to go? I'll take volunteers first.

Behind the tarp, the vast jungle now includes the hole in the ceiling. The stars fading into dawn as daylight starts to come in, eerily lighting the jungle. The tarp is now attached to the ceiling near the highest point of the cavern. The ecosystem now taking up roughly a quarter of the huge underground cavern.

MOYERS

How big is it?

ALEX

Several acres. We've pulled the tarp back to give it more room.

Moyers, alarmed motions at the opening in the ceiling --

MOYERS

The opening -- isn't there a problem with the two atmospheres mixing, or something getting out?

ALEX

(smiles)

First of all, our atmosphere is lighter it floats on top of theirs. And if anything tries to get out it will die in our air. We still have containment.

ANGLE STAGING AREA - CAVERN

Bridges, Robinson and Levin finish suiting up.

BOOKER

It's a long way in. We walk?

BRIDGES

We walk.

Booker looks up at the ceiling on the other side of the tarp. Daylight just coming through the opening.

BOOKER

We haven't been in at night. Want to wait until it gets lighter.

BRIDGES

No. Let's go now.

BOOKER

Doc -- Look -- I know how to stay alive in the face of adverse conditions anywhere on Earth. My men are trained to do the same. But if we can't tell whether something's animal or vegetable -- that's a problem. So help me out in there, okay?

Alex is staying behind. Sees them off with Maggie.

ALEX

I'll hold down the fort here.

Bridges looks at him. Alex smiling. Maggie wishes them all good luck.

MAGGIE

Watch it in there.

INT. - INSIDE THE TARP - DAWN

Acid mists swirling around the high dark limbs of alien trees. They walk in. The first streaks of daylight just bleeding through the hole in the ceiling, adding a faint half light to the spots and lights outside.

Bridges looks up -- Five or SIX huge SPIDERS are crawling up on the ceiling. Alien COCKROACHES, 6 inches long with large, metallic wings -- cover an entire wall. An alien salamander-like LIZARD, 2 feet long, eats a large roach.

They continue on. The jungle is now so dense they have to hack through sections of it with machetes.

LEVIN

(hacking a vine)

I feel awful --- this might be the only one of its kind.

The bushes emit hissing, MEWING sounds, as he whacks them.

A cactus-like alien plant with flowers snaps down on a small, scuttling animal and eats it, Venus Fly Trap style.

SOLDIER 3

I wouldn't take a whiz in here, Harry.
That's a dick-snapper if I ever
saw one.

Booker comes up on another plant.

BOOKER

What is that -- an alien squash?

LEVIN

It looks like a plant, but it's got
a mouth on top of its head. It's
moving.

BOOKER

The damn plants move.

BRIDGES

Let's keep moving. We've got
a way to go.

They give the "squash" -- and the "dick-snapper" a wide berth. Booker looks at his navigator, Lovett, with the GPS.

LOVETT

Ground zero is 100 feet ahead, fifty
feet to the right.

BOOKER

Let's not get lost, people.

They pass huge trees -- the upper limbs shrouded in darkness and acid mist. They avoid the huge, glistening "curtains" hanging from the limbs.

BOOKER

I don't see any more of those
cute, furry creatures.

BRIDGES

At the rate this thing's moving
they may already be extinct.

Bridges looks down at the half-formed grotesqueries

littering the floor of the jungle. A creature with LEGS coming out of its mouth -- barely respiring -- being eaten by smaller creatures. Evolutionary dead ends.

As they go on, the limbs and tendrils of the bushes feel their suits. Ahead the meteorite shard. The closer they get, the denser the vegetation -- almost as if it's being protected. They use their machetes to hack through.

ANGLE

Ground zero. Bridges walks around the meteorite in his bio-suit.

He looks up at the TREE canopy -- 30 feet overhead and has a strange sensation. The trees -- the forest sensing him -- looking back. Everyone's uneasy.

Bridges kneels down, carefully takes deep soil samples around the shard -- and stores them.

BRIDGES

(to Booker)

Give me a thermal scan. I want to know how far down those worms are.

Two of Booker's MEN point an infra-red scanner at the cavern floor around the meteorite. On the output SCREEN -- in glowing red -- is an outline of thermal activity -- the mass of small worms -- under ground.

COMMANDO 1

Eighteen feet.

BRIDGES

Alex, are you copying this?

ALEX (O.S.)

Yes -- I copy.

Booker and his men keep careful watch in a circle, protecting Bridges. Everyone's uneasy. We sense that this is an alien space. Suddenly there's a strange GROWL -- They all whirl around.

A spindly creature -- nearly three feet high, on multiple legs -- similar to the "log" creature they saw earlier, approaches.

BRIDGES

The existing species are getting bigger.

Its cylindrical "log" body does a 180 degree turn.
M-16s leveled at it -- six of them.

Suddenly, a SPIDER-LIKE thing leaps out of the underbrush and hops onto the back of the "log-like" creature. The spider doesn't "attack" so much as insert a long tube from its body into the back of the frantic creature underneath it. It hangs on as the creature whirls and screams -- INJECTING fluid through the tube into the back of the animal -- a sort of spider-penis at work.

LEVIN

God, are they mating? I thought --

BRIDGES

I sure as fuck don't know.

Suddenly the spider leaps off the animal -- and begins to "bud", producing two new -- but not "spider-like" -- creatures. The "log" creature falls on its side and slowly begins to bud also. It splits and fissures, producing two new halves -- completely new species. The team stares.

BOOKER

Let's get out of here. This place gives me the creeps.

They start back toward the tarp. Levin is buzzed by a huge DRAGONFLY -- an nine-inch thing. Jet black, with a long, curved tail-stinger. It flits away from Levin and lands on a large flower. Everyone tracking it.

LEVIN

It's a dragonfly --

Levin approaches the flower cautiously. Fascinated.

LEVIN'S POV: no sign of the dragonfly on the two-foot FLOWER. Multicolored, shiny, richly textured, mesmerizing -- Levin comes closer.

LEVIN

I can't see it.

BOOKER

It's there -- that or the damn plant ate it.

Bridges and Levin circle. From every angle they only see the surface of the flower. Bridges looks -- thinks he sees some subtle movement.

BRIDGES

Careful, it's still there!

Levin looks closer -- cocks his helmet. It suddenly takes flight -- BUZZING up -- off the flower where it was camouflaged. It circles Levin's clear plastic helmet and lands on it! It jumps and lights on Levin's shoulder -- sits there -- doesn't move. Levin uneasy.

BRIDGES

The stinger's in the tail. Watch it.

Bridges moves toward him. Levin reaches up with his gloved hand. The thing leaps into the air, BUZZES rapidly -- lights on the side of Levin's helmet again. Levin stares at it through the helmet. Its tail TAPS at his clear plastic-lexan helmet -- BUZZES obscenely wanting to get in -- at Levin. It suddenly rears its hard ceramic TAIL up and smashes the helmet with its metal stinger -- fracturing it, cracking a two-inch hole in it.

Levin starts to scream -- poison gas licking in through the crack -- and now the insect, the size of a small bird and all STINGER, is inside his helmet. Levin claws at his helmet -- it's buzzing inches from his face -- until it lights on his cheek -- he can't scratch -- it STINGS him. His face and cheek turn black as he continues to scream. Nothing they can do.

BRIDGES

Oh Christ, Christ!

LOVETT

Do something -- take off his helmet!

Booker reaches for the helmet release --

BRIDGES

Take that helmet off and he dies!

BOOKER

Christ -- We've got to do something!

It BUZZES angrily inside the helmet. Levin collapses, lies still.

Bridges and Booker at his side. The buzzing insect suddenly chokes, convulses and dies.

BRIDGES

Christ, it's dead. The oxygen in his helmet ...

Bridges reaches in through the hole -- grabs the dead insect with his fingers -- and pulls it out. Throws it on the ground. Feels for a pulse on Levin's neck. None.

MAGGIE (O.S.: radio)

What happened?!

BRIDGES

Levin was stung by something. We're coming out!

(to Booker)

Let's go!

TWO of Booker's men, grab Levin, and place him over a shoulder and double-time it out of the alien jungle. Bridges and the others moving as fast as they can. Past the trees and branches -- the "feeling" tendrils. The entire forest seemingly activated, agitated. Lovett and Booker bring up the rear.

We SEE a black LEECH-LIKE thing clinging to the calf area of Lovett's bio-suit. He doesn't see it or feel it. As he starts to run he suddenly stops and winces with pain.

LOVETT

Damn! Something just bit me.

Booker stops. Lovett feels down by his calf, desperately running his gloved hands over the suit. Bridges joins them.

CLOSE: Lovett's bio-suit's been penetrated. On his calf, a circular hole in his suit, the size of a quarter.

BOOKER

What was it?!

LOVETT

(hyper-ventilating)

I ... don't know.

BRIDGES

Lovett, where did it go?!

Lovett starts SCREAMING --

LOVETT

It's in my leg!! I can feel it moving. Oh God -- !

Writhing and screaming he falls to the ground. Booker and Bridges look at each other. Lovett starts to tear at the leg of his bio-suit. Bridges stops him.

BRIDGES
Let's get him out of here!

REACTION SHOTS OUTSIDE

Alex, Maggie and the others hearing all this.

ALEX (into radio)
You can't bring him out -- You'll
break containment -- you'll
be exposing everyone outside.

Bridges knows. It's a terrible dilemma. Lovett
screaming.

BRIDGES
Fuck you, Alex. We can't help him
in here! Let's go!

Two more of Booker's people help carry a screaming Lovett
to the tarp entrance.

INT. CAVERN STAGING AREA - HUGE ROOM - DAY

Levin and Lovett being carried out -- as they all come
flying out of the airlock exit in the tarp.

MOVE WITH Bridges and the others. Lovett, screaming
inside his helmet. They pull off his suit as they rush
him to the Emergency Medical Tent.

DOCTOR
(to his colleagues)
We need a CAT scan! Now!

INT. MEDICAL TENT - HUGE ROOM - CAVERN - DAY

Lovett's in the scanner. A small dark bulge under his
skin -- moving. Lovett is terrified and in immense pain,
screaming. Bridges looks on with the others.

CAT SCAN SCREEN -- shows the shape moving -- in real time
-- under Lovett's skin, into his muscle and femur bone.

DOCTOR
It's like a leech -- it's moving.

Think -- alien leech. Lovett is restrained, tied down.

LOVETT
It's eating me!! God!!!

Bridges looks on, desperate. They're all helpless. They can't get to it.

BRIDGES
(to doctors)
Get oxygen in there!

DOCTOR 2
We can't!!

BRIDGES
Do something. Kill it!

Pandemonium -- a full medical team stymied, frozen.

Suddenly a BUZZING sound from the inside of Lovett's thigh as the leech-like thing burrows deeper into Lovett's leg, near the bone. The surgeon has a surgical scalpel out, poised, but he isn't sure what to do.

SURGEON
It's eating his thigh bone!

BOOKER
Cut his leg off --!

BRIDGES
(to surgeon)
Do it!

Lovett is screaming -- out of his mind. They can all see the thing working its way along the bone, eating it, on the CAT scan! They can't do anything -- it's moving too fast. It divides in two inside Lovett's body and one of the dark shapes heads for his spinal column. Maggie and Robinson look away from the screen.

ROBINSON
God -- it eats calcium. God!

Lovett screaming, going crazy as it starts gnawing its way up his spine from the inside out. Bridges and Booker -- almost unable to watch. Booker's hand reaches for his .45 -- he'll shoot Lovett if he has to rather than watch this torture go on.

As one of the dark shapes rushes up his spinal column, Lovett dies. The other shape suddenly exits his leg -- slithering out onto the table and falling onto the floor. The second thing exits under his arm. Two eight-inch long, blood-covered leeches.

They race for Maggie's legs. Booker pins one of them to the floor with a combat knife. It squeals. The other

expires before it can attack Maggie, convulsing and thrashing about. The oxygen in the room kills it.

Silence. Lovett dead on the CAT scan table. They're horrified.

LATER

Robinson approaches Bridges.

ROBINSON
We're going to have to burn those bodies.

EXT. UP TOP - THE MESA - DUSK

Flames soaring into the night sky. They're burning the two bodies. Everyone is gathered. Bridges taking it especially hard.

LATER

Bridges walking away. Alex catches up.

ALEX
I told you it was too dangerous.

BRIDGES
Not now!

ALEX
Bridges!

Maggie intercepts Bridges.

MAGGIE
I'm sorry, Ben.

INT. LARGE BRIEFING TENT - DAY

Big meeting. Everyone there. Bridges has just presented his case. Moyers, Fowler and Marcotti listening closely with the others.

BRIDGES
I recommend we terminate it.

Alex looks at Moyers, Fowler and Marcotti.

ALEX
Do we have the right to terminate an entire life form just because we got here first?

BRIDGES

We do -- precisely because we got here first. Like it or not, we're the custodians of life on this planet.

(looks at Alex)

Or do you disagree?

Alex looks unconvinced.

BRIDGES

There's a complete ecosystem developing in there, Alex. Who knows what's going to happen next. I can't take that responsibility.

ALEX

I can. It would be criminal to destroy that thing.

Moyers looking back and forth between them. Fowler and Marcotti exchange looks.

ALEX

Just a week ago you were all for it.

BRIDGES

I changed my mind.

ALEX

Robinson?

ROBINSON

I wouldn't want to be looking down the barrel of this thing.

Bridges looks at Moyers.

BRIDGES

(to Moyers)

You have my vote.

Moyers looks over at Marcotti and Fowler. They look at him, at Alex. Not an easy decision.

Fowler, Marcotti and Moyers go off and huddle. Moyers gets on his satellite phone.

LATER

Alex walks up to Bridges. He loves being the bearer of bad news.

ALEX

They overruled you -- us.

(Bridges looks stunned)

They're going to keep it around for a while, study some of the predators.

(beat)

We're no longer calling the shots, Ben. We're just advisors.

The air goes out of Bridges -- he can't believe it.

He looks over at Moyers, Marcotti and Fowler. He and Alex walk over to them. Bridges looks at Moyers.

MOYERS

(looks to his people for support)

We've held it up to the light and looked at it from all directions. The benefits outweigh --

Bridges looks at them in disbelief.

BRIDGES

I hope you're right.

He starts walking away.

ALEX

(shouts after him)

There's no enemy on the other side of that tarp, Ben. Just life. Maybe I'm more interested in meeting Godot than you are!

ANGLE

Maggie approaches Alex.

MAGGIE

(to Alex)

I think he's right, Alex. It's dangerous.

ALEX

Et tu, Brute?

MAGGIE

Why do you have to take everything
so goddamn personally.

ALEX

What is that supposed to mean?!

(beat)

Relax, Maggie. If I thought --

MAGGIE

Don't patronize me, Alex! Honest
to God, sometimes I feel like one
of your specimens to be trotted
out to reflect on the greater glory
of Alex Decker. It's impossible
for you to imagine anything that
isn't here for your personal
benefit!

She walks away.

ALEX

(calls after her)

Maggie --

INT. CAVERN - NEW MEXICO - DAY

SUPER: DAY 26 9:00 HOURS

Booker salutes his new C.O. -- BRIGADIER GENERAL CARVER
SUSTRAND, Army Special Forces, 48, highly educated.

Bridges watches for a moment. He looks up at the ceiling
of the cavern.

ANGLE

the opening in the ceiling and a blue sky above it.

TREES and plants growing toward the opening -- now only
ten feet above them. We can almost feel the tops of the
trees straining towards the opening.

Alien spiders, scorpions, roaches and lizards clinging to
the ceiling near the OPENING.

High-tech SENSORS scan the ceiling -- sending the images
back.

INT. DIAGNOSTICS TENT - DAY

Robinson showing Moyers, Alex and Bridges the screens.

ROBINSON

The trees are growing 3 feet
a day, one and one half inches
an hour...

(shows them another
screen)

The sensors are picking up a lot
of insects and small reptiles
near the opening.

Fowler, from the CDC, looks at Robinson.

COL. FOWLER

We've installed a wire mesh
screen up there to prevent
any "migration."

Bridges turns to Fowler.

BRIDGES

Let's put a real cover on
it.

Fowler looks over at Brigadier General Sustrand Carver,
in camouflage dress. Sustrand Carver, a quick study,
nods.

COL. FOWLER

Okay. Seal it.

Alex turns back, looks at Bridges.

ALEX

Happy now?

EXT. MESA - NEW MEXICO - DAY

A crane lowers a plexiglass disc into place. Fifteen
feet in diameter and one foot thick. It settles with a
puff of sand and dust, covering the hole and sealing the
cavern off from the desert.

INT. CAVERN - THE HUGE ROOM - DAY

The extended tarp is now 80 feet high -- bowed out by the
ecosystem inside -- it's attached to the cavern ceiling
at its highest point. The ecosystem now takes up nearly
half of the huge underground cavern.

Fowler and Marcotti talking with Alex and Booker.
 Sustrand looks on.

ALEX
 (meaning the tarp)
 This is as far back as it goes.
 I think it may be time to
 cut back a little.

BOOKER
 (grins)
 Show it who's boss.

INT. DIAGNOSTICS TENT - HUGE ROOM - CAVERN - DAY

They target one of the tallest trees in the forest. A 55-foot monster headed for the translucent plexiglass disc. It's cross-hatched in green and red on their screens. Robinson looking on.

BOOKER
 Time for a little selective
 "pruning." Blast that big one.

A large, military laser (positioned inside the tarp) -- is remotely directed at the tree. A brilliant green beam knifes out from it and hits the "bark" of the tree.

CLOSE

the bark sizzles and melts -- acid steam bursting from the tree.

WIDE: The trunk explodes and the tree begins to topple. Crashing down through other tree branches, it lands with a ROAR. There's almost cheering from the military and scientific types.

Their cameras and sensors ZOOM in on the tree lying on the cavern floor. Suddenly the PODS open. A menagerie of horribly misshapen things come pouring out -- and scuttle into the underbrush.

ROBINSON
 God -- it was filled with those things.

An unnerving sight. A jungle full of encroaching trees, bushes and plants -- now only twenty yards from the tarp. Sustrand looks on. Alex and Bridges both bothered.

SUSTRAND
 What do you suggest, Bridges?

BRIDGES

(thinks)

Let's throw some oxygen in there.
That should back it off.

ANGLE - LATER

Large hoses with heavy brass nozzles, attached to large oxygen canisters, snake into the tarp.

INT. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TARP - DAY

Booker's commandos in their bio-suits -- under Bridges' supervision -- set up and direct the nozzles at trees and bushes now some twenty yards away from the tarp. They start the oxygen flow and retreat. Oxygen starts FLOWING with a loud HISS.

The invisible cloud of oxygen starts spreading through the ecosystem. Small alien animals run away from the deadly gas. Alien insects twitch and die as they get hit by the oxygen -- just like being hit by insecticide.

OUTSIDE THE TARP -

Bridges and the others -- Moyers too -- watching on monitors, with some satisfaction, as the slow-spreading cloud of oxygen knocks down and kills everything in its path. Grasses and plants WITHER and die. Leaves drop from one TREE, then the next as the oxygen advances into the jungle ... 30 ... 40 yards. Smiles on the faces of those watching -- Control at last.

ROBINSON

With their rapid metabolism
it hits them right away.

They watch four, five, six trees shrivel and die. The seventh TREE -- an odd looking tree -- with grey-yellow blossoms and small thorns -- doesn't die. It SHUDDERS --and just stands there.

BRIDGES

Whoa...

ROBINSON

(beat)
Oh shit. That one didn't die.

BRIDGES

(stares)
No.

All around it, trees and plants are dying but not the ten foot tree with black gnarled branches and grey-yellow flowers.

Bridges' blood runs cold. This is the last thing he wanted to see.

He ZOOMS the cameras in on the tree.

BRIDGES

(to Booker)

I want to know what that thing is!
Get me some cuttings from it and
bring them to the lab.

He's looking at Booker and the botany department.

MAGGIE

God, we could really use Levin now.

BRIDGES

Well, we don't have him.

INT. BIO - LEVEL - 4 - BOTANY SECTION

A cutting of the tree has been planted in a 15-foot high terrarium with a controlled and monitored atmosphere. It's already two feet high and wired six ways from Sunday -- every aspect of its biochemistry monitored. EVANS, the new head of the botany division, is there to assist them.

BRIDGES

(to Evans)

I want to know what it eats, what
it breathes, what it's thinking.
Run me complete gas balances on it.

Evans nods. The plant/tree is growing up toward a full spectrum light source they've placed above the case.

The black leaves have dark green streaks in them. Bridges looks at Robinson.

BRIDGES

I don't like that greenish color.

ROBINSON

Neither do I. I hope it's not --

BRIDGES

A variation on chlorophyll? So
do I. Let's see. Increase the
oxygen content to 20%.

Evans quickly increases the concentration of oxygen in the case -- to 20%. The tree continues to thrive.

BRIDGES

Not only can this fucker survive in oxygen -- it likes it -- and sunlight.

He looks at Maggie.

BRIDGES

Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

Evans takes another cutting from the tree and places it into a pale liquid.

EVANS

Let's see if it likes this too.

BRIDGES

What is it?

EVANS

Plant food. It promotes root growth for just about everything on Earth -- Let's see how well --

As they watch: the cutting starts to sprout. Black tendrils start growing up toward the light source. It grows so FAST we can see it with the naked eye. Roots start DOWN into the solution as the tree branches grow UP -- spreading at a frightening speed.

Bridges' eyes move to the digital output, monitoring the CONCENTRATIONS of gases in the terrarium. The oxygen level starts dropping and the level of a second gas starts rising.

BRIDGES

(stunned, looks at Robinson)
Look at this -- it takes up atmospheric oxygen and puts out ...

ROBINSON

Carbon monoxide.

They look at each other. Bridges looks alarmed. We've never seen him this alarmed.

Bridges' eyes turn back to the digital output, watching as the level of carbon monoxide soars.

BRIDGES

(face goes ashen)

Oh Christ ... Now I know what it's doing.

(looks at Maggie and Robinson)

Where's Alex? Get him and Moyers to meet me in the conference room -- now.

INT. TENT - CAVERN - THE HUGE ROOM - DAY

A briefing for a select audience. Moyers, Alex, Robinson, Booker, Maggie and the MILITARY. They're all sitting in a darkened room watching:

Full screen -- supercomputer video monitor: the "tree symbol" -- representing the new tree.

BRIDGES (V.O.)

We ran a computer projection on the Cray --

Displayed at teraflop speed by the computer -- the "TREE SYMBOL" spreads across the surface of the Earth at an astonishing speed. The numbers on the screen show the gradual change in the Earth's atmospheric gases. The concentration of oxygen FALLS and the concentration of carbon monoxide RISES --

BRIDGES (continuing; O.S.)

In six months it begins to transform the Earth's atmosphere -- appreciably. In a year the atmosphere flips -- and becomes their atmosphere. Carbon-monoxide-laden, suffocating all life as we know it here. Their animals don't have a problem with carbon monoxide -- and I'm sure neither would Godot -- they can breathe it, but it kills us -- suffocates us. I call this thing the "suffocater." There's an aquatic form that grows even faster...

They're looking at IMAGES of the oxygen-eating TREE. The lights come up. Alex sits up, pale as a ghost.

ALEX

(looks at Bridges)

It's going to terraform the entire planet the way it terraformed the cavern.

(beat)

Fuck the greenhouse effect. This is the end.

BRIDGES

(thinking now)

Maybe that's what it's programmed to do.

ROBINSON

Maybe God's tired of his current tenants.

BRIDGES

(looks at Booker)

The planet will support either life form, Booker. It doesn't care. Now do you understand evolution?

BOOKER

Fuck them. We got here first.

Bridges and Sustrand look at Booker. Good thought.

BRIDGES

If this thing gets out. If we lose containment, we can kiss life as we know it, goodbye.

MOYERS

How does it get out? The cavern is sealed.

BRIDGES

The burrowing worms... a seed, a spore dispersed by an alien animal. I don't know -- it's done pretty much what it's wanted to up to now.

Uneasy now, they all look up at the opening in the cavern ceiling -- inside the tarp and capped only by the translucent cover.

GENERAL SUSTRAND

(to Bridges, in disbelief)

Doctor -- you mean to tell me some lousy little boil ... this cancer sore is going to kill the patient?!

BRIDGES

Yes. Unless we stop it.

Dawning on them fully now. Long silence.

SUSTRAND

Then take it out. Kill the damn thing. Lance it.

MOYERS

Let's open the tarp and expose the system to oxygen. That will kill --

BRIDGES

(grim)

Not all of them. Not any more.

MARCOTTI

Why don't we just burn it?

BRIDGES

We can't without oxygen. And even if we did, there are the worms underground.

MOYERS

So what do we do?

Long look. They think. Bridges, Alex, Robinson, Booker, Moyers -- all of them. They all come to the same horrible solution. Sustrand turns to Moyers.

SUSTRAND

(to Moyers)

Call the President -- and get me the Air Force.

(looks around with brimming confidence)

I think the solution, gentlemen, is only an hour away.

Suddenly a nuclear weapon is your best friend.

EXT. KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE - NEW MEXICO - DAY

LOW ANGLE

Air Force Technicians carefully load an odd-shaped device into the belly of a C-130 transport.

EXT. MESA - BRIDGES & MAGGIE - AFTERNOON

Maggie walking with Bridges -- wistful.

MAGGIE

Now we're never going to get to meet this Godot character.

BRIDGES

(smiles, beat)

Pure, raw, primal consciousness. Unschooled. That would have been interesting. I let it go too far.

MAGGIE

It isn't your fault. Maybe Godot could have taught us something.

The mesa and the psychedelic New Mexico desert are achingly beautiful under a blue sky. The wind plays with Maggie's hair. She looks at the mesa and its breathtaking beauty.

MAGGIE

Tomorrow none of this is going to be here.

The wind ruffles Bridges' hair. They both know the nuclear weapon's been released and is flying in. She's standing very close to him.

MAGGIE

And someday we're not going to be here either.

(beat)

There never seems to be enough time. We waste it on --

BRIDGES

You haven't wasted anything.

MAGGIE

(looks at him)

Ben...

BRIDGES

(looks around at the mesa)

If they're trying to tell me that God sent the wrong package here, four billion years ago, I don't believe it.

(looks at her)

I won't let this end.

There's something about his notion that's incredibly romantic. She looks at him.

MAGGIE

Shhhh.

BRIDGES
 (looks at her)
 What?

MAGGIE
 You talk too much.

She takes his hand, leads him away.

INT. BRIDGES' TENT - MESA - DAY

Maggie and Bridges in his tent making love.

EXT. AIR STRIP - TARMAC - MESA - NEW MEXICO SITE - DAY

The C-130 comes in over the mesa and touches down on the new air strip, followed by two chase planes. The plane is met by two trucks. A device, shrouded in tarps -- the size of a large filing cabinet, is loaded onto one of the trucks and driven down into the cavern.

INT. CAVERN - STAGING AREA - DAY

CAPTAIN ROBERT ALVINS, U.S.A.F., accompanies the bomb along with two weapons EXPERTS from SANDIA. A FOUR-MAN Air Force security TEAM, well armed, stays with them and the H-bomb at all times. The bomb's "handlers" carry sidearms and keys. Alex and the others watch, somewhat awed.

BOOKER
 You certainly brought this baby
 to the right place. This way,
 gentlemen.

This is the closest any of them has ever been to an H-bomb. Bridges watches as it rolls by.

MOYERS
 Captain Alvins, I'm Phillip Moyers,
 National Security Advisor to the
 President -- Alex Decker, Ben
 Bridges -- General Sustrand.

ALVINS
 Dr. Baker and Dr. Jordan, SANDIA
 National Labs ...

He notices them looking at the security team.

ALVINS
 Security. These babies --
 (grins, meaning the bomb)
 have a way of drawing a crowd.

BRIDGES
(pointedly)
How big is it?

ALVINS
Four megatons.
(tight smile)
"Shake and Bake."

Bridges says nothing. They are contemplating the infinite here.

ALVINS
Put it at ground zero and it
should take care of the problem.

Alvins touches the warhead.

ALVINS
It's got a standard tritium/lithium
load, designed for maximum blast.
We can tailor the mix to your needs.
Blast, heat, gamma rays... whatever
you want.

ROBINSON
Like a cocktail...

ALVINS
(looks at him)
The fireball is close to a million
degrees. The shock front pushes
out ahead and pulverizes rock.
Everything in here will be turned
to green, molten glass. A hydrogen
bomb is a beautiful thing.

MOYERS
Let's do it and get the fuck
out of here.

Bridges is skeptical.

BRIDGES
Are you sure it will do
the job?

Alvins looks at him like he's nuts. They all do.

ALVINS
What do you mean?!

BRIDGES

We have some organisms 20 feet or more in the ground -- and in the walls. We've got corners and crevices in here, stalagmites shielding different parts of the cavern -- the blast front will arrive at different times.

(pointedly)

Are you sure it will kill everything, Captain?

Long pause. Col. Alvins' face goes through many changes. He is, after all, an intelligent man.

ALVINS

It should -- yes. I'm virtually certain.

Bridges' heart starts to sink.

BRIDGES

Virtually certain isn't good enough. If the blast disperses any of the biomaterial without killing it --

He doesn't want to finish the thought.

He looks back at a monitor showing a thermal scan of the biomass in red, blossoming out, expanding as they speak.

ALVINS

I'm 99.5% sure -- yes.

(reluctant beat)

Of course there'll be collateral damage.

"Collateral damage?" Bridges knew this was coming.

BRIDGES

You want to be more specific?

Alvins turns to DR. JORDAN, 40, wire-rimmed glasses.

DR. JORDAN

The "throwback" is enormous.

(they look at him)

The blast will vaporize the ceiling and the floor of the cavern -- and send a cloud of radioactive debris 40 to 50,000 feet up into the atmosphere. Let me show you.

They run a supercomputer simulation on one of the work stations in the cavern. Graphic images displayed at teraflop speed. Swirling colors as the bomb flashes, the blast rolls and sends the roof of the cavern up as a vaporized cloud -- mushrooming high above the mesa.

MAGGIE (O.S.)

Oh, God --

ALVINS (O.S)

Depending on the prevailing winds, the radioactive plume will move over Phoenix, Las Vegas, Albuquerque and San Diego to the north and west -- or Dallas and Oklahoma City to the east. We estimate the casualties from the fallout to be anywhere from 2000 to 30,000 --

(adds)

That's if we start evacuating people right now.

ALEX

Assuming we'd even consider it -- it would take longer than that to evacuate --

ALVINS

(cuts through)

You don't understand. Those numbers assume we detonate this device within the next three hours.

(they all look at him)

Let's say we wait another six hours. Given the rate that this thing's growing we'd have to bring in six megatons and then all the numbers ratchet up.

(looks at Bridges)

The longer we wait the worse it gets.

They're faced with a horrible -- unthinkable -- decision.

MAGGIE

Nobody can make a decision like that.

ALEX

It's that or lose the whole planet.

Bridges says nothing, his face a mask of pain.

His eyes return to the racing digital output showing the

biomass growth. The glowing red sphere on the infra-red screen -- spreading out in all directions.

Alvins is right -- they're going to have to pay a price -- and this is it. They all look at Moyers.

MOYERS

(reaches for his phone)

I'll tell the President.

As Moyers leaves.

ROBINSON

I wouldn't want to be in his shoes.

ALVINS

People -- the clock's ticking.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - WHITE HOUSE - TELECONFERENCE - DAY

The President with two of his most trusted ADVISORS are being filled in by Moyers. The graphics from the cavern are displayed on screen. INTERCUT as NEEDED:

PRESIDENT

(to Moyers)

You told me it was an underground nuclear blast. Now you're telling me --

(beat)

Even if I were to take this option seriously -- it's unthinkable.

MOYERS (on video screen)

Mr. President, you're going to have to make a decision. You're the only one who can.

PRESIDENT

Fifty thousand casualties! How could I explain that to the American people?

MOYERS

The problem gets worse every hour we delay, sir.

PRESIDENT

And what if this theory of yours turns out to be wrong. What if this thing --

SUSTRAND

Sir, it's more than just a theory.

The President is absolutely frozen -- unable to make

this decision.

MOYERS

I don't know how to put this to you, sir but in the long run it may be a small price to pay.

(beat)

You haven't seen what's down there.

The President turns to one of his advisors.

ADVISOR

(pained)

James, I can't advise you. I don't know.

MOYERS

(checks watch)

Mr. President ...

PRESIDENT

(snaps)

Moyers, I can't. I need to talk with my people -- Hang on.

Moyers sags. Sees the world slipping away.

INTERCUT: the alien ecosystem continuing to grow. The branches and tendrils growing toward the light.

INT. THE BIG ROOM - CAVERN - DAY

They're all standing around waiting for the decision.

Bridges is off in a corner, quietly sketching, scribbling something on a piece of paper.

MAGGIE

Bio-mass has increased another 10%. It's racing.

BRIDGES

I know.

Moyers comes in holding his satellite phone.

MOYERS

(announces)

The President needs more time.

There's an atmosphere of increasing anxiety in the cavern, bordering on desperation. We can practically hear the SECONDS and minutes ticking away. Digital out puts racing.

In the b.g. a graphic display shows the glowing red biomass, a malignant tumor expanding out in all directions.

ALEX

(to Moyers)

Tell him he has to decide, now.

Just then -- the heavy plastic COVER, capping the opening up top, comes CRASHING down into the alien jungle with a THUNDEROUS ROAR. Branches snap, trees topple. Sunlight suddenly streaming in through the debris and dust.

SHRIEKS -- SCREAMS coming from the jungle. SOUNDS we've never heard from animals we've never seen. They're all stunned. They look up.

BOOKER

What the fuck?!

The opening up top is now twice its former size and WIDE OPEN. There's a RUSTLING SOUND as the trees and plants begin to surge, growing toward the sunlight. The tallest one only 10 feet below the opening. The ecosystem bursting at its seams.

Bridges and Alex look at each other.

Booker jumps onto the radio link with the troops up top.

BOOKER

(into radio)

Colonel -- what happened?

UP TOP -- the troops scrambling -- staring at the large hole. LT. ARMSTRONG, 29, Special Forces.

ARMSTRONG (into radio)

We don't know, sir!

SUSTRAND

Fucking find out!

EXT. MESA - UP TOP - NEW MEXICO - DAY

Armstrong crawls toward the edge of the hole while everyone waits. He examines the rim of the opening.

It's CRAWLING with small worms -- burrowing WORMS.

ARMSTRONG

(into radio)

Christ, sir. There are thousands of those worms -- they've eaten the ground out from under the cover!

INT. CAVERN - THE HUGE ROOM - DAY

A shocked expression on Bridges' face.

BRIDGES
(alarmed; to Army tech)
Why didn't our thermal scans pick
them up?!

They look at him. Bridges is thinking.

BRIDGES
What's the maximum range on
our scanners --

ARMY TECH
Eighteen feet -- in this soil.

Bridges turns to Alex.

BRIDGES
You knew that, didn't you?

ALEX
Yes.

Bridges shoots him a look. Sunlight streaming in.

BRIDGES
They're five times as far out
as we thought. God.

MAGGIE
A hundred feet up and probably
fifty feet deep in the walls --

Growing alarm in the cavern.

Sustrand looks at Booker. Bridges is truly upset.

MAGGIE
(growing horror)
Which means this thing's a lot
bigger than we thought.

BRIDGES
Yeah. Ten times bigger.

He looks back at their extended thermal scan -- the glowing red ball now extends into the WALLS. It's much larger now -- huge. The worms spreading out in all directions, going deep into the walls.

ALVINS
 You're talking ten, fifteen
 megatons now. Maybe more.

This is a nightmare spinning out of control.

MOYERS
 (into phone to the
 President)
 Sir, we may have just lost the
 nuclear option.

Bridges looks at Booker.

BRIDGES
 Put a goddamn screen over the
 opening -- now!

Bridges looks up -- toward that wide-open hole to the
 outside world -- his heart sinking.

Just then -- a terrible RUSTLING SOUND from the jungle.
 A FLUTTERING, flapping sound -- They all look UP.

"Things" -- start to fly out of the upper branches of the
 trees -- "alien-BIRDS" -- short, stubby wings fluttering
 -- as they shoot toward the opening.

ALEX
 Jesus! Birds!!

BRIDGES
 (yells)
 They can't be allowed to get out
 of here!
 (to Booker)
 Shoot them --

But it's too late -- they watch, unable to do anything,
 as some of the "birds" reach the opening and hit the air
 up top. They rise a few feet into our atmosphere then
 SHRIEK and spasm -- and burst into smoldering flame.
 They fall back down into the jungle -- dead. Something
 close to a CHEER goes up from the people down below.

ROBINSON
 (exchanges a look
 with Bridges)
 We may not be so lucky with
 the next generation.

Bridges looks at them all. A frightening thought.

ANOTHER alien bird flaps up toward the opening and out.

It doesn't die -- or choke -- it keeps right on going!

BRIDGES

Shit -- it's a flier.

He looks alarmed. Sustrand and Booker on the radio link up top.

EXT. MESA - UP TOP - NEW MEXICO - DAY

The military surrounding the opening, see the thing fly up and out.

ARMSTRONG (into radio)

We've got a hot one exiting --

Waiting COPTERS - hovering -- and small chase planes. They track toward and after the BIRD with a two-foot wingspread and strange beak as it struggles, flying -- headed out across the mesa!

INT. COPTER - CESSNA - PLANES - DAY

PILOT

I see it.

They pursue. They're specially equipped with laser sighted weapons -- small and large caliber -- gattling guns, you name it. A flight of FIGHTER PLANES provides an umbrella at 10,000 feet; available to be called in.

A PURSUIT -- the copters and military Cessnas chasing down an alien bird -- flapping into the desert. ZIG-ZAGGING, it swoops and dives, flying very fast getting to 4,000 feet -- flying like its life depends on it -- almost possessed. The first alien bird to fly over the Earth and its blue skies.

PILOT 2

Christ -- look at it go!

In the cavern they all wait -- and listen to the pursuit on the open radio.

They close -- zero in on it. In their cross-hairs now, they unleash a murderous stream of bullets. It falls to the ground.

ANGLE

Both copters land. Men in bio-suits jump out -- running for the bird on the ground. It twitches and flops around, gushing fluids. They point their FLAME THROWERS at the bird and burn it to a crisp. The bird

makes SCREECHING SOUNDS as it burns. They spray chemicals over the entire area and burn it all a second time -- sterilizing the area.

INT. CAVERN - BIG ROOM - DAY

Their radios squawk and crackle. Booker gets the word from up top.

BOOKER

Got it! They sterilized the area.

Bridges looks at Robinson, at Alex -- They may have dodged a bullet.

MAGGIE

Eating the ground out from under the cover ... Was that just an accident? Or was it deliberate. A way for them to get out?

Bridges looks at her -- Interesting question. They really don't know.

EXT. MESA - UP TOP - NEW MEXICO - DAY

A fine wire mesh in place over the opening. A deep perimeter of military personnel and equipment surrounding it. Nothing goes in, nothing comes out.

INT. CAVERN - HUGE ROOM - DUSK

Bridges, watching the digital outputs that measure the increasing biomass of the system. Still racing -- accelerating.

Robinson looks at his watch, asks the question no one wants to ask.

ROBINSON

Alvins, where are we now?

ALVINS

I estimate 20 megatons.
(beat, gallows grin)
Not attractive, unless you don't mind losing most of the southwest United States.

ALEX

Any ideas? Anybody?

He turns -- looks at Bridges, who's quietly working something out with a pencil and some paper.

Bridges looks up. They're all waiting.

BRIDGES

As a species we're responsible for the disappearance of the carrier pigeon, the dodo bird, the bald eagle, the near extinction of the spotted owl and 15,000 other species. We've decimated the world's great tropical rain forests --

ALEX

What's your point?

BRIDGES

We're experts at fucking up ecosystems. Why don't we fuck up theirs?

He looks at them. There's a long moment.

ALEX

How??

BRIDGES

(looks at Maggie excitedly)

Their one-celled microbes and the small worms make up 80% of the bio-mass. They create the necessary atmosphere. and supply food for everything above them.

(pause)

If we can take them out we can kill the entire system from the ground up --

A flicker of hope. Almost too good to be true.

ALEX

How do you take them out?

Bridges looks at his papers. Looks at Robinson -- a Nobel laureate.

CLOSE

He lays out a chart -- the Periodic Table of Elements.

The tip of his pencil floats above it -- Alex, Maggie and the others look on.

BRIDGES

(looking at the chart)
What doesn't their biochemistry
like? Lead? They eat lead for
breakfast.

(looks at Robinson)
Arsenic..? That's Miller Time
for them.

The tip of Bridges' pencil passes over Arsenic and points
at the box one column over -- labeled SELENIUM --
already circled.

BRIDGES

These things use sulfur in their
metabolism.

(looks up at Robinson)
Selenium. With their biochemistry
it's as deadly to these plants and
animals as arsenic is to us --

He looks up at Robinson.

BRIDGES (continuing)

If we can get it to the microbes and
the worms it will work its way up
their food chain, killing everything.
Let the system do the work for us.

Brilliant -- dazzling idea.

MAGGIE

That's beautiful.

BOOKER

Like cockroaches. The idea is to
kill them, but not before they carry
the poison back to the nest.

ALEX

If it works -- how long do you
think that would take?

BRIDGES

(checks his figures)
With their metabolism -- I figure
the whole system should collapse
in a day, a day and a half.

ALEX

Are you sure?

BRIDGES

No.

Christ.

ALEX

And if we wait a day and a half,
and you're wrong? Where are we
then?

Alex turns to Captain Alvins. Alvins doesn't want to
even contemplate that.

ALVINS

All bets are off.

ALEX

Christ.

Bridges isn't through yet.

BRIDGES

I should point out two things.

He has their full attention.

BRIDGES

First --

(turns to Alex)

You and I will have to go in there
and deliver the stuff to the
heart of the ecosystem, ground zero.

Alex looks startled. "Us?" He starts to object.

ALEX

Why do you and I --

BRIDGES

Because, Alex, only you and I are
qualified to assess how much of
it goes into the ground and how
much goes into the atmosphere.

SCREECHES & BLEATING SOUNDS coming from behind the tarp.
No one's been in for days.

BRIDGES

(continuing)

Two -- When these things realize
what's happening -- they're not going
to like it. They're going to want to
get out of there no matter what's
on the other side of that tarp.
They're going to be coming at us.

They all look at the tarp now -- eighty feet high and

only half an inch thick.

BRIDGES

(beat, looking around)
Nothing behind that tarp gets
out of here alive.

(to Booker and Sustrand)
You guys are going to have to make
sure of that. It's not going to be
pretty.

Grim looks all around -- but that's where they're at.

MOYERS

What do you need?

BRIDGES

All the selenium in the world.

EXT. MESA - LATE DAY

Alex and Bridges -- each alone in their respective tents,
collecting themselves. Maggie alone, sitting in a canvas
backed director's chair staring out over the purple mesa
washed in honey yellow -- ULTRA-SLOW pullback from her
and the two tents framed together.

EXT. MESA - AIR STRIP - DAY

Two Air Force C-130's fly in and land. They off-load
two large industrial tanks containing several tons of
yellow powder, industrial selenium -- all they could
lay their hands on.

INT. THE HUGE ROOM - CAVERN - NEW MEXICO - DAY

There are two VEHICLES parked in front of the tarp.
A heavy PUMP TRUCK with two large tanks and two HUMVEE --
armored military vehicles.

Bridges SHOUTS to Alex and Maggie over the pump truck's
WHOOSHING PUMPS and COMPRESSORS.

ALEX

(skeptically)
Tell me again, exactly how this
is going to work.

BRIDGES

The stuff we put into the atmosphere
will slow down those trees -- the
rest should get everything else.

MAGGIE
(sees where he's going)
And the things underground and in
the walls -- will come back for a
free meal.

BRIDGES
(looks up, smiles)
That's the theory.

ROBINSON
(joining in)
Funny, isn't it -- the man who
saves rainforests comes up with
the perfect way to destroy one.

BRIDGES
(shoots him a tough look)
We'll see.

Bridges indicating the two large tanks.

BRIDGES
2000 gallons of selenium chloride.

ALEX
(shouts)
Is it enough?

BRIDGES
It better be. That's all we've
got.

Bridges looks at his wrist watch.

BRIDGES
We're wasting time.

Alex shifts -- not eager.

Maggie shows them a four-foot-long cylindrical probe
with a long metal tip.

MAGGIE
(shouts to Bridges)
This is your probe. It'll give
you your underground ratio.

Bridges nods.

An ARMY TECH takes Bridges and Alex through the valve
system on the pumps. They're making a LOUD racket.

ARMY TECH

(shouting)

This is your pump switch. Turn it on
and you're putting 200 gallons a
minute into the ground.

ALEX

Got it.

ARMY TECH

This is your aerosol system --
watch ...

He demonstrates how to direct the heavy brass nozzles.
He looks at Bridges. Bridges nods, "Got it".

Alex and Bridges pull on their bio-suits. Alex turns to
Bridges.

ALEX

You know we've disagreed on a lot
of things but --

BRIDGES

Forget it.

The two shake hands. Booker and Sustrand come over with
EIGHT Special Forces people, all in bio-suits.

BOOKER

(to Bridges)

I'll ride shotgun with you --

SUSTRAND

The rest of us will lead you in
with the humvees.

Bridges looks at Booker, armed to the teeth.

BRIDGES

You ready for this Booker?

BOOKER

Ready as I'll ever be.

A military ANALYST approaches them.

MILITARY ANALYST

Sir, we're picking up new groups of
predators -- weighing up to 75
kilograms --

They direct their attention to a monitor they've set
up. Their sensor-surveillance screens show in infra-red

and u.v. -- strange, large SHAPES -- moving around in the jungle.

ROBINSON

If you see Godot in there, tell
him I said "hello."

Bridges nods. He doesn't want to think about it.

Maggie catches up -- can't even give Bridges or Alex a hug in their suits.

MAGGIE

Take care of yourselves.

BRIDGES

(grins)
Walk in the park with Booker here.

Bridges looks up at the tarp, the truck. Looks back at Maggie and Robinson.

BRIDGES

Do not try this at home.

They all jump in the cabin of the pump truck.

INT. SEALED PUMP TRUCK CABIN - CAVERN - DAY

They seal up the cabin. Booker turns to Bridges.

BOOKER

This will be the mother of all
trips.

Bridges looks at him. Buckles up.

BRIDGES

Relax, Booker. It's not like anything
depends on this. Just the fate of
every living thing on Earth. All set?

BOOKER

Let's go.

They start in -- men in bio-suits opening the tarp up quickly to let them in.

INT. ALIEN JUNGLE - INSIDE THE TARP - DAY

Driving -- a trip through hell. A low SHRIEKING sound, coming from the jungle. Trees -- forty feet high, WEEPING-WILLOW-like, begin to sway, reaching for the vehicles with their long, dangling branches. The heavy

branches whacking at the sides of the vehicles. It's as if the entire ecosystem knows what they're trying to do -- and is determined to stop them. As they race through the passing bushes -- their tendrils -- "feel" them, measuring them.

INT. PUMP TRUCK CABIN - JUNGLE - DAY

The slower, heavier pump truck following TWO humvees up ahead. Ten miles an hour over the roots and vine systems that cover the floor of the cavern. Bridges driving. Booker scanning -- ready for action. Alex looks nervous.

Things, animals, reptiles bouncing off the sides of their vehicle. INSECTS bounce off the windshield -- hard. A thing that looks like Eggs Benedict on four legs drops onto their windshield -- it swims, spreading a white translucent goo over the windshield, making it hard to see. Bridges uses the heavy-duty wipers to knock it off and clear the glass. The GPS system gives them readouts on where they are relative to ground zero -- the meteorite.

BOOKER

.. . We're ninety meters south,
forty meters east from ground zero.
(reading off as Bridges drives)
...80-30 ... 70-25 ... Go .. go.

BOUNCE, the truck climbs over some big roots. Something black and hard crashes off their cabin door -- HISSES -- and is gone.

INT. HUMVEE #1 - ALIEN JUNGLE - UP AHEAD - DAY

Sustrand and his MEN bouncing, leading the way. Their best driver at the wheel.

NAVIGATOR

Sixty -- south, twenty -- east...
(major bump)
Easy ...

TWO SPIDER-LIKE things drop down from a tree and land with a CLICK and a THUD on their windshield. Their driver uses the windshield wipers to knock them off. They exchange a look.

-- The humvees moving through brush between the trees, and over roots -- keep moving.

NAVIGATOR

.... 40-10 .. we're right up ahead.

Tendrils on the bushes brush the side of their vehicle -- measuring their position.

CLOSE -- the trunk of a 35-foot tree -- one of the black and yellow "suffocators" -- SHUDDERS -- and hurls an eight-inch SHARD of ceramic-like "bark", at nearly supersonic speed, through the jungle. WIDER -- more trees doing the same --

KAWAAAH-ZING-WHACK another tree sends razor sharp SHARDS over the top of the humvees and ZING-CHINK bounce off the pump truck tanks like directed shrapnel.

SUSTRAND (on radio; O.S.)
What are those?!

BRIDGES
(driving)
Shards -- razor sharp. The trees!
Christ!

SUSTRAND (O.S.)
Keep moving! Christ!

More shards thwack zing through the jungle shredding plants and chopping tree limbs off, just missing them.

Their G.P.S. reads ... 10 meters south, 10 meters east.

BRIDGES
We're close. Up ahead!

Through the vines and plant cover, they can see the meteorite ahead. Still pristine, while all around it the cavern has been transformed beyond all recognition. The tall trees growing around it nearly reach the top of the cavern.

SUSTRAND (radio; O.S.)
We're here. Go ahead. We'll
cover you.

INT. COMMAND/CONTROL TENT - CAVERN - DAY

All the monitors lit up, giving them u.v., infrared and visual scans of the impenetrable jungle. They can track BOGIES like the combat information center on a carrier. Colored BLIPS -- creatures, animals, large flying insects -- all converging on ground zero.

COMMAND (O.S. radio)
Bridges, we show you at ground
zero. Sustrand, there's a lot
coming your way.

INT. ALIEN JUNGLE - GROUND ZERO - DAY

Bridges stops the pump truck as close to the meteorite shard as he can. Jams a lever forward and TWO wedge shaped NOZZLES hydraulically EXTEND from underneath the truck and jam themselves into the floor of the cavern like twin hypodermic needles.

They jump out in their bio-suits. Booker crouched, ready, covering them. Sustrand and his eight guys deploy around them.

SUSTRAND

Form a perimeter. Nothing gets even close to them or that truck.

They fan out and form a semi-circle. Nothing's coming through. Bridges and Alex race to the back of the truck. They jam the probe into the ground next to the meteorite shard. The SCREAMING SOUND of the jungle getting louder.

ANGLE

Insects fly at Sustrand's men -- buzz their helmets while wedge-shaped lizards and small rodent-like things snap and bite at their legs. Absolutely terrifying. KAAAA-ZING-THWACCK -- a sound we'll come to hate -- as another flight of shards whistles overhead, chopping down trees, cutting them in half. Sustrand's men dive for the deck.

One of them, late getting down, gets hit. He goes down screaming, nearly cut in half. His suit punctured, his red blood gushing out onto the jungle floor. Blood-thirsty creatures appear out of nowhere -- attacking and devouring his body. A horrifying sight. They fire their weapons but it's useless. It's over as quickly as it began ...

Everyone on the deck now with CREATURES coming at them. Some of the special forces guys begin to open up -- we can hear the pop of M-16s. A bizarre 30-pound predator races out of the brush and makes a run at them. It's cut down. Special Forces guys firing calmly, cooly --

Bridges and Alex check the probe frantically. They look UP and eyeball the tree canopy overhead -- alive with things you've never seen before. Several crab-like things drop down and scatter. Bridges ignores them.

ALEX

(eager to get going)
What's the ratio?

BRIDGES

6:1 ... same as up top.

Bridges turns the brass valve and a hissing, pale yellow cloud of selenium begins to spray into the atmosphere. It spreads, killing small insects and animals in its path. Nearby plants wilt -- Leaves start falling off the trees.

ANGLE - THE OPENING UP TOP - 80 FEET UP

The tops of the tallest trees now only a foot short of the opening. Alien-birds WHACK and smash themselves against the wire mesh trying to get out!

ANGLE

Bridges --

BRIDGES

(screams to Alex)

Get the rest into the ground!
Now!

Alex goes to flick the pump switch. PLINK, a nasty flying INSECT, the size of a SPARROW, caroms off his hand and the metal valve he's trying to turn -- as if it knows what he's trying to do. It lights on the valve and BUZZES angrily. Alex freezes.

Bridges steps in and turns the valve, starts the pumps.

The truck's loud COMPRESSORS/PUMPS start pumping hundreds of gallons of deadly selenium deep into the cavern floor.

More insects flock to the metal pumps -- Bridges beats them off.

INT. COMMAND/CONTROL CENTER - SAME MOMENT

Maggie, Robinson and the others watching a THERMAL readout screen. It shows the red bio-mass underground. A smaller, cloud-like shape appears, flowing down and around it. The digital output measuring the total bio-mass still racing ahead.

INT. ALIEN JUNGLE - NEAR GROUND ZERO

Sustrand's men under siege. The entire ecosystem starting to turn against them. SOLDIER 2 blasts a "hallucination on legs" -- the fangs in its 6-inch mouth just miss puncturing his suit. It dies in a sea of

purple fluid.

SOLDIER 2
Die! Damn you!! Die!!

Overhead -- a tree VOMITS a stream of red fluid that hisses and burns the roof of the humvee.

COMMAND (O.S. radio)
(alarmed)
Sustrand, you have some large predators coming at you from the southwest. 4 -- 5 -- 6 of them 40 yards, 30!!!

SOLDIER 2 (into helmet mike)
Where?! I can't see them!

COMMAND (O.S.)
(off their screens)
Right in front of you!

Camouflaged, it explodes at him -- an awful predator, an OCTOPUS with long arms and two mouths on either side of its large round head. It screams and suddenly sends a stream of hot red fluid at them. They fire and shred it in a hail of bullets. Blood and acid all over, men going down.

SUSTRAND
Watch your flank, watch your flank!
Booker, how much longer?!

COMMAND (O.S.)
We're picking up high frequency sounds from your left, Sustrand.

SUSTRAND
Eyes left!

Suddenly something flies out of the bushes at one of them -- nearly takes his head off. The man behind him nails it with a burst -- it lands at the first man's feet.

FIRST MAN
Aww Jeeze ...

SUSTRAND
(to Booker)
We've got to get out of here!

Booker runs over to Bridges.

BOOKER
Guys, we've got to go!

BRIDGES
(checks the gauges)
Give me one minute!

BOOKER
No, you don't understand! We've
got to get out of here now!!

Bridges sees the look in his eyes. If we stay we die.

He opens the valve all the way -- and runs for the 2ND
Humvee with Alex and Booker. The pump truck running.

More shards whistle overhead. The cloud of yellow gas
spreading wider and wider. Wafting over Booker's men,
safe in their suits as they run.

Sustrand's men -- carrying their dead, fall back into
their humvee and button up.

Booker, Bridges and Alex jump into the cabin of the
second humvee. Bridges starts it up.

INT. BRIDGE'S HUMVEE - ALIEN JUNGLE - DAY

Alex grabs a weapon. Bridges tries to back the vehicle
out. The engine strains but the vehicle goes nowhere.

BOOKER
Damn --

Booker jumps out -- races back, covering himself with his
M-16. Checks the wheels -- a VINE has wrapped itself
around the wheel and axel! Booker rips it with a burst
from his M-16, jumps back in the cabin.

BOOKER
Step on it or we're not going
to make it.

Bridges revvs the engine and pops the clutch, sending the
vine flying. The humvee moves. He turns it and races
back toward the tarp -- all hell breaking loose around
them. The jungle is SHRIEKING now, like a wounded
animal. Tree limbs reaching for the humvees, slapping,
grabbing the sides of the vehicles.

BRIDGES
(to Alex)
No Godot.

INT. SUSTRAND'S HUMVEE - ALIEN JUNGLE - DAY

Driving like hell.

COMMAND (O.S.)

Sustrand, you have more predators
tracking you from the southwest.
We count 4 .. 5 ... 6 --

Something the size of a small rhinosaurus, 150 pounds,
blindsides the humvee -- CRASH -- it nearly rolls over.
Like a rhino bashing a safari jeep. The guys open up
with M-16s fired out of sideports.

SUSTRAND

(to driver)

You lose this vehicle, son,
we're all dead.

The "rhino-thing" stumbles and goes down in the bushes.
They keep moving.

INT. BRIDGES' HUMVEE - JUNGLE - DAY

Alex firing, Booker blasting through the sideport at
anything that comes at them. The GPS reads 40 yards to
the tarp, 30 yards... They can see it ahead -- lights
blazing through it. Bridges drives like hell.

Suddenly -- KA-SMASH, the side, heavy lexan window
shatters, part of it falls into the cabin. Small insects
start puncturing the windshield. Booker looks at
Bridges.

INT. SUSTRAND'S HUMVEE - ALIEN JUNGLE - DAY

SMASH -- their windshield is fractured by a large animal
that drops down onto them. Three-legged, all elbows,
tiny head. Their driver is thrown to one side, holds
onto the wheel. Something rips the back door of the
humvee off. Strong, skinny limbs reach into the interior
and grab a man -- pulling him out -- he's gone. They
can't stop -- they keep moving.

As shards slam into the vehicle a tree limb smashes in
the windshield. The humvee caroms off a tree, lifts up
over a large set of roots, hits another tree, spins and
comes to rest. The doors fly open.

INT. BRIDGES' HUMVEE - ALIEN JUNGLE

Bridges skids his humvee to avoid theirs. Catches the
side of a tree. Bridges, Booker and Alex scramble,

stumble out.

Booker and Sustrand cover as Bridges and Alex help some of Booker's wounded men out of their humvee. They all run -- SHARDS whistling overhead cutting down foliage -- ripping through the tarp scattering people outside.

Deadly dragonfly insects, the size of birds, zip overhead.

Bridges trips and falls, Booker helps him to the tarp opening. They're ready to go through together when Bridges looks back at his antagonist -- an entire jungle.

He hesitates.

BOOKER

Forget about this fucking Godot character!

INT. CAVERN - BACK OUTSIDE - DAY

They're buttoning up the cavern:

- a) They place a heavy metal plate at the mouth of the ramp leading to the outside blocking any exit. Two layers of wire link fence are put up in front of the metal plate.
- b) Army Corp of Engineers earth movers with large metal blades pull up, facing the tarp -- creating a metal barrier 20 yards outside the tarp.
- c) HUNDREDS of Special Forces/commandos in full desert-green camouflage fatigues and full combat gear move into position setting up flame throwers and machine guns to create a KILLING ZONE in front of the tarp. They wear respirators and oxygen packs.

SUSTRAND

(addressing the troops)
Nothing leaves this cave alive. If it crawls, tunnels, flies, I don't care. Kill it.

ANGLE

Booker and Sustrand walk over to Maggie, Bridges and Robinson. Alex there too.

BOOKER

We're getting all non-essential personnel out of here. They're coming through that tarp any minute.

Booker's men hand them some M-16s and respirators.

BOOKER

When they do -- the shit's going
to hit the fan.

They take the respirators, put them on. Maggie tries the action on the 9mm Booker's given her. Alex, Bridges and Robinson heft their M-16s.

INT. ALIEN ECOSYSTEM/JUNGLE - DAY

Activity growing more frenetic -- some of the animals are starving, racing about, others are poisoned already. Panic and pandemonium in the jungle. Insects and birds begin bouncing off the tarp -- flying in erratic patterns. SCREAMS from inside -- a CACOPHONY of BLEATING ROARS. The tarp bulging out -- the ecosystem pushing against it.

INT. CAVERN - KILLING ZONE - DAY

The noise on the other side of the tarp reaches a crescendo. The troops tense.

SUSTRAND

Here they come!

Metallic insects suddenly blast through the tarp -- followed by birds and a tidal wave of crazed, starving creatures. They hit the oxygen and begin choking, convulsing. Wild, they lash out and try to leap the metal barriers. A tidal wave from hell. The troops open up with everything -- flame throwers send arcs of flaming petroleum into the killing zone.

Snapshots from hell:

- a) TWO Special Forces guys empty their M-80s into a four foot long alien lizard. As they do, a creature the size of a boar, with six legs, rushes at them.
- b) A variation on the "it's all legs" thing, only twice the size -- lunges out of the tarp and climbs the steel barriers, striking terror into the troops. They point their flame throwers at it -- it goes arcing back and dies in the flames.
- c) SOUNDS -- like rifle shots -- as the tarp is pierced by hordes of large, deadly insects. They crash into the lights -- knocking them down. This becomes a battle fought in SEMI-DARKNESS.

- d) Men going down, attacked by forms of life never seen before. Bridges firing, taking out his share of them. Alex, next to him, firing.
- e) Up top -- on the mesa -- tank mounted flame throwers arc rivers of fire onto the wire mesh covering the opening. Burning creatures, their wings beating at the wire mesh -- struggle and fall back.
- f) A large green spider, 3 feet across, skitters and careens around the walls of the cave -- crazed, trying to find a way OUT!! Booker swiveling, tracking it with his M-60 firing, pinning it in a bright spotlight, firing, nails it, tearing it in two. It slides down the cavern wall.
- g) Three-foot-long FERRET things at the wire mesh trying to desperately dig their way out of the cave. Bridges and Booker empty their M-16s, killing them just short of digging through.

INT. DIAGNOSTICS TENT - DAY

Maggie and Robinson, watching the screens.
Outside -- the SOUNDS of hell -- gunfire, shrieking.

A large spider crab -- 2 feet across -- sneaks into the tent. It focuses on Maggie, starts advancing across the floor, CLATTERING. Goes straight for her. She aims the 9mm and drills it. It goes straight up the tent pole, caroms off the ceiling and drops to the floor dead.

Outside the sounds die down. As suddenly as it began it's over.

INT. CAVERN - DAY

Carnage, blood, dying creatures -- gasping, drowning in oxygen. Bridges and Booker survey the dying ecosystem. Take their respirators off. Alex with them. Only some occasional SOUNDS from the jungle ... The tarp shredded and hanging in tatters.

ALEX

It's over.

Bridges isn't so sure.

INT. DIAGNOSTICS TENT - LATER

Bridges' eyes locked -- with everyone else now -- on the thermal screen showing the glowing red bio-mass below the cavern floor. It's shrunk but it refuses to disappear entirely. Bridges looks worried -- stares. Maggie looks

at him. Something's wrong.

MOYERS
What's the matter?

BRIDGES
It's not working.

Frustrated, Bridges slams his hand on the table.

BRIDGES
Dammit!

Bridges starts pacing. Moyers isn't exactly sure what's going on.

MOYERS
If it doesn't work the President's authorized us to evacuate and go with our best shot.

BRIDGES
(shouts)
Shut up, Moyers.
(to Maggie, Alex)
Something's wrong!! What??

Bridges is desperate. Looks at the computer output data screens. Suddenly.

BRIDGES
That's it!

MAGGIE
What?

BRIDGES
The pump truck's one third full! It didn't pump everything --

Bridges, nearly crazed, looks at Booker.

BRIDGES
We need to go back in there.

MOYERS
We don't have time. If --

BOOKER
I'll take you.

MAGGIE
Ben -- don't --

BRIDGES
I've got to finish it.

He holds her look a moment, then follows Booker out.

INT./EXT HUMVEE CABIN - JUNGLE - NIGHT

Booker and Bridges -- driving through the dead and dying landscape -- their eyes scanning a wrecked ecosystem. Creatures feeding on dead and dying creatures. Alien trees still shedding their leaves.

EXT. GROUND ZERO - ALIEN JUNGLE - NIGHT

Ahead in the wasteland -- the meteorite imbedded in the ground and the pump truck parked next to it. They pull up. Stop. Bridges jumps out -- checks the gauge on the pump truck, while Booker covers for him.

BRIDGES
I was right.

He fishes around in the pump motor, shining his flashlight in -- dead and dying insects, still BUZZING, have jammed up the mechanism. Bridges reaches in, clears them, getting stung by some of them. He doesn't care. He tries to restart the pumps. Nothing. He slams it with his hand, hits it with a wrench, hammers on the mechanism --

BRIDGES
Come on!

The shards whistle by -- clanging off the metal truck, thrown by dying trees -- the last gasp of a dying system. Booker ducking, looking this way and that. Bridges keeps working. CLANG another shard --

A final whack by Bridges and the PUMPS and COMPRESSORS ROAR back to life. Bridges gives the thumbs-up sign to Booker.

They take off -- dodging shards that whistle through the forest.

INT./EXT CABIN - HUMVEE - JUNGLE - DAY

Booker driving. Bridges catching his breath -- when he sees a figure -- something moving, fifty yards away.

BRIDGES
Stop.

Booker slows down, stops the humvee. Bridges gets out. He starts slowly walking toward it -- Booker now trailing behind him -- both carrying M-16s.

Half kneeling -- the FIGURE stands up in the center of the ruined jungle, on two legs. It has a presence about it unlike any of the creatures we've seen. An attitude. Not human, it has a bird-like head. Their opposite number. Godot. It points in Bridges direction.

BOOKER
Bridges -- careful.

Bridges walks toward the figure. Godot twenty yards away.

ANGLE

Everyone watching this now through the tattered, torn tarp. Alex, Maggie, Robinson, Moyers -- the troops.

MAGGIE (O.S.)
(on radio, quietly)
Ben -- stop! Don't --

If he hears her, he doesn't acknowledge her. He reaches the decimated forest clearing. The two-legged creature facing him.

Booker doesn't like this but he stays calm, not wanting to break the spell of the moment. Bridges moves toward it, slowly. It watches.

Dead and dying creatures, vegetation all around them.

Bridges mesmerized, moving slowly. Closer ... closer

A moment. Extended time. Bridges' eyes on Godot. Godot looking back at him, sees him, with a visual system that is more complex than ours -- multiple eyes of different shapes and sizes. Behind those eyes there's light -- an eerie intelligence, raw. Godot makes what appears to be a universal gesture -- open "palms" open arms -- an gesture of vulnerability. Bridges matches the gesture. An ineffable moment between them -- non verbal and way more -- it lasts -- and then, in a split second, it screams in rage and fury! It knows what's being done to it, to its world. It charges -- it's on Bridges before he can raise his gun. Godot explodes onto him.

BOOKER
(screams)
Bridges -- get back!!

Immensely strong, it knocks Bridges back -- ten feet with a single blow. Helpless, Bridges crashes to the ground.

Booker takes a step forward, with his M-16, aims. Godot charges again.

Booker screams with every fiber of his being.

BOOKER

Die you fucker! Get off my planet!

Booker opens up -- unleashes a stream of bullets -- full automatic -- bullets tear into the thing. It goes down, collapses on the jungle floor. Booker throws the gun down.

A stillness comes over the forest as Booker rushes forward. He reaches Bridges, alive, but in pretty bad shape.

Bridges looks at Booker. He has tears in his eyes.

Booker carries him back to the truck and races out --

INT./EXT HUMVEE - DRIVING - CAVERN

Booker drives through the tattered tarp and pulls up in front of the Diagnostics tent.

INT. DIAGNOSTICS TENT

Bridges propped up on a cot, badly injured. The doctors trying to work on him --

DOCTOR 1

We've got to get you out --

BRIDGES

No. Wait.

Bridges looks up at the screens with the others.

The glowing red biomass on the screen, the complete object of their attention.

Bridges can barely see the screen -- his vision impaired by whatever's racing through his blood system.

BRIDGES

(ignores doctors)

Maggie, is it working?

Moyers slowly walks over to the surveillance screens -- The thermal scan shows the hot, glowing red biomass

beginning to change.

MAGGIE
Yes -- It's working...

MOYERS
It is?

MAGGIE
(brimming)
Watch...

On the video screen the red, swirling bio-mass, the malignant tumor, begins to shrink, drawing back on itself from all directions.

ROBINSON
Last supper guys. Coochie, coochie
-- come to big Daddy.

They can all see now -- worms and microbes coming back from all directions, shrinking the ball.

BOOKER
Come on, come on. Eat up and die
you sons of bitches. Go ahead.

CUT TO: the floor of the jungle. Thousands of worms coming up to feed on the remains of the dead and poisoned animals. Their last supper. There's quiet applause and now cheering in the room.

Maggie has tears in her eyes. She looks at the doctors. She looks at Bridges. The corners of his mouth turn up in a smile. Crying, she pushes some of his hair back off his forehead.

BRIDGES
We did it?

MAGGIE
You did it. It's over.

The glowing red ball on the screen continues to shrink. Down... down ... approaching zero.

She holds his hand.

INT. BIG ROOM - CAVERN - DAY

The troops cleaning up. Removing the carnage. Alex, his bandaged arm in a very attractive sling, walks over to Maggie. Moyers waiting in the b.g. for him.

ALEX
Maggie, I was thinking -- maybe
you and I --

MAGGIE
Alex -- I'm sorry...

ALEX
(quickly raises his hand in
a gesture of submission)
Say no more.
(beat)
Well -- I'm off to a press conference.
Someone needs to explain to the world
how all this happened.
(off her look)
Goodbye, Maggie. Good luck.

Moyers and the press, waiting for him. She watches him
walk away.

EXT. VERMONT - DAY

Bridges' truck comes up the road, pulls into the driveway
of Bridges' neighbor Charley. Maggie gets out.

Charley's waiting there for her with Sam, the dog.
Maggie looks up at the blue sky, the green rolling hills
of Vermont. She approaches. Sam comes running and jumps
up on her. She kneels down and says hello to Sam.

MAGGIE
(to Sam)
Ben told me all about you.

She looks up at Charley, takes Sam's head in her hands.
Sam looks into her eyes.

MAGGIE
Okay, let's go home.

Charley walks her to Bridge's truck. Sam jumps in beside
her.

EXT. BRIDGES' FARMHOUSE - VERMONT - DAY

The truck comes up the driveway. Sam bolts out of the
truck and comes racing across the yard to the house.
Looking for Bridges. Maggie follows him up the steps,
into the house.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Sam going from room to room -- looking for Ben. Not in the kitchen, not in the dining room, not in the living room. He turns and looks at Maggie, starts to whine, goes up to a closed door, starts scratching.

Maggie opens the door to the bedroom and there's Bridges -- propped up in bed, on the mend. Sam jumps up on the bed with him.

MAGGIE

You friend's glad to see you.

Bridges roughhouses with Sam. Looks at Maggie.

MAGGIE

Sorry about Godot --

BRIDGES

No biggie. By my calculations it will only be another billion years before we bump into something like that again.

MAGGIE

A billion years is a long time.
Care for some company.

Bridges pulls back the covers, pats the bed. Maggie smiles. Sam gets out of the way.

EXT. PORCH - VERMONT - LATER - THAT AFTERNOON

Bridges reflective, sits quietly staring out into the deep green Vermont woods. Maggie stands watching him.

MAGGIE

So -- what happened out there?
Did he say anything?

Bridges looks at her, tries to find a way to communicate what is not communicable. He can't. He looks at her.

BRIDGES

Come here, you.

FADE OUT

EXT. TWO LANE HIGHWAY - NEW MEXICO - DAY

TWO NATIVE AMERICANS, a little stoned -- have stopped by the side of the road in their pickup truck to take a leak. One of them looks up into the azure blue sky and sees a hawk spiraling over head. He admires it. Suddenly it divides in two -- and the separate "halves" fly off. He does a double take.

NATIVE AMERICAN 1

Did you see that?

His buddy blinks and goes on peeing.

SUPER: DAY 1

The Land of Enchantment.

FADE OUT

THE END