

Man With The Football

by

John G. Pogue

CLOSE ON - A TELEVISION SCREEN

Hand-held VIDEO of a looming obelisk. Red aircraft WARNING LIGHTS flash at its pyramidal tip. PULL BACK to reveal the WASHINGTON MONUMENT. TOURISTS wait in line as their KIDS play in the snow.

MAN (V.O.)

This is where it ends, Melissa.

We see the LINCOLN MEMORIAL, the JEFFERSON MEMORIAL, the U.S. CAPITOL: a nation's cherished icons of democracy. MOVE back from the television screen to-

INT. DARKENED HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

On top of a table are stadium blueprints, a Beretta semi-automatic and green crocheted mittens. Distant MUSIC plays, "Frosty The Snowman."

A NUDE MAN stands with his back to us. He holds a microphone attached to a video palmcorder. The man is rapt, staring at the television screen where-

A crowd cheers outside the WHITE HOUSE, festooned for the Christmas season. A presidential motorcade enters the East Gate. PRESIDENT OWENS disembarks, holding his 4 year-old SON. He waves to the crowd, turns to enter the White House.

MAN

And this...

Camera FINDS United States Air Force Colonel MITCH BENEDICT, following discreetly behind the PRESIDENT. Tall, early 40's, weathered good looks, MITCH has the disciplined manner and commanding eyes well suited to his unique position.

He carries a black attache case hand-cuffed to his right wrist a.k.a. "the football." ZOOM in on that attache case.

MAN

This is where it begins. Right...

The NUDE MAN touches the attache case on the tv screen.

MAN

Here.

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The SCREEN goes black. Ominous SOUNDS of a missile launch in progress- A countdown punctuated with electronic BEEPS-

VOICE

Four. Three. Two...

INT. BENEDICT RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN

MITCH BENEDICT bolts awake, haunted. He looks over at his alarm BEEPING (4:30 am). He shuts off the alarm and switches on a lamp.

The tidy bachelor's bedroom is decorated with posters of famous military airplanes and healthy plants. MITCH grabs an Air Force Academy towel and enters the shower.

EXT. FT. MCNAIR - WASHINGTON, D.C. - PRE-DAWN

A military base nestled against the frozen Potomac. FOLLOW a black sedan through security checkpoints. The sedan passes the impressive colonial homes of the Joint Chiefs and stops in front of Mitch's modest residence.

INT. BENEDICT RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - PRE-DAWN

In uniform, MITCH spots the sedan outside as he's placing red candy eyes on Christmas cookies. MITCH goes to the living room, unlocks a safe, pulls out his briefcase.

EXT. FT. MCNAIR - COLONIAL ROW - WASHINGTON D.C. - PRE-DAWN

MITCH exits, engrossed in the "NY Times" with a headline: "Nuclear Summit Set For Christmas Week." He carries cookie tins with gold bows in his other hand.

His driver, BURGESS, opens the door. BURGESS is late 40's, large and muscular, a Sten automatic pistol visible inside his jacket. He wears an ear-piece and a Special Forces pin.

INT. SEDAN - SAME TIME

BURGESS hands MITCH a locked portfolio and drives. Seated next to BURGESS is a stone-faced MARINE holding an M16.

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MITCH unlocks the portfolio, breaks a red seal and examines the President's classified daily itinerary.

MITCH
You're late, Burgess.

BURGESS
A little snow and this town goes all to Hell. Baking again, sir?

MITCH
Doctor's orders. Relieves stress.

BURGESS
May I recommend an alternative, sir?
Watercolors, cribbage-

MITCH
Explain yourself, Lieutenant.

BURGESS
That last batch you gave me... with all due respect, sir, hard as rocks.

MITCH
Is that a fact?

BURGESS
Afraid so, sir.

MITCH hands BURGESS a cookie tin with grin.

MITCH
Merry Christmas.

EXT. DOWNTOWN WASHINGTON D.C. - EARLY MORNING

The sedan cruises down Independence Avenue.

INT. SEDAN - MOVING - DAWN

MITCH is engrossed in documents with red Extremely Sensitive Information stamps. He looks up. CHILDREN inside a school bus POUND on windows, trying to get his attention. MITCH scowls at them, then winks and salutes. The KIDS giggle happily. BURGESS hands back a package.

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BURGESS

You got another one last night.

It's addressed to Colonel Benedict, White House Military Office, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. No return address.

MITCH holds an X-RAY of the package up. Faint outlines of a MISSILE. He opens it, takes out a plastic model of a Minuteman III nuclear missile. A memory stirs.

MITCH

Was there a note?

BURGESS

(shakes head)

You did your time in the hole with a Minuteman III, didn't you, sir?

MITCH puts the missile down, flips through a C.I.A. status update. BURGESS notices he hasn't answered the question.

MITCH

Right lane's faster.

As BURGESS changes lanes, MITCH steals a glance at the model lying on the seat.

EXT. THE WHITE HOUSE - MORNING

The sedan passes through West Gate security.

INT. THE WHITE HOUSE - BASEMENT LANDING - MORNING

A National Security Administration OFFICER and an OFFICIAL from the Department of Energy meet MITCH as he exits the sedan. They both carry a slim briefcase. All three flash credentials to White House SECURITY OFFICERS in a booth.

INT. THE WHITE HOUSE - SHOTS - MORNING

MITCH and his silent companions are escorted through the White House by Secret Service AGENTS.

INT. THE WHITE HOUSE - 3RD FLOOR - MORNING

They enter the President's living quarters. MITCH breeches his .45 automatic and hands it to AGENT WEBBER, who makes a "sleeping" motion and escorts them down a long hall. A white Labrador Retriever watches them from an open doorway.

CAPTAIN JONES, a balding Army officer in his early 50's, rises from his post outside a bedroom suite. Handcuffed discreetly to his right wrist is the football.

The N.S.A. AGENT and the D.O.E. OFFICIAL enter a room to their left and shut the door. MITCH nods to JONES, who unlocks the chain from his wrist and hands the football to MITCH.

INT. THE WHITE HOUSE - WINDOWLESS ROOM - MORNING

The D.O.E. OFFICIAL and the N.S.A. AGENT unlock their briefcases and retrieve an envelope from each. Red seals are broken. The 12 digit computerized GOLD CODES inside each envelope are compared. They are identical.

MITCH enters with the football. He unlocks it, lifts out the old GOLD CODES and places them in an incinerator. He confirms the new GOLD CODE match.

The D.O.E. OFFICIAL slips one set of the new GOLD CODES into the incinerator. MITCH removes the ashes from the incinerator and drops them into an envelope.

The N.S.A. AGENT places the new GOLD CODES inside the football. Somber glances, the ritual completed.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BASEMENT - MORNING

MITCH makes his way past auxiliary offices to double doors marked "White House Military Office." Two MARINES salute and open the door for him.

INT. WHITE HOUSE MILITARY OFFICE - MORNING

A vast, elegant suite with antiques and colonial portraits of famous U.S. Generals. MITCH passes the Situation Room housing the NATIONAL MILITARY COMMAND CENTER, a glass-enclosed area crammed with satellite and communications screens.

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DUTY OFFICERS monitor the nation's defense posture throughout the world.

Military Office Director MCAFFERTY, 50's, United States Navy, joins MITCH. MITCH salutes him smartly.

MCAFFERTY

Morning, Benedict:

MITCH

Anything we need to know about?

MCAFFERTY

Lost a C-141 at Vandenberg. 3 crew didn't make it. Otherwise, quiet.

Mitch takes a last look at the screens.

MCAFFERTY

I hear this "Non-Proliferation Summit" is making your type nervous. Think the world will force your unit into early retirement?

MITCH

Never happen.

MITCH places his chin on a retinal scanner. Lasers scan his eyes. The steel door marked "Special Weapons Unit" BUZZES.

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - MORNING

Photos of the nation's nuclear arsenal line the walls. A dozen OFFICERS man computer terminals outside a row of sterile offices. They acknowledge MITCH respectfully as he reaches the glass-enclosed heart of the office.

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - COMMAND CENTER - SAME TIME

A sophisticated computer console dominates the area, hovered over by a team of four OFFICERS. One wall is covered with charts listing detail assignments and movements of National Military Command DESIGNATES. Computer screens and video monitors are labelled "BLUE TEAM" "GREEN TEAM" "RED TEAM". They are networked to Secret Service headquarters in the Executive Office Building.

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MITCH greets the officer in charge, Major PETROVSKY. PETROVSKY manipulates a keyboard so that we see CAPTAIN JONES sitting at his post five floors above them.

PETROVSKY

The C.I.C. is in the shower. Gonna be a hell of a week with the Summit.

MITCH checks the detail schedules, his name up there for the next day, R.F.K. stadium, 9:00 pm. Redskins vs. Cowboys.

PETROVSKY

Should be interesting. We're taking all new NATO partners.

MITCH

Carry on, major.

MITCH approaches his office. BURGESS types at a computer terminal, eating Mitch's cookies from the tin.

Mitch's secretary, MRS. WARNSTEIN, a motherly Air Force Corporal, greets MITCH with a hidden smile.

WARNSTEIN

Visitors in the sanctum, sir. Stars and bars have the replacement for Smith. I think you'll be pleased.

INT. OFFICE - SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT DIRECTOR - SAME TIME

MITCH enters and snaps to attention, saluting the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General HARDART, and his three AIDES. General HARDART is a hard-nosed, old school veteran with a breast-full of medals.

HARDART

Colonel Benedict, meet the newest member of our team, Captain Rice.

CAROLINE RICE salutes smartly and extends her hand. She is early 30's, athletic build, very pretty. Mitch shakes her hand, but his eyes are on HARDART.

CAROLINE

Nice to finally meet you, Colonel. I've heard a lot about you.

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MITCH

General, may I have a word with you?
Excuse us, Captain.

Color drains from Caroline's face. She and the AIDES exit.
MITCH taps the ashes from the envelope into a cannister next
to his desk. HARDART hands him Captain Rice's file.

HARDART

Carrier pilot. Navy didn't want to
give her up. And don't make us look
like dinosaurs and say she's not
qualified because she's female.

MITCH flips through Rice's file carefully.

MITCH

Her gender isn't what concerns me.
She wasn't on my list of candidates-

HARDART

You won't find what you're looking
for.

MITCH closes the file, facing HARDART. Displeased.

HARDART

It looks good for us, Mitch. Give
her a chance. You might even like
her, eventually.

(turns to go, pauses)

Say, Helen wanted to know if you'd
spend Christmas Day with us. You
haven't seen my new granddaughter.

MITCH

Appreciate the offer, but I've got
the duty command with the unit...

HARDART

Which I'm sure you volunteered
yourself for. If you change your
mind, let us know.

MITCH

Thank you, sir.

EXT. WINTER SKY - THROUGH PALMCORDER LENS - SCANNING - DAY

Nothing but blue sky and thin clouds.

MAN'S VOICE

I know you can't see it...

EXT. GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY GYM - ROOF - DAY

College STUDENTS play football on the snow-coated field. Near the edge, with a spectacular view of downtown Washington, sits a MAN with his back to us. He stares through a palmcorder up at the sky, recording light on.

MAN

But it's up there...

The wind blows the man's cap off. We see a bare, mottled scalp.

EXT. THE WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

Candles in the windows. A Christmas tree is lit inside.

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - NIGHT

MITCH peers over a computer printout. Major PETROVSKY and OFFICERS brief CAROLINE, giving her the grand tour. A VIDEOPHONE buzzes. The self-important face of White House Chief of Staff VAN KROPP fills the monitor. MITCH stands.

VAN KROPP

Colonel, we need The Briefing now.

MITCH

Yes, sir. On our way.

Van Kropp's face disappears.

MITCH

Rice, why don't you follow me.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - TRUMAN CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

The PRESIDENT and his CABINET are seated around an oval table. VAN KROPP looks at his watch impatiently.

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MITCH and CAROLINE enter, saluting. MITCH holds the football.

PRESIDENT
Good evening, Colonel.

MITCH
Mr. President. This is Captain Rice.

PRESIDENT OWENS nods to CAROLINE, addresses the room.

PRESIDENT
Folks, the next four days could change the course of history. The earth can be a safer place, but not without our eternal vigilance, and the world's knowledge that zealous procurement or use of nuclear weapons will meet with swift, devastating retaliation by the United States.

The PRESIDENT reaches MITCH, staring at the football.

PRESIDENT
This is not a threat we make idly. It is one which we are prepared to carry out.

PRESIDENT OWENS nods to MITCH. MITCH places the football on the table. He dials the combination lock, unhooks the silver snaps, and pulls a Cray generation III-

LAPTOP COMPUTER

from inside. He unfolds a 13" diameter miniature satellite dish connected to a Secure Voice Network phone unit. MITCH turns the computer on, awaiting instructions.

PRESIDENT
Worst case scenario. The situation in Korea deteriorates. They throw one at Seoul. Options, Colonel.

MITCH types. The 3 dimensional monitor brings up the S.I.O.P. "Single Integrated Operations Plan" for nuclear war fighting. MITCH types on. THE SCREEN shows us a map of North/South Korea and 34 attack options.

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PRESIDENT

Just as an example, which one should we choose, Colonel?

MITCH

Mr. President, that is a strategic question and I am not qualified to answer it. I suggest you consult the Joint Chiefs, as even your intentions during a test such as this are considered secrets vital to National Security.

VAN KROPP

We don't have all night for this.

PRESIDENT

Proceed, Colonel Benedict.

All eyes on MITCH. Mitch looks up at the PRESIDENT.

MITCH

You wish to initiate a non-valid launch sequence. I need to confirm your identity. Please read me your identification code.

The PRESIDENT pulls a laminated voice verification CARD from his wallet. He reads one of ten numerical sequences.

MITCH

I confirm that you are the President of the United States. General Harkins?

GENERAL'S VOICE

(from secure phone)

I second that, Colonel.

The PRESIDENT examines the options on screen carefully.

PRESIDENT

Let's say I choose General Attack Option #1, with a level 3 damage classification. What now?

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MITCH

I would have to verify the launch order, then you would read the Gold Code sequence to initiate launch.

PRESIDENT

Have Mrs. Watkins verify.

MITCH

Captain Rice, take over.

Hiding her nerves, CAROLINE picks up the secure satellite phone and punches in a series of #'s.

CAROLINE

Nucflash snap. Mrs. Miriam Watkins.

Seconds pass. A PHONE rings. VAN KROPP picks it up, hands it to Treasury Secretary MIRIAM WATKINS.

CAROLINE

Mrs. Watkins, I have just received a non-valid nuclear launch order from President Owens. I need you to confirm your identity. Please read your identification code.

MRS. WATKINS reaches for her ID card and reads off her code.

CAROLINE

I confirm your identification as Dr. Miriam Watkins, Treasury Secretary of the United States. Do you confirm this non-valid nuclear launch order?

MRS. WATKINS

I confirm this non-valid launch order.

PRESIDENT

Then I read these.

The PRESIDENT lifts the set of computerized GOLD CODES.

PRESIDENT

Show them what would happen next.

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CAROLINE types. The screen shows an attack against North Korean military and intelligence installations along with estimated casualties. The CABINET watches silently.

PRESIDENT

We chose a level 3 damage classification. What did that mean?

MITCH

Severe damage to major targets, sir.

PRESIDENT

Don't mince your words, Mitch.

MITCH

Level 3 would be an attack damage characterization similar to reducing major targets to rubble.

PRESIDENT

And level 1, Captain Rice?

CAROLINE

That would be dust, sir.

PRESIDENT

Dust...

The PRESIDENT is grim. Electric silence in the room.

PRESIDENT

(to MITCH/CAROLINE)

Thank you. That will be all.

CAROLINE watches as MITCH disassembles the unit in seconds and locks it back in the football. They exit together.

INT. WHITE HOUSE MILITARY OFFICE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

They walk past the skeleton night crew. Adrenaline high.

CAROLINE

And I thought hopping carriers was nerve-wracking. Damn...

They reach the retinal scanner outside the Special Weapons Unit.

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT/DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

MITCH nods to his office. CAROLINE enters.

MITCH
(shutting door)
Good work back there, Captain.

CAROLINE
Thank you, sir.

MITCH
I've assigned you to the Red Team.
You're to observe and ride security
in the wagon for the first month.
Petrovsky will fill in details.

CAROLINE
Sounds good, sir.

MITCH
One more thing...

MITCH faces her directly, his expression growing hard.

MITCH
Speaking about an interaction with
the unit, in a non-secure location
such as that hallway, unless
specifically asked to do so by a
superior officer, is grounds for
court martial. You should know
better.

CAROLINE
It won't happen again.

MITCH
Dismissed.

CAROLINE exits, furious with herself. MITCH shuts the door,
shoots a glance down at an open desk drawer, where three
plastic missiles lie...

INT. COCK AND BULL - NIGHT

Jammed with political junkies. MITCH sits at the bar,
listening to a JAZZ BAND play a melancholy piece.

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A pretty brunette bartender in her late 30's, JANE, refills his Scotch with a smile, leaning over the bar.

JANE

Let me guess, Colonel. Another bad day, but you can't talk about it?

MITCH

Still spying for the Russians, huh?

JANE

I'm off early tonight. Maybe we could get coffee or make war or something.

MITCH

I'm flattered, but I can't interact with a woman without Pentagon approval.

JANE

Right... You're joking. You are joking aren't you?

MITCH shakes his head no for a beat, then breaks into a grin. JANE laughs and throws her towel at him. JANE moves down the bar to another customer.

BUSINESSMAN

She likes you.

A BUSINESSMAN sits down next to him, placing his aluminum attache case on the bar. He has intense Anglo features; slender build, pool-blue eyes, looks almost professorial.

MITCH

No accounting for taste, huh?

They share a grin.

BUSINESSMAN

(remembering)

I've seen you before. From TV. You're the officer that follows the President around with that black bag... the "football," right?

MITCH tightens inside, sipping his drink.

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BUSINESSMAN

How'd it get that name? Of course,
obvious, isn't it? You hand it off
from officer to officer.

(realizing)

You can't talk about it. Please,
forgive me.

MITCH

Forget it. Happens alot.

They nurse their drinks, listening to the music.

BUSINESSMAN

God...

(softly)

Having it right there, in your hands.
It must be... terrifying.

MITCH

(practiced)

You get used to it.

HOLD on the BUSINESSMAN'S blank expression.

INT. COCK AND BULL - MENS ROOM - NIGHT

MITCH washes his hands at the sink. He looks at his
reflection in the mirror, something bothering him.

INT. COCK AND BULL - BAR - NIGHT

MITCH returns. The BUSINESSMAN is gone. MITCH flags JANE.

MITCH

The guy sitting here- Where'd he go?

JANE

Paid your tab and split. Said to
give you this-

JANE lifts a plastic Minuteman III MODEL from under the bar.

JANE

Friend of yours?

MITCH bolts through the crowd, heads for the entrance.

EXT. COCK AND BULL - NIGHT

MITCH flies out the front doors. He sprints down East Capitol, eyes searching. The sidewalk's crowded with SHOPPERS and government EMPLOYEES heading home.

He spots a figure turning a corner in the distance, the glare from an aluminum attache case catching his eye-

EXT. "CAPITOL SOUTH" METRO STATION - NIGHT

MITCH crosses 2nd Street. A TAXI CAB nearly hits him, HORN blaring. MITCH picks his way through traffic outside the Metro Station. Surveys the CROWDS. He spots a MAN slipping inside a cab.

MITCH scrambles across the street. Cars swerve to avoid him. He reaches the cab as it pulls away. MITCH leaps onto the hood. The cab SCREECHES to a halt, knocking MITCH to the icy pavement.

The BUSINESSMAN rushes out the door, clutching his attache case. MITCH pulls himself to his feet.

The BUSINESSMAN crosses East Capitol. Darts down D Street and rushes into an alley-way. MITCH yells his location into his cellular phone.

EXT. CAPITOL HILL - D STREET - ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

MITCH whips around the corner. The alley stretches before him. No-one in sight.

MITCH draws his .45 automatic. Steps forward cautiously. Eyes search the shadows. A dog BARKS viciously behind a fence next to a garage.

The garage door is open. The only place someone could hide. MITCH approaches the dark opening, gun poised. Hears a CLINK from inside. MITCH hefts his automatic in both hands.

MITCH

Out! Move!

Shadows inside twitch. Two EIGHT YEAR-OLD KIDS with snow shovels step into the light, trembling. MITCH lowers the pistol for a moment. The KIDS' eyes grow wide with alarm-

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An aluminum attache case slams into Mitch's temple. His gun goes flying. MITCH spins. The BUSINESSMAN nails him in the face. MITCH staggers backwards.

We hear POLICE SIRENS in the distance, approaching fast.

The BUSINESSMAN tries to escape. MITCH grabs his briefcase, clutching it like a pit-bull. The SIRENS close now-

The BUSINESSMAN tries to break Mitch's hold on his briefcase. He gives up and takes off running. MITCH pulls himself to his feet, dizzy, takes a few steps forward.

One of the KIDS grips his gun by the barrel. MITCH takes it from him and rushes out of the alley.

EXT. D STREET - NIGHT

The guy's nowhere to be seen. Two D.C. POLICE cars ROAR down the street towards MITCH...

EXT. ABOVE THE POTOMAC - MARINE BH-4 HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Gliding above the frozen Potomac towards the Pentagon.

INT. HELICOPTER - MOVING - NIGHT

A MEDIC dresses Mitch's temple. BURGESS breaks the lock on the businessman's attache case with a crowbar. He flips it open. MITCH puts on his gloves. Under a Sunday edition of the "Washington Post" is-

A PALMORDER packed in foam, recording light on. He finds a HOLE cut into the metal casing and lifts the attache case to the light.

We see the HOLE on the outside, the CAMERA LENS behind it. MITCH pulls a video-tape from the camera.

The helicopter lands at the Pentagon.

INT. THE PENTAGON - BASEMENT THEATER - NIGHT

Darkened and circular with a mid 1940's institutional feel. Senior Department of Defense intelligence officers (Commander WILLIAMS, Colonel AARON, Major SPELLMAN) and General HARDART sit in the shadows, all eyes on a-

TELEVISION SCREEN - NAVAL SHIPYARD - NORFOLK, VIRGINIA

Video shot from the deck of a sailboat passing close to the base. There are shots of immense aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, cranes and dry-docks.

MAN'S VOICE

Take a good look, Melissa. This is where we've invested your future. Truly the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Mine were.

FAST FORWARD - ANGLE ON BLUE SKY

MAN'S VOICE

It's up there...

HARDART

Our gentleman is rambling. Go forward again.

FAST FORWARD - OLD VIDEOTAPE - MISSILE SILO - COMMAND MODULE

where MITCH, early 20's, sits with his feet up, wearing a Missiliers uniform and orange cravat.

Next to him is JORDAN BRYANT, a handsome Southerner, same age. Their shoulder patches say "Peace Is Our Profession." They are both relaxed, full of vitality and good-humor.

PSYCHE UNIT INTERVIEWER

One last time, Lieutenant Bryant.

BRYANT

Yes, we've thought about it, and yes, we can do it.

PSYCHE UNIT INTERVIEWER

Even if it means the annihilation of millions of people?

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YOUNG MITCH

Yes, M'am. Our job is deterrence.
It's kept the peace for over 40
years.

PSYCHE UNIT INTERVIEWER

But you must think about it. At
night, perhaps. Does it bother you?

BRYANT

If the message comes down and we're
told to launch, we will do it-

YOUNG MITCH

Because we have complete trust in our
superiors.

BRYANT

That's correct.

Mitch's eyes glued to Bryant's self-assured face.

HARDART

Where the hell did he get that tape?
Go to the bar.

FAST FORWARD - SHOTS - TRAILING MITCH - WASHINGTON, D.C.

MAN'S VOICE

These weapons, their existence numbs
us. Our minds can't comprehend the
totality of their destructive power.
Their daily presence makes us into
automatons, like the machines we've
created. Unthinking, unfeeling.

The CAMERA ZOOMS in on MITCH entering the Cock and Bull.

MAN'S VOICE

Like him. Our man with the football.
He has two drinks here every night.
Never more than two. I have known
sin, child. So has he. But in the
end, we will all be judged. We must
all be held accountable. I will see
to that. And Benedict will
understand...

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FAST FORWARD - INSIDE THE BAR - HIDDEN CAMERA ON MITCH

MAN'S VOICE

It must be... terrifying.

MITCH (TV SCREEN)

You get used to it.

OFFICER'S VOICE

Bureau's here.

General HARDART stops the tape. Liaison Agent JOE WYMAN, F.B.I., is escorted into the room. Two AGENTS in tow carry the Businessman's attache case, the missile models, and the "Washington Post."

Agent WYMAN is mid 40's with hawk eyes and a down-to-earth man-of-the-people manner.

WYMAN

You gentlemen get five of my minutes 'cause I'm feeling generous and the Bureau only has about 10,000 other kook requests we got to track down this week.

(nods attache case)

Series sold out of Wal-Marts in Phoenix. Palmcorder was stolen in '93 from a couple visiting the Denver zoo, Monkey House. That's all we've got, except for this-

WYMAN opens the "Post" to page 2 of the classified section. In the margin is a crudely drawn OUTLINE OF A MISSILE, at its pyramidal tip are TWO DOTS. MITCH eyes it, intrigued.

WYMAN

We can run his composite against everybody we've got, put his face on the Service's list this week. Maybe we'll spot him.

HARDART

Thanks for your time.

WYMAN

If you really want our help, you'd tell me what was on the tape.

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HARDART dismisses him with a nod. WYMAN and his team exit.

SPELLMAN

"I have known sin." Who else said that?

MITCH

Robert Oppenheimer. I think we should let Wyman in on the tape.

SPELLMAN

That's a lot of exposure for us.

MITCH

Sir, I firmly believe he's a member of the Community.

AARON

You don't know that, Colonel.

MITCH

This needs to be top priority. I'd check all Special Weapons personnel, military and civilian. Cross reference with offspring named "Melissa." Worry about foreign after that.

SPELLMAN

Sure this isn't just someone playing a joke on you, Colonel?

MITCH

If it is, I don't get it.

HARDART

(to MITCH)

Give us a few minutes.

INT. PENTAGON - INTELLIGENCE OFFICE - PRE-DAWN

Composite CD ROM IMAGES meld into a MAN'S FACE that looks remarkably like the BUSINESSMAN'S.

MITCH (O.S.)

The eyes... They're not right.

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A TECHNICIAN manipulates the computer. MITCH stands above him. We see a thousand different blue eyes. MITCH shakes his head. General HARDART joins them.

HARDART

We want to keep this internal. Our best guys are on it. Get some sleep. You look like you need it.

EXT. 14TH STREET BRIDGE - DAWN

A black sedan glides over the bridge towards downtown.

INT. SEDAN - 14TH STREET BRIDGE - MOVING - SAME TIME

BURGESS hands MITCH this morning's batch of documents.

BURGESS

Are we calling it a night, sir?

MITCH

(shaking head)

I want last Sunday's "Post" waiting on my desk.

BURGESS picks up the phone. MITCH looks down at the composite face the computer's drawn.

MAN'S VOICE

It's up there...

MITCH peers out the window, staring up at the gray sky. BURGESS notices, looks in his mirror, trying to find the same thing, looking harder, frowning. The sky's empty.

INT. DARKENED ROOM - MORNING

Thin hands stuff a butter squash into the sleeve of a shirt. A trench-coat is pulled over top. FOLLOW one of the hands, a syringe flashing for a moment above the wrapped squash.

MAN'S VOICE

How careless of me, Mr. Squash.

The syringe is pocketed. A STOPWATCH is clicked. 2 seconds. The squash is disrobed. There is a pin-point needle prick. The stopwatch is reset to "0."

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - MORNING

The businessman's face is projected onto a screen, going through a progression of disguises. MITCH sips coffee, motioning to the screen. His STAFF sits in front of him.

MITCH

So we keep our eyes peeled for this guy. Phillips will take my place on the Red Team detail tonight.
Dismissed.

There's a precise SCRAPING SOUND.

INT. DARKENED HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The edge of a rectangular piece of metal with the logo "Coleman" is rubbed with a cobalt knife sharpener. Hands hold the edge to the light. Razor sharp.

Hands fit the piece ever so carefully onto the lid of a portable metal cooler where it's been cut away. An exact fit.

EXT. MALL - DAY

The RED TEAM jog down the Mall in cold weather running gear. CAROLINE catches up with PETROVSKY. It's frigid.

CAROLINE

So tell me, is Benedict always such a hard-ass?

PETROVSKY

Yup.

CAROLINE

But you get along with him?

PETROVSKY

We respect one another...

CAROLINE

So what is it nobody's telling me?

PETROVSKY

You'll have to take it up with the Colonel, Rice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE

I'm taking it up with you.

PETROVSKY

(after a while)

Benedict only selects officers with
combat experience. Confirmed kills.

CAROLINE

I see.

PETROVSKY

Can't blame him. This command isn't
exactly a cake-walk.

(pause)

I'm sure he'll learn to like you.

PETROVSKY jogs ahead. Hold on her expression as we cut to-

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

MITCH pours over a thick looseleaf binder. Photos and bios
of Special Weapons personnel. He scrutinizes each face.
MRS. WARNSTEIN bustles in with a pot of steaming coffee.

MITCH

Intelligence give you the printout on
Melissa yet?

WARNSTEIN

Pentagon's main-frames are down
again.

MITCH

Terrific. The second it's ready,
okay?

WARNSTEIN

Yes, sir.

MITCH turns his attention to a copy of the "Washington
Post." He lifts up a xerox of the man's DRAWING (missile
with dots), then finds the classified page corresponding.

MITCH redraws the missile on his "Post" on the same page.
He draws the two dots on the tip, starts reading the
classified ads, searching for a clue...

INT. DARKENED HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - MIRROR - NIGHT

Hands apply red greasepaint to cheeks, a forehead. Fingers draw yellow streaks under the eyes.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BASEMENT - MOTORCADE STAGING AREA - NIGHT

Controlled frenzy as a twenty limousine motorcade is prepped. The Special Weapons Unit RED TEAM check their communications equipment inside a Chevy Suburban with black tinted windows, the "War Wagon."

CAROLINE pulls four AR-15 barrelled assault rifles from their cases inside the Suburban. She flicks the safeties, inspects the magazines expertly.

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The PHONE rings. MITCH picks it up.

MAN'S VOICE

Congratulations, Colonel Benedict.
You won the first quarter.

MITCH pounds a red button on his phone. Through glass we see BURGESS and intelligence OFFICERS pull on headphones and initiate a trace. The TEAM gather round to listen.

MITCH

Let's stop playing games right now.
What do you want?

MAN'S VOICE

Did you enjoy the old home movies?
Those were the good old days, eh
Colonel?

Mitch's fingers grip the phone.

MAN'S VOICE

You remember the good old days, don't
you? Oh, but I suppose they weren't
all good, were they? I think Lt.
Bryant would agree with me...

BURGESS signals for him to keep the guy on.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

What do you want from me?

MAN'S VOICE

A little empathy. Some respect.

MITCH

Respect? I don't even know who you are...

MAN'S VOICE

Just look in the mirror, Mitch.

BURGESS signals that they've almost got a trace.

MITCH

Does Melissa know what you're doing?

MAN'S VOICE

(beat)

No. She doesn't. That's why I'm keeping you informed. I'm counting on you to explain it to her, after it's all over. You owe her that much...

MITCH

Why don't you explain it to her?

MAN'S VOICE

Because I'll be in the end zone.

The line clicks. MITCH rushes out of his office.

MITCH

Did you get him?

The TECHNICIAN shakes his head. MITCH curses. He shoots a glance down at the Post classified page, where he's circled advertisements for "Redskins Tickets".

MITCH

Get the tape of his call to Intelligence! Alert the Service and our unit at R.F.K. Tell them he might be there tonight!

He motions to BURGESS. They rush towards the exit.

EXT. R.F.K. STADIUM - NIGHT

Thick crowds of Redskins FANS herd towards the stadium. FOLLOW one MAN, his face streaked with Indian warpaint. He carries a metal Coleman cooler in one hand, a transistor radio in the other. He wears a baggy Redskins shirt, a long coat, and an Indian headdress with feathers.

He takes out his ticket and gets in a line held up by SECURITY CHECKPOINTS. Hulking STADIUM SECURITY and D.C. POLICE scrutinize every face. Some shuffle through PHOTOS. Briefly we see the composite of the BUSINESSMAN'S FACE.

The MAN reaches an airport metal detector. The MAN hands the cooler to a POLICEMAN, passes through. He reaches for the cooler. A German Shepherd BARKS at it, held back by a POLICEMAN. Secret Service AGENTS join them.

MAN

How careless of me.

He opens the cooler, pulls out a hamburger and chucks it in a trash can. Still the dog BARKS.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT #1

Sir, what is this?

SECRET SERVICE AGENT #1 lifts a syringe and glass vials from inside the cooler. More AGENTS arrive. The dog BARKS harder. FANS in line grow impatient.

MAN

I'm a severe diabetic.

Our MAN points to the PRESCRIPTION LABELS on the vials and lifts his sleeve. There are ugly welts from needle marks up and down the vein.

The POLICE and AGENTS are sympathetic. They check the inside of the cooler again, hand it back to our MAN.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT #1

Enjoy the game.

INT. SEDAN - EAST CAPITOL STREET - NIGHT

BURGESS pounds the horn, MITCH up front next to him. The sedan pulls onto the center median strip. Swerves around FANS on foot. The stadium in view.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The sedan reaches an intersection where stadium traffic is jammed. They're stuck. MITCH leaps out, walking swiftly towards the stadium, eyes scrutinizing passers-by.

INT. CONCOURSE LEVEL - 3RD TIER - R.F.K. STADIUM - NIGHT

The MAN leaves a concession stand with a giant soda. He makes his way through the crowd towards a section of the concourse level cordoned off by an army of D.C. POLICE.

Beyond them, we see a herd of Secret Service AGENTS standing behind the owners' box. Nobody could get within thirty yards. The MAN heads for a nearby MENS ROOM.

EXT. R.F.K. STADIUM - LOADING DOCK - WAR WAGON - NIGHT

The Red Team sit at their posts, listening intently to radio traffic with growing alarm. PETROVSKY motions to CAROLINE.

PETROVSKY

Code 8. Get up there with Jones.

CAROLINE grabs one of the AR15's and exits the van. She heads for a guarded doorway. POLICE let her through.

INT. R.F.K. STADIUM - 3RD TIER - MENS ROOM - NIGHT

Our MAN enters a stall and dumps the soda into the toilet. He removes the face of his digital watch and inserts it into a hidden opening in the back of his "transistor radio". He reaches into his mouth and pulls out an 8" plastic tube.

Carefully, he runs the tube through a hole in the radio, sucks air out of the tube creating a vacuum, then inserts each end of the tube into the vials from his cooler.

He sets the watch for 3 MINUTES, places the device into his empty soda cup. He takes deep breaths, injects himself with liquid from the third vial. His eyes burn with new energy.

EXT. R.F.K. STADIUM - VARIOUS SHOTS - NIGHT

A ROAR from the crowd as the Redskins win the toss and elect to receive. CHATTER from the ABC broadcasters as we go to commercial. We see the PRESIDENT, explaining the rules to confused DIGNITARIES next to owner Jack Kent Cooke.

INT. R.F.K. STADIUM - 3RD TIER CONCOURSE LEVEL - NIGHT

The MAN puts the soda in a trash can. He reenters the mens room quickly.

INSIDE THE SODA - The device counts down... 90...

EXT. R.F.K. STADIUM - NIGHT

The Cowboys and the Redskins take the field for kickoff.

INT. R.F.K. STADIUM - 3RD TIER MENS ROOM - NIGHT

The MAN looks under the stalls. Full. Glances at his second watch. 70 seconds left. He pounds on one of the stalls. A terrified BOY rushes out.

Our MAN enters. He tears off his jacket, his wool hat, the long Redskins t-shirt. 60...

Underneath he's wearing a tailored blue suit. He pulls a badge with the D.C. COP'S I.D. and HIS PHOTOGRAPH on it from a false bottom in the cooler. 50...

He yanks the sharpened metal piece from the cooler and pockets it. He wipes the red grease-paint from his face with cold cream and paper towels from a jacket pocket.

INT./EXT. R.F.K. STADIUM - NIGHT

MITCH pushes past Secret Service agents checking his credentials at the front entrance. The stadium starts to rock with the ROAR of the crowd.

The REDSKINS and COWBOYS line up for the kickoff. The REFEREE raises his arm, poised to blow the whistle.

INT. R.F.K. STADIUM - 3RD TIER CONCOURSE LEVEL - NIGHT

Our MAN exits the mens room. Bumps right into CAROLINE. Their eyes meet for a beat. The MAN walks off quickly.

CAROLINE hesitates, spins, lifts her AR-15 and aims at our MAN.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE

Stop! Right there!

Our MAN hesitates for a split second, then darts for a stairwell. CAROLINE'S got him in her sights when without warning-

The trash can EXPLODES in a flash of blinding light.

EXT./INT. R.F.K. STADIUM - NIGHT

The sound of the explosion rips through the stadium. The COWBOYS halt their kickoff. FANS panic. Smoke rises from the Concourse Level. FANS charge up the aisles for the exits. LOUDSPEAKERS tell them to stay in their seats.

The PRESIDENT and DIGNITARIES are dragged out of the owner's box by a phalanx of SECRET SERVICE and D.C. POLICE. They're rushed towards a guarded doorway where they are suddenly overwhelmed by a river of panicked FANS.

CAPTAIN JONES follows the PRESIDENT, carrying the football.

The President's group tries to force their way through the crowd.

A STAIRWELL - MITCH

charges up the steps, sees FANS stampeding down towards him.

NEAR THE PRESIDENT'S BOX - 3RD TIER - CAROLINE

dazed, fights to stand as a CROWD pushes past her.

INT. R.F.K. STADIUM - GROUND FLOOR - LONG HALL - NIGHT

Crammed with confused humanity. The motorcade visible at the far exit. POLICE trying to make room as the President's group is rushed through a door and down a long hallway.

FIND our MAN in the suit with his D.C. Police shield, joining the POLICE. They make a path through the CROWD.

Secret Service AGENTS hustle the PRESIDENT and the DIGNITARIES down the gauntlet, AIDES and support STAFF follow behind along with-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAPTAIN JONES, who is suddenly jostled by our MAN- The flash of a syringe pocketed. Jones' eyes go blank.

He slumps, clutching the football. Our MAN holds JONES up, helping him towards the exit where the PRESIDENT and DIGNITARIES are shoved into their limousines.

Nobody notices in the pandemonium as our MAN takes a sudden right turn before the exit.

INT. UTILITY ROOM - NIGHT

He drags JONES inside. Shuts the door. Lays JONES on the floor. Lifts the sharpened Coleman COOLER EDGE from his pocket. Hacks at Jones' right wrist. Blood splatters his suit. He slips the handcuff off what remains of a wrist.

The MAN pulls off his blood-stained suit, a sweatsuit underneath. He tucks the handcuffs and chain into an outer flap in the football and leaves the room.

EXT. R.F.K. - LOADING DOCK - NIGHT

The convoy of black limousines roars away. CAROLINE bursts out of the entrance. Major PETROVSKY grabs her.

PETROVSKY

Where is Jones????

They stand on the Suburban's roof and scan the CROWDS streaming out of the stadium all around them. CAROLINE looks north where-

Our MAN pushes through the CROWDS approaching the stadium from East Capitol. He heads towards the underground Metro Station entrance.

CAROLINE

(points)

Run Fumble! Now!!!

INT. SUBURBAN - NIGHT

PETROVSKY jumps inside, locks the doors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETROVSKY
Fumble Alpha Victor Alpha!

Like clockwork, the OFFICERS manipulate computers, place secure phone calls. A POUNDING. PETROVSKY sees MITCH, opens a window. Frantically points in the distance to-

Our MAN. CAROLINE chasing him. MITCH sees the football.

MITCH
Fumble-

PETROVSKY
Executed.

MITCH bolts into the crowd, knocking FANS out of his way.

EXT. "STADIUM/ARMORY" METRO STATION - NIGHT

A mob of PEOPLE ride up the station's deep escalator from the station below. Our MAN reaches the top, exhaustion tearing at his lungs. He looks back-

CAROLINE darts across East Capitol, MITCH right behind her.

Our MAN claws his way down the escalator and stumbles to the bottom.

INT. "STADIUM ARMORY" METRO STATION - SHOTS - NIGHT

Our MAN knocks through the line waiting to buy Farecards, jumps the entrance gates. He scrambles down another escalator to the-

CENTRAL PLATFORM - BLINKING ROUND WARNING LIGHTS

at the platform edge as one TRAIN lets passengers out.

Another Metro train's THUNDEROUS approach on the opposite tracks. Our MAN pushes through the crowd. Looks up.

CAROLINE rushes down the escalator towards him. At the other end of the platform MITCH descends, trapping him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The HEAD-LIGHTS of the METRO train rush towards the platform from inside a tunnel. A WOMAN sees Caroline's rifle and SCREAMS. CAROLINE and MITCH converge on-

Our MAN. Backing through the CROWD. Nowhere to go.

Our MAN grabs a MOTHER clutching her CHILD. Drags them screaming to the platform edge. Pushes the MOTHER off the edge onto the tracks of the oncoming train-

CAROLINE and MITCH freeze for a beat. Eyes torn between our MAN escaping and the MOTHER lying unconscious on the Metro tracks.

Our MAN uses the child as a shield, backing away to the opposite platform edge. Lets go of the child. Leaps down onto the tracks opposite, running into the tunnel.

MITCH

Get him!!!

CAROLINE rushes after our MAN, jumping down onto the opposite tracks. MITCH leaps down in front of the oncoming Metro train.

He grabs the mother's body and hefts her on his shoulder military style. BYSTANDERS watch from the platform, frozen as-

THE TRAIN WHOOSHES! towards MITCH.

MITCH tries to climb up the platform edge. Too high. Can't make it with her on his back. The deafening SCREAM of the train mixed with those of the child- The tracks VIBRATE-

A hand reaches down to MITCH. It's CAROLINE.

CAROLINE

Hand her up!

Together, they push/pull the woman over the edge. CAROLINE yanks MITCH up just as-

THE METRO TRAIN

SCREECHES by in a fury of wind and sparks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

D.C. COPS rush down the escalators. CAROLINE points to the opposite tunnel track and jumps down. MITCH and the POLICE follow her, sprinting into the tunnel.

DARKENED METRO TUNNEL - OUR MAN

runs. Body spent. Tears of joy streaming down his face. He darts into an area still under construction, vanishing into a tunnel, football in hand.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - SOUTHERN EXPOSURE - NIGHT

A Blackhawk helicopter lands. The JOINT CHIEFS disembark.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Tense OPERATORS work their terminals, watching a television set. SHOTS from R.F.K. stadium of FANS panicking.

NEWSCASTER

...President Owens and the foreign ministers returned to the game after authorities discovered the source of the explosion was a faulty fuse box...

MITCH meets CAROLINE'S gaze. They are unstrapped from polygraph devices by a team of TECHNICIANS. MCAFFERTY, grim, motions for them to follow him.

MITCH

Any word?

MCAFFERTY

No sign of him yet.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - TRUMAN CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

The JOINT CHIEFS and the National Security COUNCIL stand around the oval table, where President OWENS sits.

MITCH and CAROLINE enter, snap to attention. The President, exhausted, rubs his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PRESIDENT

How long did we lose it?

HARDART

Mr. President, command and control of our forces was never compromised. Our contingency plans worked as designed.

VAN KROPP

So we shouldn't worry about the lunatic that chopped off Jones' hand and ran off with the football?

HARDART

That's correct.

MCAFFERTY

All Gold launch codes were changed immediately.

PRESIDENT

What about the voice verification system?

MCAFFERTY

All National Command designees have been assigned new cards. The S.I.O.P. has been deleted from the football's computer via secure modem. All he has is a 24 million dollar Cray III laptop and some meaningless codes.

HARDART

The system is secure, Mr. President.

The PRESIDENT scans the faces of his Joint Chiefs. Each one nods in turn. He paces around the table, reaching MITCH.

PRESIDENT

You agree, Colonel Benedict?

MITCH

(beat)

Yes, sir. And I take full responsibility for this incident.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

PRESIDENT

What do we do now?

VAN KROPP

We find him. Quietly.

(to CHIEFS)

Although you say the system worked,
the perception might be otherwise.
If this leaks...

PRESIDENT

I would suggest keeping this from
becoming public information is
vital to our National Security.

Solemn nods around the table.

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The team gathered in Mitch's office. MITCH stands with his
back to CAROLINE, on the phone. He hangs up slowly.

MITCH

Jones didn't make it.

Silence. MCAFFERTY and MILITARY POLICE enter.

MCAFFERTY

Per the National Security Act, this
unit is now under House Arrest
until cleared by tribunal. Colonel,
you're relieved of your command.
Sorry, Mitch.

MITCH

Permission to speak with Hardart.

MCAFFERTY

He's expecting you.

EXT. BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON AIRPORT - NIGHT

A rental sedan pulls into a vast, empty parking lot.

INT. RENTAL SEDAN - NIGHT

Our MAN drills a hole into the football's combination lock. He pours a vial of clear acid into the hole.

The lock smokes, breaking apart. He opens the football and pulls out the laptop and Gold Codes. He lifts the Gold Codes up to the light.

EXT. PENTAGON - NIGHT

A helicopter lands at the River Entrance.

INT. PENTAGON - HARDART'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Artifacts from U.S. wars fill the vast office. General HARDART sits behind his massive oak desk. MITCH paces, agitated. He stares at a portrait of George Washington.

HARDART

You and the rest of the team will be cleared in a few days. We're recommending closed court martial proceedings for Rice.

MITCH

Sir, I'm not gonna sit in some room and wait for our guys to find him!

HARDART

You know the rules.

MITCH

A member of my team is dead. There's a guy out there with our unit, who I believe has internal security clearance, and everyone here including yourself is acting like it's no big deal!

HARDART stands and leans close to MITCH, eyes commanding.

HARDART

You're not reading between the lines. If we did make this into a larger issue, heads would roll- and believe me, yours would go first. Do I make myself clear?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH
You're making a mistake, sir.

HARDART
Can't do it. Dismissed.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

MITCH exits a black sedan, escorted by several INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS. MITCH is lost in thought, eyes haunted.

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - NIGHT

MCAFFERTY directs new Special Weapons Unit STAFFERS. CAROLINE paces in the Director's Office, two M.P.s standing guard outside the door. MITCH joins her inside.

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

He shuts the door. CAROLINE braces for the worst.

MITCH
They're recommending court martial.

CAROLINE
Sir, what was I supposed to do???

MITCH
Your job. I told you to go after him! That was a direct order!

CAROLINE
And I guess if I'd had a few confirmed kills under my belt, this guy would be in a pine box and none of this would have happened!

MITCH
Perhaps.

CAROLINE
Yeah, well, that's bullshit. With all due respect, sir. I guess it doesn't matter that I saved your life back there!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A KNOCK on the door. VAN KROPP enters.

VAN KROPP
Colonel, we need you upstairs.

MITCH
Wait here, Captain. We're not finished.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING QUARTERS - NIGHT

National Security Council STAFF huddle around the PRESIDENT, who sits on the sofa, holding his SON. He's feeding the child a cookie from a red tin. MITCH is ushered inside.

He salutes the PRESIDENT.

PRESIDENT
How are you holding up, Mitch?

MITCH
Fine, sir.

PRESIDENT
(looking around the room)
Excuse us for a moment.

Everyone leaves. President OWENS stands, facing MITCH, rocks the child in his arms. He is scared.

PRESIDENT
Cookies are better this year.

MITCH
Thank you, sir.

PRESIDENT
Don't worry about retribution. The Joint Chiefs will never know your response.

MITCH
Sir, what are you asking me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PRESIDENT

We've known each other for three years now, Mitch. I know you won't bullshit me... Should I be more worried about our man with the football?

MITCH

(beat)

To my knowledge, everything is under control.

PRESIDENT

I mean, he couldn't possibly... use it, now could he?

MITCH

No, sir.

President OWENS relaxes for a beat. He stares out the window at the falling snow. It's what he wanted to hear.

MITCH

That doesn't mean we shouldn't do everything we can to find him...

PRESIDENT

Thank you. That's all.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING QUARTERS - NIGHT

MITCH is escorted by Agent WEBBER down a hall. VAN KROPP calls after him.

VAN KROPP

Hold on. We've got a fax coming in. This one has a 6-year old daughter named Melissa.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING QUARTERS - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

They're all gathered around a fax machine. President OWENS is on the phone listening.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The fax spits out a photograph. A man in a white lab coat. His nameplate: Demetrius Zeitlin, PhD. VAN KROPP hands the phone to President OWENS. MITCH sees the eyes and nods.

PRESIDENT

(into phone)
That's him.

PRESIDENT OWENS listens some more, then hangs up, ashen.

PRESIDENT

Dr. Zeitlin works at Los Alamos,
for us.

Stunned silence.

MITCH

Computer Physicist. Theoretical
Division. Protege of Dr. Edward
Becker. Specialty is command and
control hardware, telemetry and
missile guidance. Highly regarded
in the Community.

An exchange of glances, everyone feeling the stakes rise.

PRESIDENT

Why didn't you recognize him
before?

MITCH

His photo is classified above me.
(beat)

Dr. Becker supervised the design of
our current system, with Zeitlin
under him.

PRESIDENT

You're telling me the guy who stole
it knows our entire system???

MITCH

He helped build it.

VAN KROPP

Christ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

MITCH

I should get out there, talk to Dr. Becker immediately.

PRESIDENT

(to VAN KROPP)

Presidential Directive allowing for suspension of National Security Act codes. Inform the Pentagon Colonel Benedict will be joining the Task Force.

MITCH

Permission for Rice to join me.

President OWENS looks to VAN KROPP, who shakes his head.

MITCH

She's seen his face, and I'll need an assistant. She's got a great record...

PRESIDENT

Whatever you need. Find him.

EXT. THURMONT AIR FORCE BASE - MARYLAND - NIGHT

A Marine helicopter lands next to a squad of jumbo C-5 Cargo jets. The back of a C-5 opens up, swallowing MITCH and CAROLINE as they're rushed inside. The C-5 taxis.

INT. COMMERCIAL AIRPLANE - NIGHT

An ATTENDANT walks down the aisle. She taps a MAN in a blue Air Force uniform on the shoulder. DEMETRIUS ZEITLIN wakes with a paranoid jolt. He wears the hat with brass clover.

STEWARD

Sorry to disturb you, Colonel, but I need you to stow the briefcase.

ZEITLIN

You can disturb me anytime.

She smiles and continues down the aisle. ZEITLIN pushes the football under the seat in front of him, the handcuffs and chain hidden by tape. A VOICE announces their descent.

EXT. C-5 CARGO JET - PRE-DAWN

The immense airplane roars through a cloud bank.

INT. C-5 CARGO JET - HOLD - PRE-DAWN

A cylinder of rumbling steel. MITCH sits, buttoning up a white shirt. He's looking at-

A LAPTOP COMPUTER connected to a satellite dish. We see MCAFFERTY'S FACE on the computer screen. He's in D.C.

MCAFFERTY (SCREEN)

They've authorized DCOMM to route Zeitlin through to you if he calls.

MITCH

(yelling above engines)
He'll call. I want stat reports faxed to me. Any change in our defense posture, I want to know-

MCAFFERTY (SCREEN)

Found out why we couldn't trace him before. He's using our Wimex secure voice satellite lines-

MITCH glances over at CAROLINE, back to us, taking off her uniform. She's listening to the conversation intently.

She finishes pulling on civilian clothing and joins MITCH, who wears a plain black suit. He shuts off the laptop.

MITCH

They're suspending court martial proceedings, for now.

CAROLINE

Thanks for the break, and for bringing me aboard.

(MITCH nods)

Why'd you do it?

MITCH

If I can get you out of this mess, maybe I won't look so bad. Just don't make me sorry I did it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

His words burn her up. They stare down at the snowy white Manzano Mountains, rimmed with pink light.

CAROLINE

Who do I have to kill to get your respect, Colonel?

MITCH glances at her, then looks out the window where KIRTLAND A.F.B. comes into view; a vast military installation adjoining the Alburquerque International Airport, home to the Sandia Nuclear Testing Facility.

EXT. MALIBU - EARLY MORNING

A rented convertible roars up Pacific Coast Highway, ZEITLIN at the wheel. He has changed out of the uniform, and wears a baseball cap and dark sunglasses.

Three L.A.P.D. PATROL CARS roar past him. ZEITLIN catches his breath as they pass, turns the RADIO up. He glances at the football on the floor, hidden under a duffel bag filled with electronic gear.

INT. SEDAN - OUTSIDE ALBURQUQUE - MORNING

MITCH speaks into a cellular phone. CAROLINE sees a roadblock ahead, manned by ARMY RESERVES and local POLICE.

MITCH

(into phone)

Sir, listen to me. Let's shut down Wimex. If Zeitlin tries to call me, he'll think he's on a satellite line and we can get trace it.

(listening)

I understand it would be shutting down our entire secure voice system...

(frustrated)

Yes, sir. Okay.

MITCH hangs up the phone, frustrated.

MITCH

They think he was on a flight to L.A. this morning...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The sedan reaches the CHECKPOINT and is waved through, heading North towards the mountains. MITCH glances at a Pueblo Indian FAMILY walking by the highway, the child holding his parent's hands.

EXT. GAS STATION - MALIBU - MORNING

ZEITLIN gasses up the convertible. A Dodge minivan pulls up next to him. A MOTHER exits in a hurry with her pocketbook, not shutting the door completely. She heads to the cashier.

ZEITLIN looks around, slips out a gas can from inside the convertible and starts filling it. He sees the minivan door creak open.

A chubby 3 year-old TODDLER, wearing a neon elastic leash, falls out the minivan door. ZEITLIN watches, fascinated, as the child gets to its feet without crying.

The child looks at ZEITLIN, then stares, wide-eyed, at cars WHIZZING past on Pacific Coast Highway. The TODDLER takes wobbly steps towards the road, the neon leash trailing him, unattached...

ZEITLIN watches the child step out onto the highway, approaching certain death.

A truck roars towards the child, its HORN BLARING and brakes SCREECHING- mixed with ear-splitting SCREAMS. The MOTHER rushes back from the cashier.

ZEITLIN backs away from the highway, holding the child. He hands it to its MOTHER, who sobs her thanks.

ZEITLIN

A mother should be more careful.

INT. SEDAN - ROUTE 15 - GRADE TO LOS ALAMOS - MORNING

Thunderclouds gather in the sky. MITCH and CAROLINE look out the windows as Route 15 slopes up towards the Los Alamos plateau. "D.O.D. Kills" "Deathtown" "Stop Building Nukes" spray painted on retaining walls alongside the road.

MITCH pulls out the folded newspaper copy of Zeitlin's drawing of the missile with eyes.

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CONTINUED:

CAROLINE steals a glance at the drawing over Mitch's shoulder, intrigued.

CAROLINE

What is it?

MITCH

I don't know. Something Zeitlin drew. Something he didn't want us to see...

EXT. LOS ALAMOS - DAY

The sedan is checked through security and enters Los Alamos, New Mexico. A town haunted by its past. Ugly bunkers, testing facilities and barbed wire surrounded by spectacular mountain scenery.

They pass the Church Schoolhouse with its plaque "Manhattan Project Headquarters" and Fat Man atomic bomb replica. It starts to rain.

CAROLINE

You think he wants to use the football, don't you?

MITCH

The question is how, and for what?

CAROLINE

It only has one real purpose, sir.

MITCH

I'm aware of that.

CAROLINE and MITCH feel the emotional darkness of the place. They wind through the modern testing facilities with nuclear material WARNING SIGNS and GUARDS everywhere. They reach a HANGAR, surrounded by law enforcement vehicles.

EXT. LA JOLLA CANYON - L.A./VENTURA COUNTY LINE - DAY

Rolling hills surround the coast. ZEITLIN climbs a trail through a canyon. He reaches a bluff overlooking Point Mugu and the Pacific, ashen and exhausted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZEITLIN reaches into his backpack, pulls out five prescription bottles. He downs pills with water from his backpack. It hurts to swallow. He looks to his right-

In the near distance is CONEJO MOUNTAIN. At its peak is a remote SATELLITE INSTALLATION, white dishes scanning blue sky. A trailer perched amidst the dishes.

ZEITLIN pulls out binoculars. He looks up at the installation, where two MARINES sit outside the trailer. They can't be more than 19.

ZEITLIN rips a sage-brush twig from the ground and SNAPS it. He lets it drop, pushed by the wind. He looks at his watch and sets an alarm. He lies down on a nearby picnic table and stares at the sky. Breathing hard. Trying to rest.

INT. HANGAR - LOS ALAMOS - TASK FORCE H.Q. - DAY

Wet, MITCH and CAROLINE are escorted inside a makeshift command center manned by several dozen F.B.I. AGENTS.

Agent-In-Charge JOE WYMAN is huddled with his STAFF around a map of Los Angeles. WYMAN spots MITCH.

WYMAN

That's him.

INT. F.B.I. SEDAN - MOVING - LOS ALAMOS - DAY

In the back seat, WYMAN offers CAROLINE and MITCH doughnuts and coffee. They pass through a section of resident housing.

WYMAN

Dr. Zeitlin tells Alamos Security he's going camping for the weekend. They tail him up to the Sangre Christos Mountains like they're supposed to. Thought he was still up there.

MITCH

Anything out of Los Angeles?

WYMAN

We're working on it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

Work harder.

WYMAN

Look, Colonel, this isn't Perry Mason and you aren't this week's guest star. As far as the Bureau's concerned, you two are just along for the ride.

WYMAN leans forward, looking them in the eye.

WYMAN

Unless, of course, we stop shitting each other. Why are we really looking for this guy? And why no uniforms?

CAROLINE

What'd they tell you?

WYMAN

She speaks. Zeitlin murdered one of your team. Otherwise, National Security hooley.

MITCH

That's close enough.

WYMAN

Not for me.

MITCH

I want to talk with Dr. Becker.

WYMAN

We already did. Becker's retired. He's consulting now. Hasn't spoken to Zeitlin for over a year.

They look out the window. Los Alamos security vehicles and F.B.I. sedans surround a modest ranch-style home. The mailbox says "The Zeitlins!"

INT. ZEITLIN RESIDENCE - DAY

F.B.I. AGENTS take the place apart. CAROLINE and MITCH examine the interior, decorated for the Christmas Season.

WYMAN nods for them to follow him down a long hallway, past what appears to be a little girl's bedroom. They pause outside a closed master bedroom door.

WYMAN

She doesn't know a thing.

INT. ZEITLIN RESIDENCE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Curtains drawn. ELEANOR ZEITLIN sits at a table. She is attached to a polygraph device monitored by a TECHNICIAN. Looming above her are two familiar Intelligence officers, SPELLMAN, and WILLIAMS, wearing black suits. They glance at MITCH and CAROLINE like they're intruding.

SPELLMAN

You knew all about your husband's activities.

ELEANOR

My answer isn't going to change.

MITCH examines the lie detector printout. CAROLINE hovers near a bureau, staring at FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS: Demetrius as college football star, running a Marathon, a family trip to the Grand Canyon.

ELEANOR

He'd never compromise his work or his country! Do you know what we had to go through to get cleared to this level? Our life is part of the public record!

CAROLINE sits down next to ELEANOR. SPELLMAN steps forward to intervene. MITCH holds him back.

CAROLINE

Your husband murdered a man.

ELEANOR

Liar!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE

He chopped off his hand with a metal shard. The man bled to death.

ELEANOR slaps CAROLINE with her free hand.

CAROLINE

(keeping her cool)
His name was Harry Jones.

The door swings open. MELISSA, a lanky 6-year old with deep brown eyes, rushes into her mother's arms, sobbing softly. A female AGENT enters, apologetic.

ELEANOR breaks down, clutching MELISSA. She wipes tears from her eyes, then looks up at CAROLINE.

ELEANOR

He's dying.

ELEANOR stands, holding MELISSA, staring out the window.

ELEANOR

There was a fire at the lab. The doctors said he was okay, the dose of radiation wasn't lethal.

She sits down, rocking MELISSA.

ELEANOR

Or at least that's what he told me...

MITCH

Did he ever talk about what he might do, if something went wrong? Any plans he might have made?

She shakes her head. Looks at them gathered around her.

ELEANOR

He was a good husband, and a good father...

MITCH finds himself staring at MELISSA. She meets his gaze.

EXT. LA JOLLA CANYON - L.A./VENTURA COUNTY LINE - DAY

ZEITLIN hikes a trail at the base of Conejo Mountain, along which runs a fence. "Keep Out" signs warn of the military facility above.

ZEITLIN looks around cautiously. He twists open the gas cap inside his backpack. He continues to walk, a trickle of gasoline pouring out behind him onto dry grass and brittle sagebrush.

INT. ZEITLIN RESIDENCE - STUDY - DAY

A man's study. MITCH and CAROLINE examine bookshelves filled with technical manuals. WYMAN joins them.

WYMAN

He had an account at First New Mexico under a phony name. Withdrew 30 grand over the past month. We found a doctor he was seeing in Taos.

WYMAN places an x-ray of a human skull on the desk and points to a large tumor.

MITCH

How long does he have?

WYMAN

The doctor thinks another month, maybe...

(glance watch)

Your car's ready.

EXT. ABOVE WHITE SANDS MISSILE TESTING FACILITY - DAY

A lunar desert landscape, home to our nation's premier missile guidance test center. A government sedan roars down a straight endless road towards the base.

EXT. WHITE SANDS - QUADRANT 894B - DAY

The sedan is escorted past a checkpoint to a massive concrete testing bunker imbedded in the desert floor.

INT. BUNKER - QUADRANT 894B - DAY

Crammed with computers and telemetry equipment. A test in progress.

DR. BECKER, SCIENTISTS and MILITARY OFFICERS are gathered around a flight SIMULATOR and missile guidance test MONITORS.

BECKER is early 60's, movie star handsome, with a pony-tail. MITCH and CAROLINE are escorted inside, wearing visitors badges. BECKER holds back a sneer when he sees MITCH.

BECKER

That cheap suit doesn't suit you, Benedict.

MITCH

Yeah, well, at least I can still afford a decent hair cut.

BECKER

(eying CAROLINE)

I see the military offers certain perks that were lacking in my day.

MITCH

Dr. Becker, this is Captain Rice.

BECKER

(extending hand)

Charmed.

MITCH

I'm sure. Listen, Doctor, this isn't a social visit. We need to talk.

A F-15C JET DRONE enters the airspace above them at a thunderous speed. BECKER eyes it, glancing at the tall U.S.A.F. LIEUTENANT seated in front of a sophisticated flight SIMULATOR, flying the drone.

BECKER

Get up, Lieutenant. Captain Rice is taking your place.

The LIEUTENANT rises. BECKER motions to the pilot's seat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BECKER

(to CAROLINE)

What's the matter, Captain? Your file said you were an ace pilot-

CAROLINE

We're not here to play games...

BECKER

Oh, but isn't that what life's all about?

CAROLINE

(looking to MITCH)

We don't have time for this-

BECKER

So serious, just like Colonel Benedict. What's the matter, afraid to test your mettle?

(pause)

But then, you did let Demetrius run with the ball, didn't you?

CAROLINE sets her jaw. BECKER grins and motions to the pilot's seat, taunting her with his eyes.

BECKER

I promise to be a good boy and chat with you afterwards-

CAROLINE looks to MITCH for approval. He nods. CAROLINE takes control of the flight simulator's cockpit.

IN THE SKY - The drone responds to Caroline's command.

BECKER

We call this one The Dove. Good luck.

BECKER types into a computer screen. We hear a SCREAMING ROAR. A sleek anti-aircraft MISSILE ARCS out of a bunker 1/2 mile away and heads for the drone.

CAROLINE maneuvers with cool skill and precision. Going into rolls and spins. Every evading pattern she's been taught-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

But the missile closes in on the drone's rear engine. Seconds until impact. BECKER beams with pleasure.

BECKER

Ever had a back-door experience, Captain?

The Dove closes in on the jet engine's exhaust. CAROLINE pulls down the controls suddenly. The drone falls in a straight dive, down towards the desert floor.

It heads right for the bunker.

BECKER and the SCIENTISTS grow green in the gills. They yell at CAROLINE to pull out of it. She holds steadfast. The drone zooms down towards them.

BECKER and the SCIENTISTS scream for her to stop, their destruction seconds away, when at the last moment-

BECKER slams the self-destruct button. The Dove EXPLODES in mid-air. A brilliant fireball.

CAROLINE pulls back from the dive expertly. Sees MITCH grinning proudly. BECKER stares at CAROLINE with shocked admiration. He nods to the door.

EXT. DESERT FLOOR - WHITE SANDS - DAY

The three walk past the skeletons of destroyed drones and rusting missiles on the desert floor.

BECKER

Demetrius could put a 200 ton MX within 30 feet of a dime in Yakatusk. The guidance cradles he designed are still the industry standard.

MITCH

Is there anything you could think of, a weak link that he could exploit?

BECKER stops, staring across the desert.

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BECKER
It's impossible.

MITCH
Could you do it?

BECKER
I'd have to have all the elements.
Codes. Voice. Command.

They're back at the government sedan. BECKER shakes their hands, holding onto Caroline's with an appreciative smile.

BECKER
Next time I want to test my
missile, I'll call you.

CAROLINE
Make sure it's one that works.

CAROLINE and BECKER share a smile. MITCH takes note.

MITCH
Take care of yourself, doctor.

BECKER
If I can think of anything else,
I'll be in touch.

MITCH
You don't seem concerned.

BECKER
The system is infallible, Colonel.
I know. I designed it.

INT. SEDAN - MOVING - DESERT - DAY

CAROLINE drives. MITCH works on his laptop. He goes over status updates, item by item.

CAROLINE
What do you keep looking for?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

Status reports. Something out of place. Something we might have overlooked. You liked Becker?

CAROLINE

He has a certain...

MITCH

(grins)
Charm?

CAROLINE

That's not the word I had in mind.

MITCH

(dead-pan)
I might as well tell you now, Captain. Not everyone is as easy to get along with as I am.

She's not sure whether he's serious or not. Finally, MITCH grins. They laugh together for the first time.

EXT. LA JOLLA CANYON - BELOW CONEJO MOUNTAIN - DAY

ZEITLIN stands in a bank of scrub oak. He glances around, shaking the last of the gasoline into tall desert grass.

He slips a small black DEVICE with a tiny antenna from his backpack and half-buries it. He glances up at the satellite dishes on the mountain peak, takes off down the trail.

EXT. LOS ALAMOS - THEORETICAL DIVISION - LATE AFTERNOON

MITCH and CAROLINE are greeted by DR. WAASMAN, Director of the Theoretical Division. He hands them safety badges, motions down the hall past a cheery Christmas tree.

A SECURITY DETAIL follows them discreetly.

MITCH

The fire. What caused it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WAASMAN

I can assure you all safety procedures were followed. Safety is our #1 priority-

MITCH

(interrupting)
Spare me the sales pitch, Doctor.

WAASMAN

(turning beet red)
Dr. Zeitlin and his associates were designing the triggering system for the next generation Davey Crockett, the atomic mine. Working with a critical mass that small... Well, accidents can happen.

Reach a door with atomic warnings in black and yellow. The door is welded shut. Geiger counters everywhere. They continue on, reaching an office with Zeitlin's name on it. There is F.B.I. tape across the door.

INT. LAB - ZEITLIN'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Crammed with space age computer and testing equipment. MITCH goes through the shelves. More technical manuals on guidance, signals and missile telemetry.

CAROLINE gazes at photos of Zeitlin posing at the foot of a satellite with Dr. Becker. Photos of Zeitlin with his family on a desk. CAROLINE picks up a college football trophy from a shelf.

CAROLINE

I read the transcript of your phone conversation with him. He seems to think you have something in common...

MITCH

Well, he's mistaken.

CAROLINE

Come on, Colonel...

MITCH paces, facing CAROLINE. He opens up a little.

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CONTINUED:

MITCH

I was involved with a Broken Arrow-

CAROLINE

I'm not familiar with that term.

MITCH

An accident involving Special Weapons. It's classified.

CAROLINE

This Broken Arrow. Did it involve Lt. Bryant?

MITCH tightens inside. He motions to the bookshelves.

MITCH

Manuals, texts, no books. And none back at the house...

CAROLINE

You didn't answer my question.

MITCH

You're right. Bad habit.
(motioning)
Let's go.

EXT. LOS ALAMOS - ZEITLIN RESIDENCE - SAME TIME

A sedan drops off MITCH and CAROLINE. They walk down the front path. MITCH picks up a newspaper and stares at the headlines: "Anti-Proliferation Summit In Full Swing". Photographs of President Owens with world leaders.

CAROLINE

Zeitlin's got great timing.

MITCH

And he knows it.

They enter the house.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - PARKING LOT - DAY

ZEITLIN gets out of the convertible. He pulls a duffel bag and the football from the trunk and transfers them into a blue Taurus parked nearby.

INT. ZEITLIN RESIDENCE - BASEMENT - EVENING

Converted into a large playroom. MITCH pokes around cabinets and overturned boxes. He finds what he's looking for- blueprints of the Zeitlin residence.

MITCH traces his finger along the electrical wiring plan. A wiring line goes off the blueprint.

HARDART (O.S.)

Thinking of architecture as an alternate career, Colonel?

MITCH turns. GENERAL HARDART stands at the top of the stairs. He walks down into the basement. He seems old, vulnerable.

HARDART

We're in grave trouble here, Mitch. President's busting our balls to find him. We've bumped S.A.C. and Special Weapons Forces up to Defcon 3 as a precaution. We want you to tell the F.B.I. everything. If it leaks, we'll deal with it.

FOOTSTEPS above them. One of Hardart's AIDES peers down. HARDART rises.

HARDART

Per your request, we're shutting down our Wimex secure satellite system for a trace...

MITCH

Thank you, sir.

HARDART

Let's find the son-of-a-bitch.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - PARKING LOT - EVENING

F.B.I. AGENTS interview the MOTHER of the child Zeitlin saved. Other AGENTS examine the convertible nearby.

EXT. NORTH HILLS - VENTURA - DUSK

A residential neighborhood with a view of the ocean and distant Conejo Mountain to the South. The Taurus sits in a vacant lot, ZEITLIN in the front seat.

ZEITLIN looks at palm trees blowing in the wind. He lifts a radio transmitter from his duffel, glances at his digital watch and flicks a switch.

EXT. LA JOLLA CANYON - BELOW CONEJO MOUNTAIN - SAME TIME

The black DEVICE flares, igniting the gas soaked grass nearby. Flames leap alongside the fence.

EXT. NORTH HILLS - VENTURA - SAME TIME

ZEITLIN picks up his video camera and points it at the distant fire circling Conejo Mountain.

EXT. ZEITLIN RESIDENCE - EVENING

MITCH walks through the backyard, studying the blueprints. He reaches the sandbox and kneels, digging in the sand.

After a while, MITCH finds a handle on a rusted hatch. He turns the handle and pulls the hatch open. A ladder leads to a cinderblock bomb shelter below. He climbs down.

EXT. CONEJO MOUNTAIN - THROUGH VIDEO CAMERA - DUSK

Wind blows the firestorm up the mountain. At its peak we see the two MARINES rush for their jeep. The dirt road down the mountain blocked by flames. They scream into a radio.

INT. BOMB SHELTER - SAME TIME

MITCH flicks on the lights. A cinderblock bomb shelter decorated straight from the early 60's. Survival crackers, faded radiation suits, empty water barrels. He's in the living room, a large door to his right. CAROLINE joins him.

MITCH checks the shelves, looks over as CAROLINE opens the larger door revealing a booby-trapped

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SHOTGUN

mounted on a motion sensor device, blocking the entrance to a study. MITCH tackles CAROLINE. They fall to the floor.

The shotgun pivots, aiming down at them as if controlled by an invisible power. MITCH and CAROLINE freeze on the floor, in each other's arms. Terrified.

MITCH
(through teeth)
Don't... Move.

CAROLINE
Wasn't... planning to.

A pen falls from Mitch's jacket. The shotgun COCKS with a menacing exchange of CLICKS!

MITCH
Try kicking your shoe off...

In a sudden motion, she flicks her right shoe towards the far wall. It lands with a bang. The shotgun doesn't budge, aimed down at them on the floor.

CAROLINE
Any more... brilliant ideas?

MITCH studies the motion sensor panel carefully. It looks Jerry-rigged from a more sophisticated device.

MITCH
When I say three... Roll to your left.

CAROLINE acknowledges him.

MITCH
One... two... THREE!

She and MITCH spin apart on the floor. The shotgun swings confusedly and takes aim at CAROLINE- MITCH lunges forward, knocking the barrel up. Shots fire into the ceiling.

They take a few seconds to recover, filled with relief.

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MITCH

Guess that makes us even, Captain.

CAROLINE

Colonel...

CAROLINE'S looking past him into the study. Plastered all over the walls are-

Photographs of mutilated bodies. Hiroshima Victims. The living dead. Morgue shots. Most disturbing are-

Shots of CHILDREN. Body parts ravaged by radiation and genetic mutation. A collage of our nuclear nightmare.

Bookshelves are lined with tomes on atomic history. "Fate of the Earth" "Death in Life" "A World Destroyed" Scrawled across the ceiling in red letters-

"Those Who Forget History Are Bound To Repeat It."

The word HISTORY underlined.

MITCH and CAROLINE are overwhelmed, unable to take their eyes off the children's faces.

EXT. CONEJO MOUNTAIN - THROUGH VIDEO CAMERA - DUSK

Flames rip through the installation. The jeep, trapped by a wall of fire, EXPLODES, killing both Marines.

ZEITLIN puts down the video camera. He glances at his reflection in the mirror, turns on the ignition and drives.

INT. BOMB SHELTER - STUDY - SAME TIME

MITCH takes a last look at the "History" slogan and exits. CAROLINE finds a SCRAPBOOK on a desk. She opens it-

Yellow newspaper clippings include; Mitch's commission into the Air Force Academy and Air Force Times articles charting his rise through the ranks.

A photo of Mitch with Lt. Bryant outside a missile site.

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An engagement photo: MITCH holds an adorable young WOMAN in his arms.

CAROLINE shuts the scrapbook, placing it back on the desk.

EXT. ZEITLIN RESIDENCE - SANDBOX - NIGHT

They sit opposite each other. MITCH draws the missile with eyes in the sand.

CAROLINE

I've seen those photographs a thousand times, but somehow, they've never seemed real until now. They've just been pictures. Part of the past, not something that could be part of the future.

MITCH

That's Zeitlin's fear. The threat doesn't seem real. He wants to make it real...

MITCH looks at the moon, its craters clear tonight.

MITCH

I see those faces every night. When I wake up in the morning, they're gone. Then, I go to work and thank God we've got nuclear weapons, because it's a brutal, dangerous world, and I still believe we're the good guys.

CAROLINE

I hope you're right.

MITCH

(beat)
Me too.

INT. HANGAR - LOS ALAMOS - AN OFFICE - NIGHT

Agent WYMAN and his STAFF sit listening to MITCH, WILLIAMS and SPELLMAN in one of the temporary offices. The federal agents are somber as they're filled in.

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WYMAN

If his Gold Codes are two days old
and he doesn't have the
verification voice-

SPELLMAN

Voice verification codes-

WYMAN

What's he gonna do? Just call up
and ask nicely for an atomic
missile launch? I don't get it.
Unless the guy knows something we
don't.

INT. HANGER - EMPTY OFFICE - NIGHT

MITCH shuts the door for privacy, speaking on his cellular
phone. CAROLINE listens, leaning against a desk.

MITCH

So do me a favor-

INT. WHITE HOUSE - SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - (INTERCUT) - NIGHT

PETROVSKY, MRS. WARNSTEIN, BURGESS and STAFF stand around
the phone in Mitch's office.

MITCH

Dig for me. Budget requests,
Proposals, any command and control
documents you can find with Becker
and Zeitlin's name on them.

WARNSTEIN

Sir, I know that tone of voice.
What are we really looking for?

MITCH

I don't know, Warnstein. Star Wars
projects that never got built.
Satellite systems. Surprise me.

He hangs up and looks out the window, remembering.

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CONTINUED:

MITCH

"You can't see it, but it's up there..."

CAROLINE

Colonel?

MITCH

A videotape Zeitlin made for his daughter. That's what he said. "You can't see it, but it's up there."

CAROLINE

You think he was talking about a satellite?

MITCH

Perhaps.

CAROLINE

Maybe he was trying to tell Melissa that he was on his way to Heaven.

MITCH

Zeitlin's an atheist.

CAROLINE

He wouldn't have gone this far if he didn't believe in something...

INT. TASK FORCE HANGAR - LOS ALAMOS - NIGHT

A young F.B.I. AGENT, excited, joins MITCH, CAROLINE and WYMAN. She holds a plastic bag containing a videotape with a note attached.

YOUNG F.B.I. AGENT

This just came from the Service.
It was addressed to Col. Benedict.

Everyone looks at the note. Scrawled across it are the words: "Halftime Show."

INT. MAIN ROOM - HANGER - NIGHT

They're gathered around a television. WYMAN shoves the video inside. Zeitlin's face fills the screen. His cheeks are hollow, his eyes shining.

ZEITLIN (SCREEN)

Hello to all you folks watching at home. This is one hell of a game, isn't it?

SPELLMAN

The guy's lost it-

MITCH

Can it, Major!

ZEITLIN (SCREEN)

Remember our encounter in the bar, Mitch? I asked you if carrying the football scared you. You said, "you get used to it." That was your answer. You get used to it. Like a splinter. Or an ingrown toe-nail. I expected more from you! Much more! Have you forgotten what binds us?

CAROLINE glances at MITCH, who's staring rapt at the screen.

ZEITLIN

(suddenly loud)

And now, Zeitlin Entertainment presents "You Make The Call."

The image snaps into grainy black and white video. The screen fills with a STILL SHOT taken from a SURVEILLANCE CAMERA mounted high atop a telephone pole, looking down at

TANGO 4- A NUCLEAR MISSILE SILO CLUSTER

covered by massive concrete HATCHES arranged 100 yards apart in star formation. A fence with razor wire surrounds the perimeter with "Deadly Force" warnings.

There's a small outbuilding in the center of the silo formation. A 1/2 ton jeep is parked next to it.

A sudden UNEARTHLY RUMBLING as the camera starts to rock. A silo HATCH begins to shake. Steam shoots out the hatch.

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The BEEPING SOUND of a launch in progress. The sound from Mitch's nightmare.

Two men rush from the outbuilding wearing blue missiliers uniforms. Recognize YOUNG MITCH and LT. BRYANT.

ZEITLIN

It's Fourth Down and you're Lieutenant Benedict. A three dollar computer chip malfunctions, starting the play.

MITCH darts to the jeep- Climbs inside- Drives the jeep
ON TOP OF THE MISSILE HATCH

BRYANT protests. Motions for them to get out of there.

ZEITLIN

Your teammate wants to run. But you want to stay 'cause all you've ever wanted in life was to be a hero!!!

BRYANT grabs MITCH in the driver's seat. Pleads with him. MITCH pushes him away.

ZEITLIN

A hero who never thinks about the why, or the what for, who only wants to make the play. I don't call that a hero, Mitch. I call that... heartless.

The ROAR of the missile below getting LOUDER as the hatch VIBRATES. BRYANT yanks MITCH out of the jeep's seat and knocks MITCH down.

MITCH climbs to his feet and runs after the jeep, pleading with BRYANT to stop.

ZEITLIN

What do you do? You make the call!

MITCH draws his .38, screaming "STOP!" He fires it in the air. MITCH turns to see the hatch about to open.

In desperation MITCH fires a single shot at the jeep.

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BRYANT slumps in the driver's seat. It plows into the fence. MITCH sprints. Pushes BRYANT aside. Shifts into reverse.

The 25-ton HATCH POPS up like a toy in a cloud of steam and smoke behind him. The MINUTEMAN III MISSILE trembles below. Rising a few feet into the air.

MITCH slams the gas pedal. The jeep zips backwards and crashes into the silo. It crunches against the nose of the missile, wedged in tightly-

MITCH grips the wheel- BRYANT dead next to him. The missile rocking and bucking- trapped by the jeep in the silo.

The screen goes black.

IN THE HANGAR

All eyes on MITCH. He shows no emotion. He walks away from the group and out the door.

EXT. HANGAR - LOS ALAMOS - NIGHT

MITCH stares up at the mountains. CAROLINE exits and joins him, carrying the laptop, their gear, keys. CAROLINE puts the stuff in a white sedan, then opens the passenger door.

CAROLINE

Let's go, Colonel.

MITCH looks at her as if she just got there.

INT. SEDAN - LOS ALAMOS - (MOVING) - NIGHT

CAROLINE drives. MITCH stares blankly at the LABS, many lit by cheery Christmas lights and goofy red-faced Santas.

INT. LINCOLN TOWN CAR - MOJAVE HIGHWAY - NIGHT

ZEITLIN at the wheel. The lights of the Las Vegas Strip coming into view in the distance.

EXT. HOTEL ROOM - BALCONY - NIGHT

CAROLINE, dressed for bed in a "U.S. Naval Academy" nightshirt, opens her window, leaning on the railing. She stares at the view of Los Alamos spread out below her.

MITCH (O.S.)

Doesn't look as ugly at night, huh?

She glances to her left. MITCH leans out his balcony railing, holding a bottle of Scotch. He offers it to her. She accepts the bottle, takes a swig, and hands it back.

CAROLINE

Thanks.

MITCH

Now you know why Zeitlin's singled me out... The bomb has made murderers of us both.

CAROLINE

You had to stop the launch. Who knows what would have happened? You did the right thing.

MITCH drinks, thinking about that for a while. He shakes his head and looks directly at her.

MITCH

It's not that simple. It's not about right and wrong anymore. It's about living with this thing we've created, and trying to control it so we can believe we're safe. But to do that, we must be willing to sacrifice everything. Best friend, wife, family, everything. Knowing it'll never be enough... We'll never really be safe...

CAROLINE

You believe that?

MITCH nods, a million miles away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

I wish it didn't have to be that way. What other choice do we have?

CAROLINE takes the bottle from him.

CAROLINE

Why'd you stay with Special Weapons? I mean, how could you stand it after that happened?

MITCH

Someone's got to do the dirty work, Captain. It might as well be me.

They stare into the darkness for a while.

CAROLINE

You were married?

MITCH

Briefly. She left. Said I was impossible to live with.

(he smiles)

Imagine that.

CAROLINE

You and Zeitlin aren't the same at all.

MITCH

Why's that?

CAROLINE

Because he's not willing to sacrifice everything. He's not willing to sacrifice Melissa...

INT. MITCH'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

MITCH is asleep, his Cray laptop opened next to him. There is a tiny BEEP. MITCH wakes, exhausted. He pulls up a FAX. Another long STATUS REPORT. He goes through each item.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

After a while he comes to "Conejo Mountain Secure Satellite Installation" and a paragraph on the death of two Marines. "Arson suspected." MITCH is wide-awake now.

He types. The screen shows Conejo Mountain just north of Los Angeles. MITCH pulls up a detail on the incident.

A long technical list of elements destroyed by the fire:
Milstar Tracking dish. Satcom Secure Transmission Terminal.
DSII Maintenance Unit-

MITCH
(frowning)
DSII maintenance unit?

MITCH goes into a definitions screen, typing in "DSII" The computer spits out "subject not found." MITCH tries it again.

"SUBJECT NOT FOUND."

MITCH tries other definition screens. "Subject Not Found."

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - DAYBREAK

MITCH rushes down the hallway. CAROLINE follows him to a DOOR. MITCH pounds. SPELLMAN, in a robe, opens up.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

MITCH shows them "DSII" on his laptop. SPELLMAN and WILLIAMS peer at the screen, CAROLINE behind them.

SPELLMAN
System doesn't exist.

WILLIAMS
Could be civilian.

MITCH
Zeitlin knows what DSII is. That's why he flies to L.A., knocks out the sat-maintenance functions 'cause whatever he's trying to do involves a goddamn satellite!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE

You're positive it's not a black budget item?

SPELLMAN

As far as I know.

WILLIAMS

We'll check it out.

MITCH

We'll be waiting.

MITCH and CAROLINE exit. WILLIAMS and SPELLMAN share a glance. SPELLMAN pulls out a cellular phone...

INT. PENTAGON - GENERAL HARDART'S OFFICE - MORNING

TELEVISION SCREEN- A morning news show's coverage of the final days of the Summit.

ANCHORPERSON (T.V.)

The culmination of this week's historic events will take place tomorrow night, Christmas Eve, at the White House, where President Owens and 56 Heads of State expect to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Aggression Pact...

HARDART holds a phone against his ear, his expression serious.

HARDART

(into phone)
I see. I'll inform them.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

MITCH makes a connection with his cellular phone.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - (INTERCUT) - DAY

MRS. WARNSTEIN hands PETROVSKY the phone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH
Major?

PETROVSKY
Sir, where are-

MITCH
Listen up. We're looking for a
"DSII" satellite system. Go back
five, ten years. Look for anything
close!

There's a KNOCK at the door. CAROLINE opens up to WYMAN.

WYMAN
We think we found him.

MITCH
(covering phone)
What? Where?

WYMAN
Vegas. They're waiting for us so
let's move-

EXT. ARMY RESERVE HELICOPTER - ABOVE LAS VEGAS - DAY

As it swoops towards a rooftop casino helipad.

INT. ARMY RESERVE HELICOPTER - BACK SEATS - DAY

Intelligence officer AARON yells to be heard above the
ROTORS. WYMAN, MITCH, CAROLINE, SPELLMAN and WILLIAMS sit
behind him. AARON points to a detailed radar printout.

AARON
N.O.R.A.D. picked up a remote
signal coming from the 23rd floor.
Secure frequency matched the one
used for our unit. Signal's been
moving from room to room. They
think he stole a pass key.

F.B.I. AGENTS and hulking SECURITY STAFF wait for them on
the helipad below. The helicopter lands.

INT. CASINO - SECURITY BOOTH - SURVEILLANCE UNIT - DAY

MITCH and CAROLINE stand behind a bank of Casino MONITORS which show us interior shots of the

23rd FLOOR HALLWAY

Empty except for a MAID pushing her cart from one room to the next.

OTHER MONITOR ANGLES

show dozens of F.B.I. AGENTS and a S.W.A.T. TEAM creeping into place. A massive show of force.

INT. CASINO - 23RD FLOOR - STAIRWELL - DAY

Behind the army of S.W.A.T. and F.B.I., MITCH and CAROLINE wait for the order. Wyman listens on his talkie for a beat.

WYMAN

Okay... Now!

INT. CASINO - 23RD FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

On cue, LAW ENFORCEMENT charge into the hall from both stairwells and the three elevators. Hotel doors are kicked in. Stunned GUESTS are escorted from their rooms.

In seconds, WYMAN gets the clear signal from the S.W.A.T. COMMANDER. MITCH and CAROLINE approach the corralled GUESTS. Terrified families and couples but no Zeitlin.

WYMAN

Take the place apart.

Law enforcement respond on command, pairs of officers entering each hotel room. Searching with frenzied intensity. Overturning mattresses, pulling apart wallboard.

MITCH and CAROLINE watch as more AGENTS stream into the hallway past the shocked guests, equipped with metal detector devices and K-9 units.

MITCH finds himself staring at the MAID. She is crying with fear. MITCH approaches her large cart. He pokes through the piles of dirty laundry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE watches as MITCH gets down on his stomach, peering up underneath the cart-

HIS POV - THE CRAY III LAPTOP COMPUTER

has been spot welded to the underside of the cart, the tiny satellite dish clamped next to it. MITCH disconnects the battery unit.

He sits down, perplexed. CAROLINE takes a look at the laptop. They watch law enforcement continue their destructive search.

CAROLINE

I don't understand...

MITCH meets her gaze. Neither does he.

EXT. BECKER ESTATE - DAY

An oasis in the middle of the desert. No houses for miles. A modernistic Frank Gehry home sits on a bluff of red rock, surrounded by a security fence with cameras.

INT. BECKER ESTATE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Velvet curtains drawn. An antique four-poster bed in an otherwise sleek, modern bedroom. Mirrors reflect BECKER, straddled atop a BLONDE. He makes loveless love.

BECKER

(stopping mid-stride)

Hear something? I heard something.

He looks down at the BLONDE. She rolls over on her side and starts to snore. BECKER pushes a button next to his bed.

A cabinet door slides open, revealing a battery of security MONITORS showing angles all around the estate. BECKER scrutinizes them. He opens a bedside drawer, lifts out a .38 pistol. He climbs out of bed and patters down the hall.

FOLLOW BECKER as he searches through the extravagant rooms of the mansion. Satisfied, BECKER returns to the bedroom. He puts the gun down and climbs back into bed. He's about to wake up the BLONDE, but something catches his eye-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A RED LIGHT glows in the corner of the room. BECKER cranes his neck, sees a VIDEOPALM set up on a tripod. The BLONDE turns to face BECKER and we see it's actually-

ZEITLIN. ZEITLIN grabs Becker's pony-tail, sticking his silenced Beretta in his face. Through the open bathroom door, we see the BLONDE hog-tied on the floor.

ZEITLIN

Surprised to see me, Edward?

BECKER glances to the bedstand where the gun lies. ZEITLIN jams the gun into Becker's forehead, medicated eyes icy.

ZEITLIN

Get up.

INT. CASINO SECURITY - OFFICES - DAY

MITCH on the phone. CAROLINE by his side.

MITCH

(into phone)

Zeitlin used it to throw us off the trail which means he's got access to another Cray laptop. I want a list of any other Cray III's out there-

PETROVSKY (ON PHONE)

Sir-

MITCH

Call Intelligence, whoever you need to-

PETROVSKY (ON PHONE)

Sir, listen up for a second!

MITCH hears his laptop printing out a document.

INT. S.W.U. - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - (INTERCUT)

Major PETROVSKY on the phone. The team is gathered around a Black Budget proposal from '78. Almost every word has been BLACKED OUT. MITCH grabs his copy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETROVSKY

We found something you might be interested in. "D" "S"-

MITCH and CAROLINE examine the document. At the top is a satellite proposal name: DARK STAR.

From: Dr. Edward Becker and Staff. Los Alamos, New Mexico.

PETROVSKY

I put in a flash rush request to the Chiefs for more info, still haven't heard back.

MITCH

Find General Hardart immediately and patch him through to me!

PETROVSKY

Yes, sir.

MITCH

Good work-

MITCH hangs up and punches in a number. We hear a DCOMM OPERATOR answer.

MITCH

Dr. Edward Becker's residence.
Flash Alpha override Colonel Mitchell Benedict.

DCOMM OPERATOR

One moment please- That line is busy.

MITCH

Break in- This is an emergency.

DCOMM OPERATOR

Secure line, sir. Can't do it.

MITCH slams his phone shut.

MITCH

We need to have another chat with our charming friend.

EXT. BECKER MANSION - HALLWAY - DAY

ZEITLIN leads BECKER down the hall at gun-point. BECKER carries the video camera and the football. They reach double doors with a combination security lock. ZEITLIN nods to the lock.

ZEITLIN

Open it.

BECKER shakes his head. ZEITLIN shoots through the lock.

INT. BECKER ESTATE - LIBRARY - DAY

A magnificent library with a cathedral ceiling. BECKER sits, duct-taped to a chair. ZEITLIN sets up the video camera so it's facing BECKER.

ZEITLIN

Where do you keep it?

BECKER

You're dying, Demetrius. Why didn't you tell me?

ZEITLIN

Where is it???

BECKER

How were you exposed? You can sue them.

ZEITLIN glances at his watch. Looks around the room.

BECKER

That's the best thing for Eleanor, for Melissa. To leave them the legacy of a secure financial future-

ZEITLIN

I'm going to leave them something better than that.

ZEITLIN hefts the Beretta. He approaches BECKER with an almost friendly expression and sits on the desk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZEITLIN

Perhaps you'll see what it is, if
you live until tomorrow.

(lifting gun)

Do you want to live? Until
tomorrow?

BECKER

What do you think?

ZEITLIN

Then tell me where you keep it!!!

BECKER

You'll have to kill me first.

ZEITLIN

I used to wonder if you had the
courage of your convictions.

ZEITLIN fires a shot. It grazes Becker's shoulder.

ZEITLIN

Where is it?

BECKER

No...

ZEITLIN fires a second shot point blank into Becker's foot.

BECKER

Under the rug!!!

ZEITLIN yanks up the corner of a massive oriental. There is
a trap door. He pulls it open. There's a SAFE. He turns
to BECKER. He looks down at the gun. He looks at BECKER.

EXT. CASINO ROOF - DAY

A terrified young CORPORAL follows MITCH and CAROLINE as
they stride towards the helicopter. He is flustered.

CORPORAL

Colonel, sir, you don't have the
necessary authorization-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH climbs into the helicopter. The CORPORAL stands there, open-mouthed.

CAROLINE
(passing him)
Good choice.

CAROLINE straps in, goes quickly through a pre-flight checklist. She starts the massive engines, expertly lifts the helicopter off the pad.

INT. BECKER ESTATE - LIBRARY - DAY

ZEITLIN eases a CRAY III LAPTOP out of the safe. BECKER is bleeding, in pain. ZEITLIN turns the laptop on. He types commands. He smiles-

ZEITLIN
You came through for me.

ZEITLIN turns Becker's laptop so we can see the screen. S.I.O.P. Single Integrated Operations Plan. The screen we've seen before. The plan for nuclear war fighting.

ZEITLIN
I knew you couldn't just give it up and walk away. I was counting on it. Tell me, how did it feel? To keep a copy of the S.I.O.P. here all this time? Did it make you feel powerful? Do you feel powerful now?

ZEITLIN pulls the Gold Codes from the football.

BECKER
They're useless.

ZEITLIN
At the present moment, yes. We were so, so clever. Fooling the American People for years.

BECKER
They wanted to be fooled. I need a doctor...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZEITLIN

Making them think there was a "button"! That only one man had control, that only the President, could fire our nuclear arsenal. It was a clever lie. It made generals and scientists into Gods, knowing they had control "just in case," but it also created possibilities. Dangerous possibilities...

BECKER

What are you going to do?

ZEITLIN

Change the world. For the better.

BECKER

You've become a real fucking humanitarian...

ZEITLIN slides the laptop into the football along with the Gold Codes. He picks up his Beretta.

ZEITLIN

You never believed in the Almighty, did you?

BECKER

Please... Don't...

ZEITLIN

Me neither. Terrifying, isn't it? Nothing to look forward to...

BECKER

Demetrius-

BECKER begs for his life. ZEITLIN aims the gun at Becker's head and pulls the trigger. There's a CLICK! But no shot.

ZEITLIN looks at the terrified expression on Becker's face and laughs. The laugh turns into a sickly wheeze.

ZEITLIN

That may be my last laugh, Edward. Thank you. Good-bye.

BECKER'S speechless. ZEITLIN sticks his weapon in his jacket, picks up the football, his palmcorder, and leaves.

EXT. ARMY RESERVE HELICOPTER - DAY

The red clay desert that makes up the Chupadera Mesa below.

INT. ARMY RESERVE HELICOPTER - DAY

CAROLINE maneuvers the helicopter expertly, listening to her radio headphones. She signals to MITCH, who's examining the "DSII" document, intrigued.

CAROLINE

Dr. Becker's place is in the middle of nowhere. Otero County's sending two units to his house. His line's dead.

EXT. BECKER ESTATE - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

ZEITLIN exits, carrying a duffel. He tries several keys in the door of a late model PORSCHE with license plate: "ATOM DR." One works. He stows his gear in the forward trunk and climbs inside.

INT. ARMY RESERVE HELICOPTER - DUSK

The sun sinks. A highway streaks through the lava beds beneath them. CAROLINE hands MITCH the co-pilot's headphones.

CAROLINE

They're routing a call through!

We hear a half dozen OPERATORS effect a connection- Then-

INT. WHITE HOUSE - SITUATION ROOM - NIGHT

General HARDART hovers above TECHNICIANS hustling to get a trace.

HARDART

He thinks he's on a secure satellite line- We're tracing it so hang on!

ZEITLIN (RADIO)

Fourth Quarter, Colonel.

INT. PORSCHE - MOVING THROUGH DESERT - DAY (INTERCUT)

ZEITLIN drives, a map of the vast Pecos River Valley on the seat. He's speaking into a car phone, exhilarated.

MITCH

And you're winning, right?

ZEITLIN

Of course. Did you like my halftime show?

MITCH

Enjoyed speaking with your wife more. And Melissa. She's a beautiful child. It's going to be hard growing up, knowing her father's a murderer.

ZEITLIN

She'll understand. The sacrifice of a few is worth the end result.

MITCH

That's what they said about Hiroshima, isn't it Doctor?

ZEITLIN

Getting to know me, aren't you?

MITCH

Very well. You're a selfish coward, Zeitlin.

ZEITLIN frowns, words stinging him.

MITCH

You're not doing this for Melissa or history or anyone else. You're trying to play God...

ZEITLIN

You should know me better than that, Mitch. Much better.

MITCH

You don't want to face up to the hard truth!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZEITLIN

And what is the hard truth?

MITCH

That you're just as responsible for
the mess that we're in as anyone.

ZEITLIN

Just like you?

MITCH

(beat)

Yes. Exactly like me.

This sits in the silence. ZEITLIN looks pleased.

ZEITLIN

I see I'm starting to get through
to you...

CAROLINE listens on a second line to Intelligence
TECHNICIANS tracing Zeitlin's call. MITCH thinks hard-

MITCH

So how do we redeem ourselves,
Doctor?

ZEITLIN

We change history. So it never
happens again.

MITCH

And kill how many more?

CAROLINE hears coordinates from the trace line. She pulls
up the electronic map from the helicopter's computer.

ZEITLIN

It doesn't have to happen that way.
You'll see what my game plan is.

CAROLINE grabs Mitch's arm, points out Zeitlin's location on
the screen. She points to the highway stretched below them.

MITCH

When will I see it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

ZEITLIN

At the two-minute warning. I'll
let you in on my next play, though.

(beat)

I'm going to throw a bomb.

MITCH

We're taking out your receiver,
Dark Star II-

ZEITLIN hesitates for a beat- MITCH and CAROLINE share a
glance. ZEITLIN looks at his watch. Suddenly petrified.

ZEITLIN

You finally had me going, Colonel.

CAROLINE motions out the window to a speck travelling north.

ZEITLIN

Only, we both know it's too late.
The ball has been snapped. I'm
going back to pass-

MITCH

(looking down)
Interception.

ZEITLIN hears ROTORS and looks up, stunned. A military
helicopter descends right towards him.

EXT. DESERT - MOVING - DAY

The PORSCHE weaves back and forth across the highway. The
HELICOPTER chases it like an owl after a mouse.

ZEITLIN fires up at the HELICOPTER, where MITCH leaning out,
shooting down at him. The PORSCHE windshield shatters. A
shot streaks by CAROLINE.

The PORSCHE careens off the highway, bouncing over the
rutted desert floor. ZEITLIN heads for nearby canyons and
shuts off his headlights.

CAROLINE struggles to keep ZEITLIN in sight as the PORSCHE
enters a maze of deep canyons surrounding the Pecos River.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

Don't lose him!

ZEITLIN swerves through dry washes, trying to evade the helicopter above him. He pulls the clip from his Beretta, fumbling in his pockets for another one when suddenly-

The PORSCHE slams into a grove of saplings by the Pecos River cliff edge. The roaring PECOS RIVER 100 feet below.

MITCH and CAROLINE see the Porsche in the shadows. A tiny figure leaping out with the duffel.

MITCH

Take it down there!!!!

CAROLINE looks to the canyon rim walls.

MITCH

Now, Captain! That's an order!

CAROLINE

There isn't enough room!

MITCH curses, grabs an M16 from the back and fires.

Bullets pound around Zeitlin's feet. He spins around. No shelter. He rushes towards the cliff edge, hearing the violent ROAR of the Pecos River below.

ZEITLIN leaps off the edge.

CAROLINE maneuvers above the river, yelling their location into the radio. They peer down at ZEITLIN knocked about by raging white water...

He disappears into the shadows of the river canyon depths.

MITCH

Wonderful.

Mitch takes off his jacket, reaching for the hatch door.

CAROLINE

Don't even think about it.

MITCH leaps out of the helicopter-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

CAROLINE

MITCH!

He falls 300 feet into the river.

IN THE RIVER - ZEITLIN AND MITCH

separated by yards, fighting to stay afloat. MITCH tries to steer himself, but is sucked under by a violent whirlpool. He fights to rise, but is trapped beneath the surface.

ZEITLIN lets the flow of the river carry him downstream, clutching the duffel.

UNDER WATER - MITCH

turns and twists, battling the river, but he's sucked further down. Lungs bursting. The more he fights the current, the more he finds himself drowning.

He stops struggling against the water, and is spun out of the whirlpool. He surfaces, gasping for breath.

MITCH looks downstream. ZEITLIN'S nowhere to be seen.

The beam of the helicopter's SPOTLIGHT finds Mitch from above. It hovers, canyon walls too narrow to descend.

EXT. PECOS RIVER CANYON - CLIFF - DUSK

A topographical map spread out on a table. MITCH, wrapped in blankets, consults with a crowd of F.B.I. AGENTS. Otero County SQUAD CARS arrive.

CAROLINE stands at the cliff edge, watching a squadron of U.S. Army helicopters search the canyons with powerful spotlights.

INT. OTERO COUNTY POLICE SEDAN - MOVING - NIGHT

MITCH and CAROLINE in the back seat. MITCH yells into his cellular phone-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

Have General Hardart call me immediately! Well, find him and route him through to me!

MITCH shuts the phone, furious.

MITCH

They can get us to Washington in three hours.

CAROLINE'S silent. MITCH sees her smoldering.

MITCH

I thought I could catch him...

CAROLINE looks out the window.

CAROLINE

If you hadn't jumped, we might have been able to follow him down the river...

She looks him square in the eye.

CAROLINE

You should have listened to me.

MITCH knows she's right.

EXT. MESCALERO APACHE INDIAN RESERVATION - NIGHT

A desolate plain edged by the Sierra Blanca Peaks. An RV pulls into an abandoned airfield on the outskirts of the reservation town. On the back of the RV, in huge script, is a sign: "The Chesterfields. Hallandale, Florida."

The RV pulls into a hangar. An overweight PILOT with a leather jacket waits by his twin-engine CESSNA. This is HUDGINS. He eyes the RV carefully, curious.

HUDGINS

You're five hours late, Mr. White.

ZEITLIN opens the door. He climbs down, tripping onto the cement floor. HUDGINS helps him stand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZEITLIN points to his soaked duffel. HUDGINS stows it in the Cessna. ZEITLIN pulls out a water bottle, swallows medication.

HUDGINS

Maybe you need to see a doctor
before we go.

ZEITLIN

I'm not paying you for a diagnosis.
(to plane)
Help me up.

HUDGINS lifts ZEITLIN up into the Cessna's cockpit.

INT. GULFSTREAM JET - NIGHT

MITCH and CAROLINE sit in the empty passenger compartment. They are both in uniform. MITCH is focused on his laptop screen, switching between network television COVERAGE of the final preparations for the "Non-Proliferation Summit."

MITCH glances over at CAROLINE. She is asleep, her head bent awkwardly against the seat.

MITCH bunches up his jacket. He lifts her head gently, places the pillow between her head and the seat.

He pulls the newspaper page from his jacket pocket. Zeitin's missile with eyes. He studies it for a while.

He switches screens on his laptop and a note-pad appears. He draws the words: "DS Maintenance Unit". He underlines "Maintenance" He writes "Dark Star" and "Gold Codes".

MITCH

(to himself)
What does a maintenance unit do?

CAROLINE

(opening an eye)
Diagnostic self-testing, commlink verification, date-time functions and signals updating. What are you thinking about?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

If there is a Dark Star satellite,
and it's part of command and
control... and the date-time
functions were changed-

CAROLINE

Or reset on default-

MITCH

Which they might be if the
maintenance unit was destroyed...
(thinking)
And there wasn't any backup-

MITCH writes "DECEMBER 20" on the newspaper clipping.

MITCH

He stole the football December
20th. The Conejo Mountain
maintenance unit was destroyed the
next day. If this Dark Star
satellite thought today was
December 20th or even before...

CAROLINE

The Gold Codes might be valid.

MITCH

(nods)
But there are still the Voice
Verification codes- And no
satellite could override a
Presidential no-launch order...

MITCH looks at his watch. It's changing to December 24th.

INT. CESSNA - MOVING THROUGH CLOUDS - NIGHT

ZEITLIN sits in the rear compartment. The Cray laptop is
attached to a tiny satellite dish. He holds the
video-camera in one hand, typing with the other.

There is the sound of a connection made. The laptop screen
flashes-

MILSTAR SATELLITE TRACKING SYSTEM

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He zips through a half-dozen screens, typing in PASSWORDS and finally bringing up a system status report for-

DARK STAR II

He types away, asking for today's date. The screen-

DECEMBER 20

ZEITLIN types furiously, asking for a N.O.R.A.D. tracking pattern. The screen shows the satellite's path around the earth. ZEITLIN types more. The screen projects the path of the satellite over North America for December 24.

ZEITLIN pulls scrawled notes from the attache case. At the bottom of the calculations is a time circled in red:

9:58:23 P.M.

He looks at his reflection in the video lens, red "recording" light on.

ZEITLIN

Whatever they say about me, know
that I love you. Be good to your
mother. Remember me...

He shuts the recorder off, the effort of holding it up exhausting him.

UP FRONT - HUDGINS

watches ZEITLIN through an outside mirror. He peers down through clouds at Washington's DULLES AIRPORT in the far distance.

INT. PENTAGON - BASEMENT - MORNING

MITCH and CAROLINE rush down the hall, ESCORTS behind them. They reach a lounge area outside a conference room guarded by two stern MARINES. MAJOR SANDERS, thin and officious, greets MITCH and CAROLINE with an upheld hand.

SANDERS

I'll let you know when they're
ready.

MITCH pushes past him, yanks open the double doors and enters the inner sanctum of the Joint Chiefs.

INT. PENTAGON - BASEMENT - CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

The JOINT CHIEFS are seated around the oval table, their faces dimly lit. MITCH and CAROLINE charge into the room, the MARINES behind them. HARDART waves the MARINES out.

MITCH

What is Dark Star II?

HARDART

Hello Colonel. Welcome home.

MITCH

I want an answer, sir.

ADMIRAL #1

Major Sanders, escort Captain Rice out.

SANDERS approaches CAROLINE. She looks to MITCH. He nods that it's okay. She leaves reluctantly.

MITCH

You want me to take a guess?

HARDART

Sit down, Mitch. You're out of line.

MITCH

(slams fist on table)
Zeitlin's out there somewhere with Gold Codes that may be valid. I want some answers!

The JOINT CHIEFS are icily silent. MITCH paces furiously.

MITCH

DS II stands for Dark Star, a pre-programmed command and control satellite. A system designed to survive the nuclear annihilation of the United States.

General HARDART stands. Meeting MITCH's gaze.

HARDART

Didn't you hear me, Colonel? I said sit down. Now!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

Somehow you got Dark Star II past Congress and the rest of us. You only had one up-link and maintenance system built so it wouldn't attract attention-

ADMIRAL #1

That's quite enough!

MITCH

You built a survivable satellite launch system designed to override all safeguards and Presidential command and control, only you weren't careful enough! You never imagined somebody might use it against us, did you?

Silence. The CHIEFS exchange grim glances.

MITCH

I think Zeitlin wants to do it tonight! Christmas Eve, the Anti-Proliferation Summit. What do I have to do to get some answers???

HARDART

Are you threatening us, Colonel?

MITCH

Sir, all I know is, right now I'm afraid. And I think you should be too.

HARDART

We have the situation under control.

MITCH

(beat)

What situation?

ADMIRAL #1 opens a side door. SPELLMAN and WILLIAMS step inside, followed by three hulking Special Forces OFFICERS.

MITCH

Don't do this...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

HARDART

You've given us no choice. Stand
at attention, Colonel.

MITCH hesitates. The MARINES approach him. MITCH darts for the door. They tackle him. He struggles viciously in their arms, eyes locked on HARDART.

EXT. PENTAGON - INNER COURTYARD - MORNING

CAROLINE paces. A few Pentagon EMPLOYEES pass by on their way to work. Hovering nearby are MAJOR SANDERS and three M.P.'s. MCAFFERTY enters the courtyard. She salutes.

CAROLINE

Where's Colonel Benedict?

MCAFFERTY

You've got a week of debriefing at Quantico, then you'll be back on the team. How's that sound?

CAROLINE

Like an order. Where is Benedict?

MCAFFERTY

Captain Rice is ready now.

The M.P.'s escort CAROLINE out of the courtyard and through the Pentagon's halls. HOLD on her expression as we cut to-

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - UPPER 16TH STREET - DAY

Majestic apartment buildings lining 16th street. A rental car with HUDGINS at the wheel is parked at the top of Meridian Heights, next to a mailbox.

INT. RENTAL CAR - BACKSEAT - DAY

ZEITLIN takes the videotape from the recorder and places it inside a package addressed to "Ms. Melissa Zeitlin". He seals the package, unrolls the window and sticks it in the mailbox.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZEITLIN digs in his jacket, lifting out an envelope filled with cash. He hands it up front to HUDGINS, who counts the hundreds. ZEITLIN wraps a scarf around his neck, opens the car door-

ZEITLIN

Merry Christmas.

ZEITLIN exits with his duffel. HUDGINS rolls down the window.

HUDGINS

Merry Christmas to you too, Dr. Zeitlin.

ZEITLIN takes a few more steps, turns and gets back in the backseat. HUDGINS turns to face him, lifting a faxed F.B.I. "wanted" notice with Zeitlin's face on it. He nods down to his girth, the butt of a .38 pistol visible...

ZEITLIN

How much do you want?

HUDGINS

How much have you got?

A muffled explosion in the seat behind him. HUDGINS grabs his massive chest. Blood coats his hands.

ZEITLIN pockets his Beretta and grabs his duffel. He exits quickly. KIDS building snowmen on a lawn nearby are oblivious to his departure. ZEITLIN heads down 16th Street, which slopes towards the White House..

EXT. CIRCLING WHITE HOUSE - DUSK

Limousines line Pennsylvania Avenue along with network news TRAILERS and press vehicles. Television JOURNALISTS cover the story from the North Lawn.

INT. MILITARY RESIDENCE - FT. MCNAIR - NIGHT

CAROLINE paces inside a comfortably furnished living room. A tired-looking young MARINE is stationed next to the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAJOR SANDERS sits in the kitchen, reading "PEOPLE."
CAROLINE goes to the kitchen doorway, spots a ring on Sanders' finger. SANDERS notices her, keeps reading.

CAROLINE

Guess you got stuck with the shit
detail. Christmas Eve and all...
Kids?

SANDERS lifts two fingers. She sits opposite him.

CAROLINE

Do you have any pictures?

SANDERS pulls photos from his wallet. Two girls. Cute.

CAROLINE

They're adorable.

SANDERS

How about you?

CAROLINE

Three boys. A real handful.
(beat)

Say, would you mind... I'd like to
wish them Merry Christmas...

SANDERS hesitates, then nods to the phone.

SANDERS

Make it quick.

CAROLINE thanks him with her eyes and dials fast.

CAROLINE

Hello, sweetheart.

INT. SPECIAL WEAPONS UNIT - NIGHT

Stunned, PETROVSKY listens on the phone, recognizing
Caroline's voice. He motions to BURGESS to grab a line.

PETROVSKY

Captain Rice?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE

No, honey, I can't tell you where I am right now. Put Mitch on the phone. He's not there? Where is he darling?

BURGESS motions to a TECHNICIAN, who flicks on the telephone tracing device.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FORMAL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A table for two hundred lavishly set. Protocol OFFICERS check seating assignments. CATERERS and SECRET SERVICE go over every last detail. VAN KROPP examines Summit documents with AIDES on a side table. He looks up. AGENT WEBBER joins him, face ashen. He holds a digital audio tape.

VAN KROPP

What?

WEBBER

You need to listen to this, sir.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - MOVING - NIGHT

VAN KROPP rushes through the kitchen, past the hallway already crowded with DIGNITARIES, to an elevator.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - LIVING QUARTERS - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The PRESIDENT sits alone at his desk, rehearsing tonight's speech. He wears a black tuxedo.

PRESIDENT

Future generations will applaud this agreement, and history will-

He looks up as VAN KROPP enters the room.

PRESIDENT

What's wrong?

VAN KROPP

We just received a phone call, from Zeitlin.

INT. FT. MCNAIR - MILITARY RESIDENCE - NIGHT

CAROLINE listens to a POUNDING on the door. SANDERS pulls the door open to PETROVSKY and BURGESS. They salute one another.

PETROVSKY

Major, Captain Rice is to come with us.

SANDERS

I'll need to see your orders-

SANDERS clams shut. He spots the Sten automatic BURGESS holds in his right hand, the hard look on BURGESS'S face.

EXT. THE WHITE HOUSE - LAFAYETTE SQUARE - NIGHT

It starts to snow. A CROWD in the park across the street watches the spectacle unfold at the White House.

ZEITLIN weaves through the crowd, catches glimpses of DIGNITARIES arriving at the White House front entrance. He passes a squadron of D.C. POLICE combing through the crowd with dogs.

ZEITLIN savors each moment, feeling part of the crowd. Exchanges a pleasant glance with a TOURIST FAMILY, looks at his digital watch. 7:04 p.m. He looks at the White House, expectant. Waiting...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - TRUMAN CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

The JOINT CHIEFS and National Security Council STAFF hover around the table. PRESIDENT OWENS leans against a wall, holding his speech. VAN KROPP nods to a TECHNICIAN gravely, who pushes "play" on a tape recorder.

ZEITLIN (RECORDER)

Greetings. Welcome to the end of the game. After 10 pm this evening, a U.S. warhead will destroy Class 5. I implore you to use the hours you have left to evacuate as many people from the area as possible-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PRESIDENT

What's Class 5?

GENERAL #1

This threat can't be taken seriously-

PRESIDENT

What's Class 5????

HARDART

Mr. President, Class 5 is our attack characterization parlance for Washington, D.C.

VAN KROPP

Christ...

PRESIDENT

Let's hear the rest of it.

ZEITLIN (RECORDER)

Loss of life is not my purpose. My aim is... chaos.

(softly)

You won't hear from me again.

The TECHNICIAN shuts off the tape.

PRESIDENT

Colonel Benedict? Where is he?

ADMIRAL #1

Mr. President, an unauthorized launch order is impossible-

PRESIDENT

Where is Benedict!!!!

CAROLINE (O.S.)

Tell him.

All heads spin to CAROLINE, who stands in the doorway, PETROVSKY and BURGESS by her side. She faces HARDART.

CAROLINE

Then tell them about Dark Star II.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

PRESIDENT

What's happening here???

HARDART

It's internal, sir.

PRESIDENT

I want some answers now!!! Or do I go out there and explain to the world that this agreement is invalid! That we can't even control our own weapons!

HARDART

Mr. President, we need to have a conversation.

PRESIDENT

Well, let's have it!

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

President OWENS, his National Security STAFF, and the JOINT CHIEFS stare up at a giant MONITOR-

ANGLE - SPACE - MOVING IN ON THE DARK STAR II SATELLITE

An awkward looking contraption with solar panels and antennae like cat's whiskers, built in the late 70's. Moving slowly towards it is a sleek, modern-

U.S. HUNTER KILLER SATELLITE

Its red LASER SCANS back and forth in a computerized pattern around DARK STAR II- But DARK STAR II's liquid JETS push the satellite out of reach each time the slow moving LASER passes near. Space hop-sotch.

HARDART

The technology at this level is rudimentary, as you can see. We suspected Dr. Zeitlin may have destroyed Dark Star's maintenance unit three days ago. As an added precaution, we decided to terminate the satellite.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDART shows the President a computerized screen with the tracking pattern of the two satellites around the earth.

HARDART

Our window of vulnerability is when Dark Star enters zone 8-

(motioning North America)

At that point, there is the remote possibility that a ground transmitter could pass it an Emergency Action Message after-

HARDART motions to a monitor. A time is encrypted in red:

HARDART

9:58.23 p.m. Tonight.

VAN KROPP

Translation?

HARDART

A signal could be sent to Dark Star, accompanied by the invalid Gold Codes-

PRESIDENT

What you're saying is he could do it?

HARDART

Dark Star has enough fuel to evade until 9:30 p.m. After that, Hunter-Killer will close in-

HARDART motions to another screen. Three other SATELLITES with SOVIET emblems are arcing towards DARK STAR II-

HARDART

To be joined by the Soviets. Between the four of them-

GENERAL #1

Offensive measures will be initiated. Dark Star II will be destroyed.

PRESIDENT

Before 9:58.23?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

ADMIRAL #1

Absolutely.

The President frowns. They watch the SCREEN as the DARK STAR II jet pulses above the laser again. President OWENS pulls open his black-tie and faces his Joint Chiefs.

PRESIDENT

What exactly is this satellite's function?

ADMIRAL #1

Sir, if our command structure is decapitated, it will ensure that the United States prevails...

PRESIDENT

Prevails? Over what? Dust?

(beat)

If you can't destroy Dark Star- A launch order could override all other systems? Even my own command?

HARDART

We will destroy it before that could become a possibility.

PRESIDENT

What if you don't? Can't we do something?

HARDART

All nuclear launch and guidance systems were disengaged within the last two hours...

President OWENS feels there's something more.

PRESIDENT

What?

ADMIRAL #1

Unfortunately, there's a delay between the time we send out our Emergency Low Frequency signals and the time some of our submarines receive them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3

PRESIDENT

Get to the point!

MCAFFERTY

(pointing to a screen)

We're still waiting to hear back
from the New Mexico and the
Mariposa. Both on Arctic Patrol.

PRESIDENT OWENS stares at the ceiling. He shuts his eyes.

PRESIDENT

How could this happen? Can you
tell me how this could happen?

The PRESIDENT scans their faces. Realizes he's alone.

PRESIDENT

They're waiting for me upstairs.
The world is waiting...

(facing GENERALS)

Let me see if I'm hearing you
correctly. You're telling me that
this too shall pass, that we'll
knock the goddamn thing out of the
sky and that everything's going to
be alright- That we don't have to
evacuate all of Washington D.C. in
two hours as if that were even
possible! Isn't that what you're
telling me???

No-one wants to answer this question.

PRESIDENT

ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU'RE TELLING
ME???

PRESIDENT OWENS leans against the wall for support.

PRESIDENT

I want an answer... Now.

HARDART steps forward, grim.

HARDART

Mr. President, that is what we're
telling you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 4

PRESIDENT

Good...

OWENS glances at his reflection in a monitor.

PRESIDENT

Good...

He attempts to re-tie his black tie. His fingers tremble.

PRESIDENT

I want Benedict back here. Brief me after it's over-

President OWENS nods to the gathered.

MCAFFERTY

Attention!

Everyone salutes President OWENS as he exits the Situation Room. HOLD on HARDART as we cut to-

EXT. ELLIPSE - WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT

A squad of six MC-400 HELICOPTERS land in the park south of the White House. PILOTS stay in their cockpits.

INT. W.H. MILITARY OFFICE - OUTSIDE SITUATION ROOM - NIGHT

A real time CLOCK. 8:47 p.m.

The Joint Chiefs and a team of BATTLE OFFICERS maneuver the HUNTER-KILLER SATELLITE closer to DARK STAR II.

The three SOVIET SATELLITES are now visible in the monitors. All four close in on DARK STAR II. The HUNTER-KILLER'S LASER shears off one of DARK STAR II's antennas.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FORMAL DINING HALL - NIGHT

The world watches as PRESIDENT OWENS signs the Non-Aggression and Proliferation Agreement amidst vigorous APPLAUSE. HEADS OF STATE line up behind him.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BASEMENT LANDING - NIGHT

A sedan pulls up to a security booth. MITCH climbs out stiffly. CAROLINE greets him, sees this is his worst nightmare come to life.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - BASEMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

They stride down the hall, waved through by SECURITY.

MITCH

How does it look?

CAROLINE

They say it looks pretty good.

They reach the White House Military Office. MARINES salute.

INT. WHITE HOUSE MILITARY OFFICE - SITUATION ROOM - NIGHT

MITCH and CAROLINE take their place at the rear of the crowd. The HUNTER KILLER SATELLITE shears off a DARK STAR solar panel- The SOVIET SATELLITES close in-

EXT. NATIONAL CHRISTMAS TREE EXHIBIT - MALL - NIGHT

Just south of the White House, KIDS play with reindeer in the Petting Zoo, part of the national Christmas Tree exhibit. Back near the official Christmas Tree of Alabama, ZEITLIN stands, holding his duffel- Staring at-

THE ELLIPSE. The MC-400 Helicopters stay on alert. Behind them, we hear the SOUND of applause from inside the White House. Network ANCHORMEN set up for live shots from the south lawn.

ZEITLIN

I told them to evacuate. I didn't want to sacrifice so many... But somehow, we knew... it would have to end this way.

ZEITLIN turns to watch the CHILDREN in the petting zoo. He looks at his watch.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FORMAL DINING HALL - NIGHT

Roaring APPLAUSE. TV CAMERAS swivel. President OWENS rises from his seat at the table, walks to a podium, catching VAN KROPP'S eye. VAN KROPP shakes his head "not yet."

President OWENS steps behind the podium. Looks down at his watch. 9:11. He fights to keep himself together.

PRESIDENT

We are gathered here, on this night
of Peace-

EXT. SPACE

The U.S. HUNTER KILLER circles DARK STAR II in an awkward mechanical ballet. DARK STAR II's jets nearly spent. The HUNTER KILLER takes slow aim with its laser port-

INT. WHITE HOUSE BASEMENT - SITUATION ROOM - NIGHT

HARDART on the phone with N.O.R.A.D. MITCH and CAROLINE'S eyes glued to the monitors- Where 9:58.23 appears in red on each. The real time CLOCKS read 9:38 p.m.

HARDART

Tell the Soviets to back off.

The U.S. HUNTER KILLER closes in on the immobile DARK STAR II. We see the SOVIET SATELLITES freeze in place.

HARDART

Point blank. Get it right up
there!

The HUNTER KILLER pulses closer to DARK STAR II.

HARDART

Okay, right there.

The HUNTER-KILLER freezes at 20 yards. For a beat, DARK STAR II and HUNTER-KILLER drift in space like fraternal twins. The Earth a blue sphere below them.

HARDART

Execute pulse kill. Now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The HUNTER-KILLER'S laser port swivels slowly. Taking aim. A PULSE of red laser streams from its snout when without warning-

DARK STAR II's liquid jets ROAR to life with a sudden burst of power. Evading the laser which-

DESTROYS a SOVIET SATELLITE in the background.

We hear the Soviet communications line go nuts. HARDART barks orders. The HUNTER-KILLER thrusts after DARK STAR II.

The real time CLOCK- 9:42 p.m. In red 9:58.23.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FORMAL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

PRESIDENT OWENS mid-speech, ashen. He glances over at VAN KROPP in a doorway. VAN KROPP shakes his head, holding his ear-piece as he listens intently. President OWENS stares at his watch, and it's all he can do to continue his speech.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BASEMENT - SITUATION ROOM - NIGHT

The real time CLOCK: 9:57.00 p.m. In red: 9:58.23 p.m.

The two SOVIET SATELLITES are yards from sandwiching the errant DARK STAR II. Frantic RUSSIAN/U.S. communications.

The SOVIET SATELLITES-

COLLIDE into DARK STAR II. Antennae and solar panels entwine. DARK STAR II is snared. The U.S. HUNTER KILLER approaches the threesome.

MITCH and CAROLINE and everybody else hold their breath and pray. The real time CLOCK reaches 9:58:00 p.m.

THE HUNTER KILLER laser port cranes upward to take aim at DARK STAR II in what seems like SLOW MOTION. Everyone SCREAMS at it to move faster-

The real time CLOCK at 9:58.15... 9:58.16...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FORMAL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

PRESIDENT OWENS at the podium. He looks ill.

PRESIDENT
 Future generations will- Future
 generations...

He's silent. His eyes shift to VAN KROPP- Then down to-
 HIS ROLEX - 9:58:20 p.m.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BASEMENT - SITUATION ROOM - NIGHT

The HUNTER KILLER laser port finally locks on target-

HARDART
 Execute pulse kill!!!!

THE REAL TIME CLOCK - 9:58.23 matching the red time 9:58.23.

A laser streams from the U.S. HUNTER KILLER SATELLITE and
 DESTROYS DARK STAR II

along with the Soviet SATELLITES in an angry fireball. A
 roaring CHEER from the Situation Room.

All clocks FREEZE ON - 9:58.25 p.m.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FORMAL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

VAN KROPP gives the thumbs up to PRESIDENT OWENS-

PRESIDENT
 Future generations will applaud
 this agreement, and history will
 validate our efforts-

INT. WHITE HOUSE BASEMENT - SITUATION ROOM - NIGHT

Amidst the celebration MITCH and CAROLINE grab each other in
 a bear hug. Their eyes meet. They kiss. A long slow burn.

Papers and headphones fly all around them- When out of the
 corner of his eye MITCH sees a flashing RED ALERT message on
 a N.O.R.A.D tracking screen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He grabs an officer's discarded headphones and listens. Color drains from his face. CAROLINE screams for quiet. Nobody listens.

MITCH smashes a chair into a glass panel. Silence.

MITCH

(listening headphones)

At 9:58.24- The SS NEW MEXICO received a valid launch sequence from Dark Star II- overriding the Captain's no-launch command- It fired a MK-90 intercontinental ballistic cruise missile with a 1 megaton warhead.

Stunned, everyone looks up at the clock frozen at 9:58.25.

ADMIRAL #1

He couldn't have done it in two seconds!

MITCH

The command was issued within a thousand yard perimeter of the White House.

ADMIRAL #1

Estimated Target?

BATTLE OFFICER #1

Class 5, sir.

They all look up at the screen as a digitized 1 megaton ATTACK on Washington D.C. is played out. Estimated casualties, 1.2 million.

GENERAL #1

We can change guidance coordinates-

MITCH

N.O.R.A.D. says it's being guided by a remote unit-

ADMIRAL #2

That's not possible!

Those who know better feel their stomachs turn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

HARDART
(in shock)
Washington impact time?

BATTLE OFFICER #1
(checking screen)
Fourteen minutes and counting, sir.

MITCH
Permission to run Joint Emergency
Evacuation Plan.

HARDART
Yes. Do that...

MITCH
(grabs phone)
Nucflash Victor Victor run system
command J.E.E.P. 6 Niner NOW!!!

We hear Mitch's command issued through White House intercoms. OFFICERS start escorting the Joint Chiefs out the Military Office. MITCH and CAROLINE rush out-

HARDART is frozen, immobile, staring at his reflection in the Situation Room's glass panels. An OFFICER grabs him-

INT. WHITE HOUSE - SHOTS - NIGHT

Stunned White House STAFF and Secret Service AGENTS fumble through pre-planned evacuation procedures- Grab essential documents from safes- Secure EXITS-

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FORMAL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Everyone on the edge of their seats. PRESIDENT OWENS finishes his speech at the podium with a flourish.

PRESIDENT
..And May God Bless you all.

All rise to their feet in a thunderous OVATION. Secret Service AGENTS stream into the room. Four AIR-WARNING SIRENS blare, continuing throughout the scene.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AGENT WEBBER
 (yells to gathered)
 We have an emergency situation-
 Follow our exact instructions as we
 evacuate the building!

A ROAR of consternation from the MEDIA as Secret Service AGENTS fan out- Escorting HEADS OF STATE out the far doorway-

EXT. WHITE HOUSE/ELLIPSE - HIGH ANGLE LOOKING DOWN - NIGHT

The MC-400 HELICOPTERS roar to life. The first group of DIGNITARIES is herded onboard.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - UPPER FLOORS/BASEMENT HALLWAYS - NIGHT

Military OFFICERS and White House SUPPORT STAFF rush down hallways- Running into frantic REPORTERS- SECRET SERVICE point everyone towards the South EXITS-

EXT. SOUTH LAWN - NIGHT

The PRESIDENT and his FAMILY are escorted through the snow. His SON cries. MARINES rush about with M-16's poised.

CAROLINE is in the midst of them, pistol drawn. Escorting PETROVSKY, who carries the new football. Her eyes search for MITCH on the South Lawn that is now-

Dark with MOVING BODIES as everyone flees the White House, rushing for the squadron of helicopters, shooting terrified glances up at the night sky.

PETTING ZOO - A SMALL BOY WATCHES A HELICOPTER

as it lifts off. His FATHER and the rest of the ADULTS at the Christmas Tree Exhibit stare at the exodus, shocked.

THE ELLIPSE - THE PRESIDENT'S GROUP

is hustled aboard a helicopter. CAROLINE pushes PETROVSKY up inside. PETROVSKY reaches down to help her up, but CAROLINE races back through the CROWD.

INT. WHITE HOUSE HALLWAYS - NIGHT

MITCH tramps through mounds of discarded documents, running from one office to the next, checking for hangers-on. He tries one door. It's locked. He kicks it open and finds-

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT

HARDART staring out a window at the madness on the ELLIPSE. His hands are at his side, hidden by a desk.

MITCH

Sir, you've got to leave, now!

HARDART turns, facing MITCH with an odd expression.

HARDART

I don't think they will forgive us.

(beat)

I won't.

HARDART lifts a revolver to his head and fires.

EXT. ELLIPSE - NIGHT

Only two helicopters left. A crowd clamors to get onboard. CAROLINE is on the outskirts of the crowd YELLING Mitch's name.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BASEMENT - FOLLOWING MITCH - NIGHT

MITCH races through the vacant labyrinth. Rushes into the White House Military Office. Flags are toppled, chairs and desks pushed aside. MITCH searches the offices. He sees the-

EMPTY SITUATION ROOM - A N.O.R.A.D. TRACKING SCREEN

and the red arc of the incoming missile's trail down through Northern Canada- Moving into Pennsylvania-

ESTIMATED TIME OF IMPACT - 7 minutes.

MITCH runs into the Special Weapons Unit. He checks each office.

MRS. WARNSTEIN lies on the floor next to her desk, clutching her chest. MITCH lifts her off the floor and carries her out of the office.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BASEMENT HALLWAY - SAME TIME

MITCH runs into CAROLINE. He hands MRS. WARNSTEIN over to her.

MITCH
Get her out of here!

CAROLINE
What about you?

MITCH
I'll be right up-

MITCH turns from her, heads down the hall towards the inner regions of the basement. She yells after him.

CAROLINE
You're not coming, are you???

MITCH turns back suddenly. Their eyes lock for a beat and she knows she's right. MITCH salutes her. He turns and vanishes into the hall's darkness.

CAROLINE
Mitch!

He's gone. Devastated, CAROLINE helps MRS. WARNSTEIN towards the exit.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FORMAL DINING ROOM - DAY

The AIR-RAID WARNING SIRENS cease. MITCH steps around an overturned table. He picks up the SUMMIT AGREEMENT, stained with red wine. He sets the document on the table.

He pulls out the newspaper with Zeitlin's drawing on it.

EXT. ELLIPSE - NIGHT

CAROLINE fights her way through REPORTERS clamoring to get onboard the helicopters. She hands MRS. WARNSTEIN up to a MARINE inside and looks back towards the White House. The MARINE beckons to her, holding out his hand-

INT. WHITE HOUSE - FORMAL DINING HALL - NIGHT

MITCH looks from the DRAWING on the table to the South Lawn, where the remaining CROWD fights to get on the last helicopter. A memory clicks in his brain for a beat. His eyes shift up to the-

WASHINGTON MONUMENT

Red WARNING LIGHTS blink at its pyramidal tip. He looks at Zeitlin's drawing- He darts for the exit-

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - SOUTH LAWN - NIGHT

It's snowing harder. MITCH sprints across the empty lawn and crosses Executive Avenue. Tourist cars are jammed there, watching the scene at the Ellipse. MITCH rushes past the Zero Milestone.

ANGLE - FROM ELLIPSE - CAROLINE

inside the last helicopter, eyes finding-

MITCH

As he sprints across Constitution Avenue and up the gentle slope leading to the Washington Monument.

CAROLINE feels the helicopter start to lift off the ground- REPORTERS and MARINES cling onto the landing rods-

EXT. BASE OF WASHINGTON MONUMENT - NIGHT

MITCH reaches the entrance and rushes inside.

INT. BASE OF WASHINGTON MONUMENT - FOYER - NIGHT

MITCH runs to the elevator. A PARK RANGER lies dead inside. The electrical box has been yanked from the panel. MITCH darts for the door marked STAIRWAY- "555 Feet Up".

INT. WASHINGTON MONUMENT - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

MITCH charges up the long rectangular metal stairwell, sucking wind. He draws his .45. Heads for a doorway visible above. Heart POUNDING.

INT. TOP OF WASHINGTON MONUMENT - OBSERVATION ROOM - NIGHT

An intimate observation room. Behind a thick marble pillar stands DEMETRIUS ZEITLIN. He hears Mitch's FOOTSTEPS in the stairwell.

On the floor next to him sits the Cray laptop connected to a satellite dish- A CLOCK on the laptop shows the time until impact.

1:45... 1:44... 1:43...

Zeitlin's left hand grips a remote guidance device. He holds his Beretta in his other hand, covering the doorway.

He sees MITCH enter and fires-

MITCH ducks back. Shots THUD into the door-frame. Through the WINDOWS we see the last helicopter rising into the sky.

MITCH swings inside and fires three SHOTS that slam into the marble pillar.

MITCH darts back into the safety of the stairwell as two more shots CRACK by his head. Stalemate.

ZEITLIN

Remember when you were a child, Mitch? And saw your mother cooking at the stove? I do. I remember seeing the flame for the first time. I wanted to reach out and touch it. My mother told me not to. I'm sure your mother told you the same thing-

MITCH feels time running out. He looks for a way inside.

ZEITLIN

But we had to find out for ourselves. So we reached out, and touched the flame, and got burned. We never forgot that pain. Our mothers were right, but we wouldn't listen. Why is it nobody listens, Mitch?

Mitch searches desperately for an option. ZEITLIN watches the missile's coordinates. He maneuvers the guidance device, steering the missile.

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THE LAPTOP SCREEN - TRACKING THE MISSILE'S PATH

As it arcs into northern Maryland.

MITCH leans in and empties his pistol in a volley of shots. They SHATTER the marble pillar, but not the concrete underneath.

ZEITLIN

Only a minute left to go!

MITCH shoves a new clip into his .45. Takes a deep breath.

ZEITLIN

I'm coming in to score-

ZEITLIN sees a hand reaching out the stairwell, laying the Colt .45 on the marble floor.

MITCH steps into the room, unarmed. ZEITLIN aims his Beretta at MITCH. MITCH walks towards ZEITLIN.

MITCH

I have a message for you. From
Melissa.

ZEITLIN is caught off guard. He hesitates.

ZEITLIN

Not another step...

MITCH

She wants to see you.

(beat)

You don't know, do you? She's
here, in Washington.

ZEITLIN

(pausing)

Good try, Colonel.

MITCH

The F.B.I. flew them here for
questioning yesterday.

A shadow of doubt crosses Zeitlin's face. He aims the Beretta at Mitch's head, tears streaming from his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

MITCH

They're at the Mayflower Hotel on
16th Street. Go ahead! Call them!

MITCH pulls a phone from his jacket and holds it out.
ZEITLIN glances at the laptop screen. 20 Seconds.

MITCH

Must Melissa touch the flame too?

ZEITLIN'S doubt turns to hatred. He fires point-blank,
wounding MITCH in the shoulder. MITCH grabs the wall for
support. Bleeding, he staggers forward towards ZEITLIN.

MITCH

Give us all... another chance...

ZEITLIN shakes his head, gun pointed at MITCH'S face.

ZEITLIN

(faraway)

We don't deserve it...

Their eyes meet. Everything happening in agonizing SLOW
MOTION. ZEITLIN begins to squeeze the trigger-

A GUNSHOT

Stunned, ZEITLIN looks at CAROLINE standing in the doorway
with her gun still aimed at him. He staggers backwards,
blood spills from his chest.

ZEITLIN falls to the floor. MITCH grabs for the remote
guidance device clutched in Zeitlin's hand. Through the
WINDOWS we see the fire trail of a

ATOMIC CRUISE MISSILE

arcing down towards them.

THE LAPTOP SCREEN - THE CLOCK- 10... 9...

ZEITLIN holds onto the device in a death-grip. MITCH and
CAROLINE pry the device from his hand. MITCH maneuvers the
guidance controls- The coordinates spin wildly.

THROUGH THE WINDOW - THE MISSILE

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3

responds to Mitch's command, changing course, arcing up towards the atmosphere. Away from Earth. Into gray sky. Vanishing from sight. Seconds go by like hours.

A BRILLIANT FLASH OF LIGHT- A SILENT DOUBLE EXPLOSION

The sky glows electric white. Falling snow translucent. Washington D.C. lit up for three seconds. Bright as day.

MITCH reaches out. He pulls CAROLINE close to him and embraces her. They hold each other. Night returns.

EXT. WASHINGTON MONUMENT - FROM ABOVE - NIGHT

PULL BACK from the looming obelisk, red AIRCRAFT LIGHTS flashing a warning at its tip, until all of downtown WASHINGTON D.C. is visible below us... Blanketed with gently falling snow.

THE END