SUPERCOLLIDER

by David Koepp & John Kamps

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This is based on a true story.

It just hasn't happened yet.

A BLUE-GREEN BALL

that could be the earth (but isn't) rolls across the ground, bumping and bouncing on uneven terrain before SMACKING into a multi-colored yellowish ball and sending it rolling off in another direction.

As Sinatra sings "How Little We Know," a shiny steely ball comes rolling into view, bounces off a red ball, caroms into a white one, and SMACKS into a line of three balls, causing a chain reaction of SMACKING and bumping and unpredictable colliding.

Pulling back from the super closeups, we realize we've been watching --

EXT TOWN HALL DAY

-- a game of marbles, seen from above. THREE BOYS crawl around the edge of a chalk circle that's been drawn on a cement plaza in front of a quaint town hall. Rising above them, we watch as they fire away, the marbles CLICKING softly off one another in the circle.

VOICE (O.S.)
Einstein said "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it *is* comprehensible."

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

KAREN KRAUTHAFER, thirtyish, races out of the dry cleaner's on the main street of a tiny Wisconsin town. She opens the door of a police car marked "SPARKLE CREEK SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT," hangs her laundry in the back, and slides behind the wheel.

We drift into the car, look closely at Karen's face. Just as she starts up the car, a slight, almost imperceptible *ripple* slithers through the image, so faint it could have been a mistake, something wrong with the film print -- but since we mentioned it here, *you* know it wasn't.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hah! Maybe to him.

EXT ICE CREAM STAND DAY

A TEENAGE GIRL with a vertical wall of teased bangs BARKS at us with a smile.

TEENAGE GIRL
Mint chip on a sugar cone!

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (O.S.)
That's me!

HOWARD HEYWOOD, mid-thirties, glides inexplicably into frame, takes the cone, and glides out. Pulling back, we see he's on a ten speed bike. He takes a lick of the cone and loops lazily toward Main Street.

EXT TOWN HALL DAY

CLICK! A big silver marble CLICKS into two others, knocking them out of the circle.

EXT MAIN STREET NIGHT

In Karen's car, she reaches for the radio, keys the microphone.

KAREN
Hey, Owen, you there?

An officious dispatcher answers. Karen puts on a pair of glasses she wears for driving -- they're stylish, shaped like a sideways figure eight.

OWEN (O.S.)
Go ahead, Unit One, Alpha Base reading you five by five, over.

KAREN
Run me the checklist once more, hey.

OWEN
Say again, Unit One, Alpha Base is ten six hundred your last transmission, over.

KAREN
Owen, talk normal, I am *so* late. And I'm forgetting something. I know I'm forgetting something.

OWEN
Got your dress?

KAREN
Yep.

EXT TOWN HALL DAY

One of the KIDS bends down at the edge of the marble circle, lining up one of the greatest marble combo shots of all time.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Howard rounds a corner, turns onto Main Street. Town Hall is visible up ahead.

INT KAREN'S CAR DAY

Owen's voice comes over the radio as Karen starts the car.

OWEN (O.S.)
Shoes?

KAREN
This is making me crazy -- *what am I forgetting?*

OWEN (O.S.)
Good attitude this time?

KAREN
Well, *yeah.*

EXT TOWN HALL DAY

The kid shoots the marble and SMACK! The big silvery thing slams into two other marbles. We race with the marbles, following the series of collisions that ensues. One marble hits another, which glances off a third, which CLICKS into a fourth, which leaves the circle and starts to roll down the sidewalk.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Howard's feet pump the pedals of his bike while he works on his cone, not really looking where he's going.

INT KAREN'S CAR DAY

Karen backs into the street, still on the radio.

KAREN
What's that supposed to mean, good attitude, of course I have a good attitude. I'm thrilled.

OWEN (O.S.)
Whatever you say, Boss.

KAREN
Pipsqueak.

She SNAPS off the radio and drops the car into drive.

EXT TOWN HALL DAY

The marble hits a bump in the concrete and bounces off the sidewalk.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Howard sees the shiny marble bounce into the street, fifty feet ahead of him.

INT KAREN'S CAR DAY

Karen hits the gas, mumbling to herself.

KAREN
Remember, remember...

But she can't. She shrugs and peels out.

EXT TOWN HALL DAY

The Kid bounds into the street, chasing the marble, not noticing the police car headed straight at him.

INT KAREN'S CAR DAY

Karen's eyes pop wide open, she slams on the brakes and swerves to the left --

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

-- coming directly into Howard's path. His bike SLAMS into the front of her car, he goes flying off it and --

INT KAREN'S CAR DAY

-- SMACKS into her windshield like a great big bug, coming face to face with her, his mint chip cone SPLATTERED right next to him.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

As the squad car SQUEALS to a halt, the Kid catches his marble and sees what he's caused.

KID
Whoops.

He takes off running as fast as he can. Karen leaps out of the car and goes around to the hood, where Howard is peeling himself off the windshield.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!

Howard turns and looks at her, rather calm, considering. He's had the wind knocked out of him, but seems otherwise uninjured.

HOWARD
Well, I'm uh... surprised.

KAREN
Oh my God, I'm so sorry. Do you want to go to the hospital?

Howard, struck by a thought, pulls a notebook from his pocket and starts scribbling in it.

HOWARD
(distracted)
Hmm?

KAREN
You might have a head injury.

HOWARD
Collision objects *relative* mass. Okay.

KAREN
You seem a little out of it.

HOWARD
No, I'm like this.

He climbs off the hood, still writing.

KAREN
Are you an escaped mental patient?

He looks up at her. They make eye contact, hold it for a moment longer than they ought to.

HOWARD
No, I work up at the plant. I'm Howard.

KAREN
I never did understand exactly what it is you people do up there.

HOWARD
I am having the strongest feeling of deja vu.

CONTINUED: (2)

KAREN
(puzzled)
So am I.

HOWARD
It's like waking up from a dream... if you can just get a hold of one thread of it...

They're staring at each other, and now that attraction has turned into... sadness?

HOWARD (cont'd)
(his expression changes)
Well. It's gone now.

KAREN
OH JESUS GOD!

HOWARD
You remembered?

KAREN
NO! YEAH! SOMETHING ELSE! I'M LATE!

She turns and hurries toward her car, then races back to him.

KAREN (cont'd)
(way fast)
Um listen this is really terrible given my position in law enforcement and everything but do you think we could possibly sort of well you know like uh forget about this? I am *so* unbelievably late!

HOWARD
No problem.

KAREN
Great thanks bye!

She jumps in the car and SLAMS the door.

HOWARD
What are you late for?

KAREN
My wedding!

CONTINUED: (3)

She hits the lights and siren and takes off, leaving Howard nonplussed. He watches her go, then slowly SNAPS his fingers in disappointment.

CUT TO:

EXT COUNTY COURTHOUSE DAY

The squad car is parked at the end of a long sidewalk that leads up to the County Courthouse. The car is rocking about on its wheels, as we watch Karen hurriedly changing into her wedding dress inside the car.

THREE MIDDLE-AGED PEOPLE are waiting on the steps. Two are a couple, BOOTS and CAROL GERMAINE. The third is MITCH, Karen's father, barrel-chested, working man's hands. Carol looks miffed, Mitch looks amused, and Boots, well Boots looks like he always looks -- like he'd rather be fishing.

Karen bolts out of the car, adjusting the breezy semi-formal dress while running down the sidewalk toward them. She looks pretty great.

KAREN
I'm *so* sorry I'm late, there was a good reason, I swear --
(leans on her Father's shoulder while slipping into her shoes)
-- there was an accident, but I know this judge, I'm sure he won't mind --

CAROL
Do you also happen to know, little lady, that it's Monday?

KAREN
Of course I know it's Monday, Monday's the day Bob and I chose to get married because this way it's the same anniversary as --

Carol just stands there staring at her, arms akimbo.

KAREN (cont'd)
What?

MITCH
Judge leaves at noon on Mondays. Plays sheepshead over in Genesee Depot.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
But it's only --
(she grabs Boots's wrist)
Twelve-oh-two.
(shit)
Where's Bob?

MITCH
Went back to work. Said he'll see you tonight for the game.

BOOTS
You'll know him right off. Big guy, just had his ass handed to him.

CAROL
Again.

CUT TO:

EXT KAREN'S FATHER'S HOUSE DAY

Karen, in uniform again, parks her squad car in front of a modest house. A contractor's truck is in the drive. Next to the contractor's truck is a second contractor's truck, identical in every way, but maybe a year or two newer.

INT KAREN'S FATHER'S HOUSE DAY

Karen enters the kitchen. Mitch is stacking beers in the fridge. He glances at a clock on the wall.

MITCH
Cutting it kinda close, aren't you? Kick off's in three minutes.

Karen looks at a package of sausages on the counter.

KAREN
On your certificate, under cause of death, I'm writing suicide by sausage.

MITCH
They're only brats. Little beef, little pork, little cubes of beef and pork and whatnot. They cook down to almost nothing.

KAREN
Where is he?

CONTINUED:

MITCH
Outside. Careful, he's got one of those big forks.

Karen turns and looks out on the patio at the source of a hot SIZZLING sound.

ON THE PATIO,

she sees BOB KUGELMAS, JR., Karen's age, engulfed in a cloud of barbecue smoke as he tends the grill. Big strong handsome guy.

Karen walks up to him, through the cloud of smoke.

KAREN
Bob, there's no excuse for what happened. Well, actually there is an excuse, but it doesn't matter. I'm sorry.

BOB
It's all right. It's a weird time for everybody. It's a new season, Brett's not as young as he used to be, we're all a little tense.

KAREN
Does everything revolve around the Packers?

BOB
Even the sun. They proved it.

Well, he can make her laugh.

KAREN
It was our wedding day. It was supposed to be perfect this time.

BOB
What do you say we try again on Friday?

KAREN
Fair deal.

They clink beer bottles.

BOB
I mean, it's not like the town's going anywhere. We're not going anywhere. Nothing's going to change.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

BOB (cont'd)
(kisses her)
Ever.

KAREN
I should change.

CUT TO:

INT BATHROOM DAY

Karen is in the shower, rinsing shampoo out of her hair. She looks down, sees the water swirling down the drain.

She cocks her head. Is something funny about that?

She bends down, hugs her knees to her chest, and stares at it. The water is swirling, counter-clockwise.

CUT TO:

INT MITCH'S HOUSE NIGHT

Karen has changed into cutoffs and a T-shirt. She stops at the door to the family room and looks inside. Her father, Bob, and Boots and Carol Germaine, now wearing pressed jeans and Green Bay Packer sweatshirts, are sitting at a semi-circle of TV trays set up in front of the set.

An empty one waits for her, a plate of cooked sausage and a beer sitting on it. She can't bring herself to sit there.

ON THE TV,

Brett Favre scrambles for his life and tosses an underhand shovel pass to Ahman Green, who limps around left end for two and a half.

IN THE LIVING ROOM,

BOB
Ankle's still bothering Ahman.

MITCH
Pulling guard dogged it.

BOB
The guard didn't matter, outside linebacker bit deep. *Definitely* the ankle.

CONTINUED:

BOOTS
(inexplicably bursting into song)
"And the farmer hauled another load away..."

They all laugh, for some reason.

CAROL
(rising)
I'm up!

Boots and Mitch hold up empty beer cans immediately. Karen wanders hesitantly into the room.

CAROL (cont'd)
Well, look who's here.

KAREN
What'd I miss?

CAROL
Well, where should we start?

BOOTS
It ain't lookin' good for the playoffs.

BOB
Season's only five minutes old, Boots.

BOOTS
I should get my hopes up so they can crap all over me?

KAREN
Which way does water swirl down the drain?

Karen is standing in front of the television, blocking their view.

MITCH
Sit down.

CAROL
(to Karen, acidly)
Can I get you anything?

KAREN
No thanks.

CONTINUED: (2)

MITCH
Sit *down.*

CAROL
Oh, there must be something. Cool beverage? A sandwich?

KAREN
I'm *fine.*

CAROL
(a warning)
I am up.

KAREN
Isn't it supposed to be clockwise?

MITCH
(still to Karen)
Who cares?! SIT DOWN!

Karen plops into a chair. Carol immediately shoves the TV tray in front of her, piled high with blackened pork products.

Boots next to her, looks up, panicky, a potato chip poised in mid-air.

BOOTS
WE'RE OUT OF BOB OSTROW FRENCH ONION DIP!

Karen drops her head into her hands.

CUT TO:

EXT HIGH ABOVE SPARKLE CREEK DUSK

We're high over the town. In the distance, we can see the creek that gives the town its name. This place couldn't be lovelier.

Faintly (or is it our imagination?), a low HUM rises up on the soundtrack. Gets a little higher pitched. Like something accelerating. But it's quiet, barely there.

EXT MAIN STREET DUSK

Push past a sign that says "Welcome to Sparkle Creek -- Pop. 2626."

CONTINUED:

All up and down Main Street, the eerie white flickering light of television sets spills from the windows of the buildings. We can hear the game, echoing down the deserted streets.

A LOCAL GUY hurries out of Bernie's Tap, carrying a brown paper bag, fresh beer and chips inside. He's walking as fast as his legs will carry him, staring at a portable TV in his hand, his face creased with concern.

TOM
Oh, that's reviewable. THAT'S REVIEWABLE!

EXT FIELD DUSK

A cow, in a field. A strange cow, a cow turning in a circle.

Rising up above the cow, we see ten more cows. Also turning in circles. Even higher, a total of fifty cows, all turning around and around in circles in the middle of the field. Counter-clockwise, for the record.

CUT TO:

INT MITCH'S HOUSE NIGHT

Karen, who has failed to escape her seat in front of the television, concentrates hard on peeling a label off a bottle of Pabst Blue Ribbon. The others are all in a bad mood. Game isn't going very well.

BOOTS
(singing again)
"Turn out the lights..."

BOB
Not necessarily.

BOOTS
"The party's over..."

BOB
Couple-two-three touchdowns...

MITCH
(shaking an empty beer can)
Carol, you up?

CAROL
(through gritted teeth)
Would you like me to be?

CONTINUED:

BOB
Or two touchdowns and a field goal.

BOOTS
"Dreeeeeeam... dream dream dream dream dreeeeeeam..."

BOB
Maybe two touchdowns, two two point conversions and a safety...

MITCH
Could be that.

BOB
Might add up.

Mitch shifts, holding his beer can out to Karen.

MITCH
Karen, you up?

Karen looks at him, the Pabst label now stuck to her forehead.

KAREN
Huh?

A weird shudder passes through the screen, a ripple just like the one we saw in the opening. Mitch repeats the words he just said, in the way he just said them:

MITCH
Karen, you up?

Exactly as she did before, Karen buries her face in her hands.

That was weird. Didn't anybody notice? But there's no time to think about it because --

Ted Koppel's face streaks through the room.

TED KOPPEL
... to which Mr. Putin replied with a curt "Not interested."

It's a strange, elongated version of Mr. Koppel, like a narrow, stretched out *beam* of Koppel, and it comes right through the front wall, slices through the living room, and exits the back wall.

Pause.

CONTINUED: (2)

Silence for a moment.

CAROL
That's funny. Ted Koppel's not on till ten.

A horse race gallops through the room.

ANNOUNCER
It's Mother of Pearl and Lucky Dan, Lucky Dan and Mother of Pearl, Mother of Pearl, *and woah, Nelly, here comes China Dog!*

Again, it's weird, streaky, it comes right through the walls, this time bounces around off the light fixtures before disappearing up, through the ceiling.

Panic strikes. Which means, basically, everybody stands up and looks at each other.

Mitch walks over to the TV set and stares at it, hands on hips. He bends down and SMACKS it on the side.

All hell breaks loose.

Those strange, elongated rays zap through the wall in a hundred different spots, bouncing crazily around the room, through people, walls, furniture, you name it.

A cacophony fills the room, a million different sounds all played at once.

Karen and the others grab their ears, slam their eyes shut, and lunge toward the door to get the hell out of there.

EXT STREET NIGHT

It's even worse outside. TOWNSFOLK pour out of their houses and stagger into a blizzard of sight and sound, as if all radio and television waves suddenly have become visible (which is exactly what happened).

Karen gropes her way toward the squad car, but takes a wrong turn in the maelstrom and bumps into the neighbor's house. She looks through a window --

INTO THE NEIGHBOR'S KITCHEN,

where she sees a MAN and WOMAN wrestling with a microwave oven, trying to get close enough to shut it off, because the thing looks like an electronic porcupine, spitting freaky glowing waves in all directions.

Karen ducks, ends up falling over backwards as the waves pierce the walls of the house, wash out into the night right over her head.

She lands on her back on the grass, looking up at the stars in the sky. Well, she *would* be looking at the stars, instead, what she's looking at is

A CYLINDER OF CHAOS,

bouncing and waving and emanating and glowing and piercing its way straight up into the sky as far as the eye can see.

HIGH OVER THE TOWN,

the same shot we saw before, we get a good perspective on the tower of chaos, and we notice the *truly* strange thing about it.

It's in a perfect circle around the town. A cylinder, if you want to be 3D about it, that rises straight up over the town and seems to have no top.

Outside the circle -- unspoiled Wisconsin natural beauty.

Inside the circle, where the town is -- a technological hell.

CUT TO:

INT KAREN'S SQUAD CAR NIGHT

Karen, who has managed to find her way into her squad car, is driving through the mess, with her windshield wipers on, for some reason.

She reaches down, picks up the handset and flicks on the radio, but the moment she does, it is as if a swarm of white flashing killer bees leap out of the receiver and attack her. These killer bees are called static.

Karen SCREAMS and flips it off, which settles the static problem, but all around her, the night air is still filled with noise and strobing light.

CONTINUED:

Suddenly a WHITE VAN streaks across her field of vision (a real white van), so close that she has to swerve, hard, to the right.

WHAM!

Karen has reached the sheriff's office. She slams forward, bounces her head off the wheel, THUNKS it into park.

EXT SHERIFF'S OFFICE NIGHT

Karen climbs out of the car, which she has driven directly into the wall of the sheriff's office. She looks around, sees the tail lights of the white van disappearing around a corner, barely visible through the din.

She fights her way toward the door.

INT SHERIFF'S OFFICE NIGHT

Karen BANGS through the door of the sheriff's office. OWEN, a seventeen year old kid in a Wu Tang Clan tee-shirt, is sitting at the dispatcher's desk, chair turned toward the television, hands clamped over his ears, still trying to watch the game.

Karen and Owen have to scream to be heard over the furious sound blasting through the office.

KAREN
OWEN!

OWEN
THEY'RE GOING FOR IT ON FOURTH AND THREE!

KAREN
OWEN!

OWEN
HOLY GOD THEY'RE RUNNING IT!

Karen takes a deep breath, SCREAMS at the top of her lungs.

KAREN
OWEN!!!

This is the exact moment at which it all stops. The room immediately returns to normal. From the television set, in the normal manner:

ANNOUNCER
First down!

CONTINUED:

Owen claps, turns to face Karen.

OWEN
Wha'sup?

KAREN
It stopped.

OWEN
(motioning with a twirl of his finger)
You mean the thing?

KAREN
Yeah, Owen, the thing.

OWEN
Hey, what's the story with that?

BAM! Karen opens a locker, takes out a hat and gun belt.

CUT TO:

EXT MAIN STREET NIGHT

Now wearing the hat and gun belt but still in her cutoffs and tee shirt, Karen comes into the street, which is rapidly emptying of people, who are all headed back into their houses with some urgency. Game's still on.

Karen looks around. At the end of the street, she sees that white van again, streaking out the mouth of an alley and disappearing into another alley. She jumps in the squad car and follows.

EXT ALLEY NIGHT

Karen watches the van pull out of the alley and into the center of the town square where it parks behind a statue of a general on a horse.

FOUR TECHNICIANS in biohazard suits climb out. Two carry armored brief cases, the other two, crowbars. They check to make sure the coast is clear and split off in four different directions.

Karen slips out of her car and watches from the shadow of a building.

IN THE SQUARE,

the Technicians with crowbars pry open two manhole covers at opposite ends of the square. They snap open their armored cases. They huddle close together, obscuring her view, but she catches just a glimpse of commands being entered on miniature keypads.

She turns and looks out into the square. The other two Technicians are collecting samples -- water from the fountain, a spade full of soil. A frightened squirrel is netted and dropped in a cage.

Karen hears a high-pitched HUM and looks back toward the manhole. The Technicians put on thick goggles with amber glass and a sharp beam of white light fires up from inside the first manhole, rises into an arc, then rapidly cuts across the sky in a nanosecond slice of light and dives into the open manhole on the other side of the square.

IN THE ALLEY,

Karen's jaw drops as the brilliant light reflects off her face.

IN THE SQUARE,

the briefcases SNAP shut, the manhole covers BANG back into place.

The four Technicians slip off their goggles and head back to the van, heads swiveling, making certain they weren't seen. They slip into the van, BANG the doors shut, one after the other. The Driver starts it up, hits the headlights --

-- and sees Karen standing in the street in front of them. She points to the badge on her hat, walks around to the driver's window, and signals for him to roll it down.

He does.

KAREN
Would you like to tell me what it is you think you're doing?

The Driver turns, looks at the other Technicians, they MUTTER among themselves. He turns back to Karen with a carefully considered response.

DRIVER
We're with the cable company?

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Okay, I'm gonna need you to go ahead and hop out of the van.

The Technicians confer once again, then the Driver turns back, looks right at her --

-- and hits the gas. Karen watches gobsmacked as the van hauls away. She reaches for her gun -- but what? She's going to shoot them?

KAREN (cont'd)
Leakers!

CUT TO:

EXT ROAD OUT OF TOWN NIGHT

Driving now, Karen catches up with the van a mile or so out of town. She turns on her warning lights, but the van keeps going. She BLOOPS the siren but the van just lumbers along at a steady, O.J. on the run kind of pace.

She picks up her radio.

KAREN
I'm heading West on County K in pursuit of a white van, license 2ZE054.

OWEN (O.S.)
Do you need back-up? Over.

KAREN
Do we have back up?

OWEN (O.S.)
That's a negative. Over.

KAREN
So what do you think, Owen?

EXT TEKCOM NIGHT

The white van pulls up to the security gate of an industrial park of long and low mirrored glass buildings. Karen follows close behind, lights still flashing.

The gate opens and the van pulls through, but the gate drops, fast, right in front of the squad car. Karen hits the brakes and SCREECHES to a halt.

CONTINUED:

She leaps out, furious, to confront the GUARD in the shack.

GUARD
Woah, woah, woah, where do you think you're goin', there, Tex?

KAREN
Do you see the lights?! Do you hear the siren?!

The Guard checks out her outfit.

GUARD
Don't you think you'd better get that car back before somebody notices it's missing, Tex?

KAREN
I am the *sheriff!* And I was in pursuit of four suspects in that white van! And if you call me "Tex" one more time I will cuff you till you bleed.

GUARD
Listen, sweetheart, why don't you just-

MOMENTS LATER,

the Guard is in the back of the squad car, hands zip-tied to the cage between the front and back seats.

GUARD
I DIDN'T SAY TEX!

KAREN
Close enough, Tiger.

VOICE (O.S.)
Say now, what's the kerfuffle?

Karen turns and sees a man in a suit coming down the driveway carrying a briefcase, a big goofy smile on his face. JERRY CORNDELL's looks fall somewhere between personable and smarmy.

KAREN
Who are you?

JERRY CORNDELL
Jerry Corndell, head of public relations for TekCom.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

JERRY CORNDELL (cont'd)
Happened to be on my way home when I heard all the huzzarei. What seems to be the problem?

KAREN
Quite a few problems, Jerry. And I think you guys are the ones causing them.

JERRY CORNDELL
Oh, you mean before? That was nothing, that was just our boys doing a simple alpha test of some new equipment. And I believe their official score on that test was "whoops-a-daisy!"

KAREN
Horses ran through our living room.

JERRY CORNDELL
You know how when you're listening to the radio and they say "we now interrupt this program for a test from the Emergency Broadcast System" and you hear all that static? Same thing, 'cept you could see it. Few microwaves gone a smidge hinky.

KAREN
So that's what you do here, work for the Emergency Broadcast System?

JERRY CORNDELL
We're developing new technology for wireless communication. It's all FCC, FDA, NEA approved.

KAREN
Your smile lines twitch when you lie, Jerry.

JERRY CORNDELL
(bending down and looking in the car)
Rupert, what in the sweet name of Curly Lambeau did you do to get yourself arrested?

KAREN
Rupert failed to show respect for the badge. As did the driver of a white van that just pulled through your gates.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

KAREN (cont'd)
I was questioning him when he drove off, then refused to stop for the lights and siren. He went up the hill and into your facility, there.

JERRY CORNDELL
That is one hundred percent out of line. You know what I'm gonna do? First thing, I'm talking nine a.m. in the manana, I am going to march right back in there, find the A-S-S who evaded your lawful impedance, and I am gonna have myself a donkey barbecue. Sound good?

KAREN
Tell me how *this* sounds. Either you show me this place *right now* and explain *in detail* what you really do, or I come back first thing in the morning with a search warrant and that pushy guy from Channel 6 and we have a look around for ourselves.

Jerry looks at Rupert, who is nibbling at the plastic zip ties around his wrists. He looks back at Karen.

KAREN (cont'd)
I have a lot more zip strips, Jerry.

JERRY CORNDELL
Well. Looks like you get to meet Big Rick.

CUT TO:

INT CORRIDOR NIGHT

Inside the plant, Jerry leads Karen down one of those impossibly long corridors. They're silent, except for the sound of his shoes CLICKING and her sneakers SQUEAKING. Jerry Corndell is trotting alongside with a stack of release forms on a clipboard, flipping them aside one after the other as Karen signs them.

JERRY CORNDELL
(a mile a minute)
Sign here... initial here... just there... one more... radiation waiver... there there and there...
(whips out a small ink pad)
A thumbprint here...

CONTINUED:

Karen looks at him, wondering what she's getting into. As they walk toward a set of elevator doors in the remote distance --

DISSOLVE TO:

-- the far end of the hall. They finally reach the double doors, an elevator. Jerry is still talking as he slides in a key car and the elevator doors WHOOSH open.

JERRY CORNDELL (cont'd)
In the event of an emergency, do not use vertical escape hatches at A and C alcoves.

KAREN
Okay.

JERRY CORNDELL
Do not use the stairs over the magnets, go underneath and cross over... never exit within thirty feet of the helium release...

KAREN
I won't.

They step inside and turn around to face the front.

JERRY CORNDELL
And do not, under any circumstances, pass directly through a white vapor cloud.

KAREN
Wouldn't dream of it. Why is there an elevator in a one story building?

POW! Their heads disappear as the elevator rockets *down*, into the earth.

Pulling back down the hallway, we begin to descend ourselves, down to floor level --

-- and then *below* floor level, down through the grass, down through the dirt, down through the roots and rocks and rodents and stuff, *far* below ground, where mother nature's browns and grays and blacks abruptly give way to --

INT BIG RICK LAB NIGHT

-- *SPARKLING WHITE.*

CONTINUED:

We settle into an underground laboratory complex of staggering dimension. The main room, Big Rick's lab, is an enormous underground cavern filled with complicated scientific equipment and lit by hanging fluorescent lights. A STAFF OF FORTY, some dressed in lab coats, others dressed in shorts and Hawaiian shirts, moves briskly about, tending to the equipment, conferring with one another, monitoring the streams of data that pour across the massive display monitors that line the walls.

At either end of the lab, an endless tunnel curves off into infinity, the tunnel on the right arcing to the left and the left to the right. They must meet at some point, miles away.

As we finally settle down to floor level, the elevator doors BING open and a guy in the foreground turns around to greet it.

It's Howard Heywood, the guy she hit on his bike.

Karen steps off the elevator, dwarfed, the roof of the cavern five stories over her head. Karen looks at Howard, surprised.

HOWARD
The maniac cop! Shouldn't you be on your honeymoon?

KAREN
(overwhelmed and distracted by the place)
Huh?

HOWARD
I thought you were getting married.

KAREN
Yeah, well, if you hadn't shot out in front of me I wouldn't have hit you with my car and I wouldn't have been late for the wedding and I *would* be married right now, instead of standing...
(looking around again)
... here.

HOWARD
(she's not married?! whole vistas of the future open up to him)
Oh.

CONTINUED: (2)

KAREN
(I'm not married! whole vistas of the future open up to her)
Yeah.

They stare at each other for a second, then Karen narrows her eyes and turns back to the subject at hand.

KAREN (cont'd)
Are you Big Rick?

HOWARD
Me? Nah. C'mere.

He leads her across the lab and she cranes her neck, taking it all in. Against the far wall of the room there is an enormous, suspended Plexiglas tube, a dozen feet in diameter, which curves off into the mouth of the two tunnels at each end. There is a huge control deck nestled up alongside the side of the tube, and a tall flight of stairs leading up to it.

Howard leads Karen up the flight of stairs. There's a huge swivel chair at the top; its enormous back is to us.

ON THE CONTROL DECK,

Howard leads Karen to the edge of the control deck, jammed with thousands of dials, switches and slidey bars. Two WELDERS in silver heatproof suits work on the wiring above, bathed in a shower of sparks.

HOWARD
This is Big Rick.

From this vantage point, Karen can look up and down the curving tunnels in both directions. The tubes are lined by rows of massive magnets and all the wiring, piping, and scaffolding needed to support them.

HOWARD (cont'd)
It's an acronym. Stands for Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider.

KAREN
What is it?

HOWARD
A superconducting supercollider.

KAREN
What is it?

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
A particle accelerator.

KAREN
(pause)
What is it?

VOICE (O.S.)
It's a hole in the ground.

HOWARD
Conrad!

The big black chair spins around, revealing CONRAD DAVIES, a big pasty man who hasn't seen the sun in years.

CONRAD
Well, it is.

HOWARD
This is Conrad. Conrad co-authored "Limits on the Flux of Neutral Penetrating States in a Beam Dump!"

KAREN
Wow.

CONRAD
It's a tunnel. Seven miles in circumference. It encircles the entire town.

HOWARD
Remember five or six years ago when the Department of Natural Resources said they had to do all that digging to redirect an underground river that was polluting the water table? That was us.

KAREN
Why all the secrecy?

HOWARD
Had to. The whole thing was on the QT, the President funded us through a Department of Energy slush fund. Can't do pure science by committee.

KAREN
What kind of science is this?

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD
(like a kid)
Particle theory. The tunnel's got two concentric rings of five thousand superconducting electromagnets wound with niobium/titanium cable, supercooled with liquid helium --

KAREN
You say "super" a lot.

HOWARD
-- to near absolute zero.

KAREN
And why would a boy build something like that?

CONRAD
So we can smash stuff together.
(of course)

KAREN
What happens inside the tunnel?

HOWARD
Well. Pretend you're the nucleus of an atom of gold.
(she doesn't)
Go on.

Now she pretends. She leans forward, looking down the tunnel as far as she can see.

KAREN
What are you gonna do to me?

HOWARD
We're gonna strip you of your electrons and launch you into the tunnel.

KA-BOOM!

TAKING THE GOLD ATOM'S PERSPECTIVE,

we take off down the tunnel. Howard talks over, his voice SHOUTING over the sound of our rapid acceleration.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (O.S.)
DESPERATE FOR AN ELECTRICAL CHARGE YOU'RE WHIPPED AROUND BY THE ELECTROMAGNETS, THEN SWATTED BY THE RF CAVITY AND YOU ACCELERATE DOWN THE TUNNEL AT 99.998 PERCENT THE SPEED OF LIGHT!

Our speed increases, the magnets whipping by, ZIPPING and BUZZING as we enjoy the exhilarating, blinding speed.

IN THE LAB,

Conrad interrupts, prideful.

CONRAD
There are other accelerators around, but they've only been able to get up to 99.995 percent.

HOWARD
You know that one they got out at Brookhaven on Long Island? Only got a four mile circumference.

CONRAD
We call that one Little Ricky.

HOWARD
Anyhoo.

BACK IN THE SIMULATION,

we're flying along again, and Howard is SHOUTING over the sound.

HOWARD
SO THERE YOU ARE, FLYING ALONG AT NEAR-LIGHT SPEED, AND EVERYTHING'S GREAT FOR A WHILE, BUT WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW IS THAT WE FIRED A WHOLE *STREAM* OF GOLD NUCLEI FROM THE OTHER END OF THE TUNNEL, AND THEY'RE HEADED STRAIGHT FOR YOU!

HIGH ABOVE THE TOWN,

we're looking down on Sparkle Creek, at night. Two faint points of light, glowing underground, are circling around the perimeter of the town, headed straight toward one another. The WHINE of their respective accelerations continues to build.

IN THE SIMULATION,

we can see the approaching gold nucleus, headed straight for us in slow-motion.

HOWARD (O.S.)
SUDDENLY, FOR A DURATION OF TEN TO THE NEGATIVE TWENTY-FOURTH OF A SECOND AND AT A TEMPERATURE HOTTER THAN THE SURFACE OF THE SUN, *YOU SMASH TOGETHER!*

Slow-motion turns to sickeningly fast motion, we collide with the approaching gold nucleus. We explode into a brilliant, beautiful, peaceful shower of infinitesimal particulate matter.

BACK IN THE LAB,

the image of the disintegrating nuclei is playing on a giant display screen over the control panel.

HOWARD
(enraptured)
And in that moment... we have it.

Pulling back, the same image is now on screens all over the lab.

HOWARD (cont'd)
Captured for our perusal on the collision event display screens. We have it! Quark gluon soup.

KAREN
A quart of glue soup?

HOWARD
"Quark gluon" soup. Up gluons, down gluons, muons, pions, gravitons, the works, the juice, the goop, the *star stuff we are made of,* a state that hasn't existed since the instant after the Big Bang, when all matter floated in suspension at a trillion degrees Fahrenheit. The origin of the universe, the moment... of *creation.*

KAREN
What happened tonight... was that supposed to happen?

CONRAD
My bad. All me.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
Tonight was a mistake. Some shielding on the niobium/titanium cable was stripped, sending out energy into the UV spectra, which as you know, is normally visible only from four to eight hundred angstroms. "I see, said the blind man as he picked up the hammer and twenty micron caliper."

Everyone around them GUFFAWS inexplicably. Karen raises an eyebrow.

KAREN
So basically, you have surrounded Sparkle Creek and its three thousand unsuspecting residents with an experimental device you can't control.

HOWARD
Well, I wouldn't put it quite that way...

CONRAD
I would.

HOWARD
Could we go somewhere Conrad isn't?

CONRAD
Heard that.

HOWARD
Meant you to.

CUT TO:

EXT TEKCOM NIGHT

Howard walks Karen out to her squad car in the empty parking lot. There are a million billion stars out.

KAREN
You have to tell the town what you're doing.

HOWARD
No, not now. Absolutely not.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
They have a right to know what's going on under their feet.

HOWARD
Actually, it's not under your feet now.

He takes her by the shoulders and moves her back a step, past an elevated ring which we notice is a model of the magnet tubes that run through the underground tunnel.

HOWARD (cont'd)
Now it is. You were standing outside the edge of the ring perimeter.

KAREN
Thanks. Either you tell them or I will.

She's not bluffing.

HOWARD
If we go out and try to explain now, people won't understand, they'll think the world is coming to an end, or we're going to get sucked into a black hole, or, or, God knows what doomsday scenarios they'll come up with. If public opinion turns panicky and the Department of Energy gets wind of it, *God* knows who they'll send, they'll get *involved.* This is a government project, you don't know what those people are like, they're *freaks*, man, they'll shut me down like *that.* Please don't let that happen. I'm, I'm, I'm asking you. This means everything to me.

KAREN
Why?

HOWARD
What?

KAREN
Well, come on. I mean, I can tell it's important to you, but what does *any* of this have to do with the price of milk? Why do you do it?

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD
To know. Why are we here? How'd it begin? What does it all mean? Is there one principle underlying every element, property, and process in the observable universe? Sheriff Krauthafer Kugelmas Kugelmas, I am on a quest for nothing less than a Unified Theory of Everything.

KAREN
Theory of...

HOWARD
Everything. Theory of Everything.

KAREN
But maybe that's something we're not supposed to know.

HOWARD
Maybe we just haven't tried hard enough. Einstein said the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it *is* comprehensible.

KAREN
I don't know, I just sorta take it all on faith.

HOWARD
I wish I could.

KAREN
Promise me. When you figure *everything* out, keep it to yourself.

HOWARD
You're not curious?

KAREN
Sure. But if you know how everything is going to end, you're not living, you're waiting. Maybe we need the questions, you know, will things turn out right this time? Because in the questions there's always hope.

He smiles ruefully, looks up at the sky. She looks up too. It's a wistful moment, a carpet of stars above them.

CONTINUED: (3)

HOWARD
God. I spend so much time thinking about the universe sometimes I forget I live in it.

KAREN
We'll call a meeting and you'll tell the town. Just give it to 'em straight, don't talk down to them. But I got a hunch you're not the kind of guy who does that.

He looks at her. They are drifting closer together.

KAREN (cont'd)
I mean, I trust you, and I didn't understand one word that came out of your mouth.

HOWARD
Not everyone's like you.

KAREN
Have a little faith in people.

She puts her sheriff's hat back on. Literally.

KAREN (cont'd)
Good night, Doctor.

HOWARD
Good night, Sheriff.

CUT TO:

INT JERRY CORNDELL'S OFFICE NIGHT

Jerry Corndell plops into a chair at his metal desk in his tiny, sound-absorbent office. He loosens his tie as he cradles a telephone to his ear, waiting for someone to pick up.

JERRY CORNDELL
Yes sir, hello. It's Corndell. Sorry to wake you, sir, I know it's late. We have an issue, sir.

As he talks we drift above him to some framed government-issue photographs on the wall. There's the President. A picture of Jerry, posing with a Congressman on the steps of the Capitol.

CONTINUED:

And a third shot, of a man in a gray suit, posing with his hand on a faux-country fence in front of an American flag.

JERRY CORNDELL (O.S.) (cont'd)
There's a mole in the hole.

CUT TO:

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

One single word, in big block letters. BUDGET.

The image is bouncing, moving, and as we pull back we realize it's a bumper sticker on the back of a rental car, a sensible white four-door Crown Victoria, headed down the road that leads into town.

INT CAR DAY

The speedometer holds like a rock on "55." A squeaky-clean black polished Florsheim rests on the accelerator. A razor-sharp part divides the driver's hair into manageable quadrants.

A lapel pin, a tiny United States flag, shines smartly in the lapel of the driver's gray suit.

From the passenger seat, we get our first look at THE UNDERSECRETARY -- actually our second look, as he is the man we saw in the photograph on Jerry Corndell's wall.

To say the Undersecretary is bland isn't quite accurate, he's actually kind of washed-out. Gray, like his suit.

CUT TO:

EXT TOWN HALL NIGHT

In front of the town hall on Main Street, a black felt placard behind glass announces upcoming events:

Saturday: Pancake Breakfast
Wednesday: Scouts
Today only: Sub-Atomic Physics

A good turnout of TOWNSPEOPLE are filing in the front door. Standing near the doorway are Howard and Karen. Owen is with Karen and Howard is flanked by Conrad.

Jerry Corndell rushes down the sidewalk toward them.

CONTINUED:

JERRY CORNDELL
Howard! Howard!

Jerry hurries up to them and grabs Howard by the arm, all flushed and girlish.

JERRY CORNDELL (cont'd)
It's the Undersecretary!

Howard and Conrad both GASP.

EXT PARKING LOT NIGHT

In a far corner of a parking lot in back of the Town Hall, the white Crown Vic is parked underneath a single street light.

The driver's window of the car rolls down and a hand comes out. It beckons them towards him with a crooked finger. Howard, Jerry, and Conrad walk quickly toward it, nervous.

MOMENTS LATER,

seen from above, the rear doors of the Crown Victoria slam shut.

INT CROWN VICTORIA NIGHT

Howard, Conrad, and Jerry Corndell are wedged into the back seat. The Undersecretary is in front. Howard is trying to make out his features but it's too dark to see anything but his profile.

JERRY CORNDELL
Mr. Undersecretary, I can't tell you what an honor it is to meet you, I've been a big fan ever since I read the Gerkin memo --

A car passes outside. Its headlights briefly illuminate the interior of the Undersecretary's car. Howard catches a brief glimpse of the Undersecretary in the rearview. His steely eyes stare straight forward.

UNDERSECRETARY
Which one is Heywood?

HOWARD
That's me, sir, uh, Mr., uh, Undersecretary. Do I... I'm Howard, what should I call you?

CONTINUED:

UNDERSECRETARY
I am the Undersecretary.

HOWARD
O...kay. I assume you're here because of the little mishap. I want to assure you that nothing we're doing is outside the parameters of our agreement with the Department of Energy.

UNDERSECRETARY
Dr. Heywood, I am a civil servant. My role is not to question the value of government policy, my role is to execute it. When your project first landed on my desk, though I found it a questionable use of public funds, mine was not to reason why. As long as it stayed on the left side of my desk, I was content to sign checks and pass along papers. Now, however, it has moved to the right side of the desk. It is, in fact, on top of the pile. It is a problem.

HOWARD
I think we're taking a relatively minor situation here and blowing it way out of proportion.

UNDERSECRETARY
That condescending attitude, Dr. Heywood, makes me want to stick you in a closet with the meanest OSRC I can find and throw away the key.

He pronounces it Os-Rack. So do they:

JERRY CORNDELL
An OSRC!

UNDERSECRETARY
An OSRC.

HOWARD
An OSRC?

JERRY CORNDELL
Oversight and review committee.

CONRAD
We don't want that!

CONTINUED: (2)

UNDERSECRETARY
No sir, you do *not* want that. So. I understand we're running a little community outreach program tonight.

HOWARD
How did you know about it?

He casts an uncomfortable sidelong glance at Jerry, who looks away.

HOWARD (cont'd)
It's really very simple. All I have to do is go in there, answer a few innocent questions, and we'll be up and running again.

UNDERSECRETARY
You're not going to say boo. Or peep. Or quantum kissmyass. I'm giving the meeting to Corndell.

JERRY CORNDELL
Really, sir? Such a vote of confidence, I can't th-

HOWARD
Jerry doesn't know anything about physics!

UNDERSECRETARY
This ain't about physics, my friend, this is about a throwing a bucket of water on the fires of idiocy that rage inside the head of John Q. Lunchpail.

HOWARD
I really don't feel they'll respond to-

The Undersecretary raises a hand, silencing him.

UNDERSECRETARY
I have risen from my desk. I have bent over. I have located the plug that says superconducting supercollider. My hand is on that plug. One more "little mishap" --

He looks at Howard for the first time.

CONTINUED: (3)

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
-- and I yank it from the wall.

CUT TO:

INT TOWN HALL DAY

Two billiard balls, suspended from wires, swing through the air and CRACK together.

JERRY CORNDELL (O.S.)
See, that's really all we're doin' down there, exactly like this demonstration here.

Jerry Corndell stands on stage in front of the packed meeting hall. Most of the town is there, drinking coffee out of Styrofoam cups. Among the crowd are Bob Kugelmas, Boots and Carol, and Karen's father.

Karen sits on stage to the right of Howard, in uniform. The Undersecretary sits to Howard's left.

JERRY CORNDELL (cont'd)
Except the balls are the nuclei of gold atoms, they're movin' at the speed of light, and the whole thing hasn't happened since the dawn of time. Hope that clears it up for you!

BEHIND HIM,

Karen leans over to Howard, agitated.

KAREN
Are you guys kidding? You're treating us like idiots.

Howard gestures futilely, points to the Undersecretary, who is seated on his left -- wasn't my idea.

AT THE FRONT,

Jerry walks to a table, picks up a sheaf of papers, and hands them to Conrad.

JERRY CORNDELL
Dr. Conrad Davies here is the director of our superconducting magnet division. He's going to hand out a schedule of when we plan to do our experiments.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

JERRY CORNDELL (cont'd)
Although we don't foresee any more of the unforeseen, we want you to be ready. Also, to be on the safe side of small town U.S.A., you'll be given an interference kit, which consists of this --

He opens a square box and takes out a Green Bay Packer helmet lined with aluminum foil.

JERRY CORNDELL (cont'd)
-- and enough aluminum foil from the good folks at Reynolds Wrap to line all the south-facing windows of your homes. So check the schedule, the next test is Friday at noon. Put on your helmet, line your windows and doors, and you're good as gold!

He turns away. There are disgruntled MUMBLINGS from the crowd behind him.

Karen turns to Howard, livid.

KAREN
This is *not* what we talked about!

Jerry rummages through a box of props.

KAREN (cont'd)
Why don't you *say* something?!

Howard opens his mouth to speak and starts to stand, but the Undersecretary shoots a hand out and squeezes him by the knee, forcing him back into his chair.

HOWARD
Ow!

Jerry steps back up to the microphone with a bright yellow cushball in his hand.

JERRY CORNDELL
Now it's your turn! I'm going to throw this cushball into the crowd and whoever catches it asks a question or makes a comment. Then that person throws it to another person. Got it? Let's go!

Jerry chucks the ball into the crowd. It caroms off the head of somebody who wasn't looking and hits an old lady (MRS. KNOEBEL) in the face.

CONTINUED: (2)

MRS. KNOEBEL
Oh!

JERRY CORNDELL
Little help!

Mitch, Karen's father, who is sitting next to her, bends down and picks up the ball.

MITCH
What if it isn't safe?

HOWARD
(rising)
I'd like to take this one, if I-

But again, the Undersecretary does the knee squeeze, and Howard plops back into his chair.

HOWARD (cont'd)
Quit *touching* me!

Karen drops her head into her hands.

JERRY CORNDELL
(to the Crowd)
If? If?! If a frog had hip pockets, he'd carry a gun!
(he laughs, no one else does)
"Is it safe?!" Safer than a Volvo wagon in the slow lane! Toss that ball!

Mitch shrugs and throws the cushball. It's caught by a guy in an ORANGE HAT.

ORANGE HAT
What about ice fishing? Are the lakes still going to freeze over?

JERRY CORNDELL
Thick as my head and twice as hard!
Next!

Orange Hat throws the ball. A big hand reaches up and spears it. It belongs to Bob Kugelmas, Jr. He stands. He's big, it takes him a while to reach his full height.

CONTINUED: (3)

BOB
I got a question. How do we know that the next time you fire up that hog it's not gonna blow us all to smithereens, or burn up the planet, or fire us off into the ninth dimension?

There is much murmured assent. This is the question on everyone's minds. Conrad leans into the microphone, too close.

CONRAD
(with feedback)
I believe the explosion scenario is the least likely.

This causes some consternation. Jerry C. elbows Conrad aside.

JERRY CORNDELL
Did everyone get a Johnny Cake?

BOB
Answer the question.

JERRY CORNDELL
Look. I'm not saying we won't get our hair mussed. But we live in America. If we want to keep watching our big screen TVs and filling our trucks with dollar-a-gallon gas, we gotta remain first and best. If we're not at the forefront of science, we're at the ass end of everything. Pardon my Swahili. This project is going to put Sparkle Creek on the map. You should all feel proud. You should feel all feel brave. You should all feel... smart. *Now throw that ball!*

There are CHEERS and bursts of APPLAUSE, which are picked up by the rest of the crowd. Bob, angry, hurls the ball at Jerry, who ducks it.

Behind him, the Undersecretary catches it easily. He looks at Howard and smiles.

Karen bolts to her feet angrily, her metal chair SCRAPING across the floor.

HOWARD
Sheriff, wait, let me explain!

CONTINUED: (4)

KAREN
Wasn't that what the meeting was for?

She stalks out and doesn't look back.

CUT TO:

EXT BERNIE'S TAP NIGHT

Later. Howard comes across Main Street and heads into Bernie's Tap, the tavern on the corner.

INT BERNIE'S TAP NIGHT

CRACK! A rack of pool balls breaks apart, the balls carom around the table. Mitch looks up at Karen, who has a cue in her hand.

HOWARD (O.S.)
Good scatter.

Karen turns, frowns when she sees him. Still angry.

KAREN
Hello.

HOWARD
Sorry if I'm interrupting, somebody told me you hang out here.

KAREN
I don't *hang out* here.

HOWARD
No, sorry, of course not, I just... I wanted to tell you...

Bob Kugelmas, Jr. turns away from the bar, three bottles of beer in his hand.

BOB
Don't think we've met. I'm Bob.

HOWARD
Kugelmas, Jr.?

BOB
(smiles shyly)
Packer fan, aren't you?

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Bob, for God's sake, don't even...
(to Howard)
Will you excuse me a minute?

She picks up her purse and goes to the ladies' room.

Bob watches her go, sighs. They don't seem to be getting along. He sits at the bar, gestures to the empty stool next to him, for Howard to sit in it.

Howard does. Bob shoves a beer at him.

BOB
She's upset. It's just nerves. We're getting married on Monday. I think.

HOWARD
Congratulations.

BOB
Yeah, we'll see. Karen's afraid I'm gonna get cold feet. I'm not. I mean, they're not. Cold. It's not like I haven't done this before. I'm a little loaded. I don't know if you can tell.

HOWARD
(well, yeah)
Not at all.

BOB
First time we hitched up, we were eighteen.
(whispers)
Thought she was pregnant. She wasn't, but, hey, the ink was dry. That didn't last. Second time, we were twenty-five. Little older, little smarter. I was playing football. Punter. Packers. I don't brag about it.

HOWARD
Cool.

BOB
I don't brag about it. I was on the road a lot, though. She couldn't handle it. Came home one Monday, she was moved out. That hurt. You wouldn't know, some stuff you can't know unless you live it.

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD
(with meaning)
That is true.

Bob thinks, staring off into the distance with beery eyes.

BOB
Some things you just gotta do until you get 'em right.
(back to Howard)
Don't you?

A jacket drops over Bob's head, tossed by Mitch.

MITCH
Come on, Bobby, let's call it a day, we gotta be on the site at seven.

Bob pulls the jacket off and glances in the direction Karen went.

BOB
Yeah, okay.
(to Howard)
Say goodbye to Karen for me, will you, buddy?

HOWARD
Will do.

Bob heads outside. Mitch remains behind for a second, smiling mischievously at Howard and puts five bucks on the bar.

MITCH
(of Howard's beer)
Have another on me.

HOWARD
Actually, I'm not much of a beer drinker. They always get warm on me.

MITCH
What you need is a beer cozy.

He takes Howard's beer and stuffs it into a foam rubber insulated sleeve, gives it back to him.

MITCH (cont'd)
Drinkin' faster wouldn't hurt, either.

Howard looks skeptical.

CONTINUED: (3)

MITCH (cont'd)
Karen'll drive you home.

He smiles and leaves.

KAREN (O.S.)
Cleared the room, did you?

Howard turns around. She has let her hair down. She looks fantastic.

HOWARD
Are you leaving too?

KAREN
Why? You got something to say?

HOWARD
I want to apologize for what happened in the meeting. It wasn't what I would have done. I wasn't in charge.

That was a good answer, so she sits next to him.

KAREN
Who was? That guy who kept feeling you up?

HOWARD
Yeah, him. And I told him I wanted to make it up to you all, that I'd like to invite someone from the town to be at the next test, and I'd like that person to be you. It's Friday at noon, will you come?

KAREN
Yeah.
(fishing)
So what'd you and Bob talk about?

HOWARD
Oh, football. History. Stuff like that.

KAREN
History?

HOWARD
Yours, actually.

CONTINUED: (4)

KAREN
What did he say, *exactly?*

HOWARD
Probably a little more than he should have. Do you mind if we talk about something else?

KAREN
Bob's a little upset. He thinks I'm going to bail out on him before Monday. I'm not, though. I'm not afraid to get married. I do it all the time.

He laughs.

A long pause. He looks at her -- what the heck.

HOWARD
I was married. Once.

KAREN
What happened?

HOWARD
I guess I wasn't paying attention. I looked up one day and she was gone. Never did give me a reason, really. That's the thing about people, for large objects they're a lot easier to lose than you'd think.

KAREN
I'm sorry.

HOWARD
So was I.

KAREN
Ahhhh. I see.

He looks at her -- what?

KAREN (cont'd)
So you've spent your life ever since trying to figure out why. Why things happen. A reason, for everything.

Uncomfortable, Howard finishes his beer.

CONTINUED: (5)

HOWARD
Can I buy you another?

She hesitates.

HOWARD (cont'd)
Beer makes you smart. Says so right here.

He holds up his beer cozy, which does in fact say "Beer Makes You Smart."

She smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT COUNTRY ROAD NIGHT

Seen from a distance, Karen's squad car drives down a long dark country road, lights flashing, siren blaring. Abruptly, the lights and siren shut off.

A moment later, the lights and siren turn on again.

Off again.

On again.

Off.

On.

Abruptly, all four wheels lock up and the car SCREECHES to a halt.

INT CAR NIGHT

Karen SNAPS off the lights and siren and turns toward Howard, who's in the passenger seat. She's peeved.

KAREN
Touch that switch again!
(and I'll kill you)

Howard, who is a happy drunk, just looks at her.

KAREN (cont'd)
Go ahead. I dare you.

Howard picks up the radio handset and keys the mic.

FROM OUTSIDE THE CAR,

we hear the P.A. system kick in and Howard's amplified voice rings out over the Wisconsin night.

HOWARD (O.S.)
Attention all units, set up roadblocks, ten-four, ten-four.

He makes a static sound.

INSIDE THE CAR,

Karen folds her arms and stares at him. She is not laughing.

Howard stares back. He hangs up the radio. He folds his arms too.

It's a staredown. Howard looks at the switches. At Karen. At the switches. At the one he likes the most.

KAREN
(still warning him)
Go ahead.

He can't help it. His hand darts out, he hits the switch for the lights, and bolts out of the car.

ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD,

Howard tumbles out of the car and races into an adjacent corn field, laughing hysterically. Karen bolts out of the car a second later, carrying one of those big long flashlights.

She flicks it on and heads into the corn, laughing in spite of herself.

KAREN
I AM GONNA GIVE YOU SUCH A BEATING!

She swings the flashlight up to shoulder position, the way cops do, and makes her way into the corn, shining it in between the stalks, which are erratically lit by the flashing red lights of the squad car.

Up ahead, she hears Howard, laughing and rustling through the corn.

KAREN (cont'd)
YOU'RE ONLY MAKING IT WORSE FOR YOURSELF!

CONTINUED:

She continues after him.

KAREN (cont'd)
HOWARD! TIME TO COME OUT AND TAKE YOUR BEATING!

She stops, listening. She hears a rustle from the right. Turns suddenly, flashing the light.

KAREN (cont'd)
Doooccccc-torrr?

Now a rustling from behind. She turns again, just in time to see Howard, diving through the stalks, right at her.

HOWARD
AHHHHHHHHHH!!!

He hits her in the midsection, tackles her hard, and they land between the rows of corn.

They lie there, laughing, breathing hard, Howard on top of her. The red lights flicker, the corn stalks CLICK in the breeze. Howard rolls off, lies next to her, staring up at the stars as they shine overhead.

HOWARD (cont'd)
I am absolutely dying to kiss you. But that would be inappropriate, so I'm not going to even mention it.

She rolls on her side, up one elbow, looking at him. He looks back. Their lips are but inches apart.

KAREN
Yeah, that'd be uncomfortable. I'm glad you didn't bring it up.

He kisses her. She kisses back.

CUT TO:

EXT KAREN'S HOUSE NIGHT

The middle of the night. Karen's squad car pulls into the driveway of her house and she climbs out and heads for the house. She stops in her tracks. Bob Kugelmas is sitting on the front steps, waiting for her. He smiles sleepily.

BOB
Hi.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Hi. What are you doing here so late?

BOB
Couldn't sleep.

KAREN
I stayed at the bar a while, then I, you know, just, then I drove Dr. Heywood home.

BOB
He seemed like a nice guy.

Karen nods, miserable with guilt. She sits next to Bob.

BOB (cont'd)
Look. I was lying there. And I couldn't sleep, and I just wanted to come over because I wanted to say, I know I may not be the smartest guy in the world, or the best looking, or the richest, but... well, I guess that's all I really wanted to say.

KAREN
Oh... Bob.

He gets up to go. Turns back with one last thought.

BOB
Oh yeah. Plus that I love you.

KAREN
Thanks, I... I... I...

"Love you too" is the common response here. But instead:

KAREN (cont'd)
I really appreciate that.

A furrow of anxiety creases his brow. He nods.

BOB
Okay, then.

She looks at him. Pulls something from in front of her eyes. It's not hair, it's corn silk. Talk about guilt.

CUT TO:

EXT TOWN SQUARE DAY

BONG! The big clock in the middle of the town square strikes noon.

The streets are nearly empty. The few RESIDENTS still out are scurrying into the nearest building. By the last BONG of the clock, the streets are deserted.

EXT RESIDENTIAL STREET DAY

With a loud CRINKLE-CRUNCH and a RIP, a long strip of Reynolds Wrap is pulled off a roll and hung in the window of a home, closing it off.

Pulling back, we see there's aluminum foil in *all* the windows of the house. Pulling back further, we see there's foil in all the windows of all the houses on the block.

INT MRS. KNOEBEL'S HOUSE DAY

Mrs. Knoebel, the elderly lady with the walker, pulls her Packer helmet over her head. There's aluminum foil over the face mask and in the ear holes, rendering her nearly senseless (well, two out of five gone, anyway).

From inside the helmet, we hear her tiny voice:

MRS. KNOEBEL
Oh!

EXT BACK YARD DAY

In a back yard, a FEW KIDS are swimming in an above-ground swimming pool as their MOTHER, wearing her helmet, SHOUTS from the back door of the house.

MOTHER
I said inside, NOW!

KID
Five more minutes!

MOTHER
NOW!

KID
Five more minutes!

MOTHER
NOW!

CONTINUED:

The Kids tread water, look at each other. Then:

KID
Five more minutes!

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

THREE OLD MEN sit on a bench on the road into town, their usual perch. One by one, they put on their Packer helmets. Not goin' anywhere. Wouldn't miss this for the world.

CUT TO:

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

The Big Rick lab is busy busy busy, TECHNICIANS swarming all over the place.

UP ON THE CONTROL DECK,

Conrad sits in the big chair, behind the controls. TWO DOZEN SCIENTISTS are grouped around the banks of computer terminals and monitors, running through checklists. Howard bops from terminal to terminal, making last minute checks. Karen watches him, in uniform.

There is an unmistakable tension between them, they exchange an awkward glance or two.

HOWARD
Roll the detector.

CONRAD
(into a microphone)
Roll the detector.

As Conrad's amplified voice echoes through the cavernous lab, WORKERS swarm toward a fifteen foot blue ring, slathered over with pipes and tubes and wires and with a sexy looking metal diamond at its center.

BAM! BAM BAM! The Workers pop hydraulic pipes into holes in the floor at the base of the rings, flick their switches, and the giant hydraulics start to contract, sucking the giant metal ring forward.

On the floor, we see the giant ring CRUNCH forward slowly, through a well-worn path in the concrete. This baby is *heavy.*

NEARBY,

CONTINUED:

the Undersecretary stands near a basketball hoop that's been hung on one wall, a makeshift lane painted on the cement floor.

His arms are folded across his chest, he's shaking his head in disapproval. Jerry Corndell stands beside him, arms also folded, also shaking his head in disapproval.

UNDERSECRETARY
Waste. Waste, waste, waste, waste, *waste*, waste, waste.

UP ON THE PLATFORM,

Conrad calls out last minute checks.

CONRAD
Vacuum.

VOICE (O.S.)
Check.

CONRAD
Magnets.

VOICE (O.S.)
Check.

Karen edges over to Howard, mutters under her breath.

KAREN
We have to talk.

HOWARD
(muttering back)
I know we do.

CONRAD
RF cavity.

VOICE (O.S.)
Check.

CONRAD
Forward time projection chamber.

VOICE (O.S.)
On line!

Karen and Howard keep muttering.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
About my momentary lapse of judgment.

HOWARD
Is that what you're calling it?

KAREN
Well, what are you calling it?

HOWARD
I haven't named it yet.

Conrad continues the checklist.

CONRAD
Photomultipliers.

VOICE (O.S.)
Nine-five Alex.

CONRAD
Silicon vertex tracker.

VOICE (O.S.)
Fixed and running.

Karen and Howard are speaking out of the sides of their mouths.

KAREN
I think probably the best course is if we just pretend it never happened. Don't you think that?

HOWARD
Can we talk about this later?

BELOW THEM,

the giant blue ring KA-BOOMS into place in the center of the lab, between two equally gigantic magnet rings. Its settling movement is so loud the entire lab trembles with its bassy finality.

SNAP! SNAP! SNAP-SNAPPITY-SNAP! Workers flick huge metal latches, securing the detector in place.

A Worker turns and SHOUTS up to the deck.

WORKER
DETECTOR IS UP!

ON THE CONTROL DECK,

Howard takes a deep breath. Jerry C. and the Undersecretary step up onto the platform behind him. All eyes are on him. Absolute silence in the lab. Finally:

HOWARD
Let's bang some stuff together.

Conrad enters a sequence of commands on his keyboard, then stands and keys opens a metal box above him. Inside, there is a giant lever with big red letters at the top that say "ON" and big red letters at the bottom that say "OFF."

KAREN
You have *got* to be kidding me.

Howard casts a sheepish look around, shrugs.

HOWARD
More fun than pressing "enter."

CONRAD
And...

He cranks the giant switch up into the "ON" position.

CONRAD (cont'd)
We are in collider mode.

Immediately, there is a great WHOOSHING sound, all around them. Karen looks concerned, takes a step toward Howard.

HOWARD
Water through the pipes. Cooling system.

A steady CLICKING sound begins to echo from the walls.

HOWARD (cont'd)
Geiger counters. Couple dozen millirems of radiation in the containment area.

A HUM comes from right over their heads, a blast of air blows Karen's hair. She looks at Howard, frightened.

HOWARD (cont'd)
Air conditioner. Kinda hot out.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
I knew that.

Conrad is entering commands furiously, but on the monitors all around them -- nothing.

HOWARD
(to Karen)
You won't see anything yet. Not till the nuclei lose their electrons, then they get really hungry for electrical charge, so when they're introduced to 5000 electromagnets they're, you know, interested.

CONRAD
Stable.

HOWARD
Start beam injection from the Alternating Gradient Synchrotron.

CONRAD
Use your words.

HOWARD
(realizing)
Sorry. Start beam injection *please.*

CONRAD
Much better.

He hits a command on his keyboard. We dive in close to that key and suddenly EXPLODE --

INTO THE TUNNEL,

where we're *over* the tubes this time, flying along on top of them, the endless miles of white piping, lined with cable and tracking instruments, racing below us at breakneck speed.

Up ahead, a *bright red* pipe merges in from the side like a freeway on-ramp, headed straight toward us, and at the very moment we pass over the intersection point we leap

INSIDE THE BEAM TUBE,

where a bright red beam, similar to a laser, fires right through the dead center of the magnetic tunnel, stretching off into infinity.

CONTINUED:

We're P.O.V. gold nucleus, caught up on the beam as we feed in from the AGS tube, and we blast around that ring almost as fast as light itself. Up ahead, we see the ring straightens out, turns slightly to the left, and in that distance we see another beam, this one *blue*, moving in the opposite direction.

BACK ON TOP OF THE TUBE,

we zoom ahead and see the massive blue curve of the detector ring. We pull up even higher, pass over the detection ring and look down *inside* it, where the two white tubes both open end, revealing two thin, transparent Plexiglas tubes that cross in an X in the dead center of the detector ring.

As we look down on it, still moving toward it, the blue beam and the red beam *collide*, right at the crotch of the X, and as they collide, we keep moving, right down into them, right down to

THE SUB-ATOMIC LEVEL,

where we see a crazy fireworks show, and now we finally understand those images from the opening. But these patterns are wild, haphazard, not symmetrical in the least, and pulling back rapidly we realize we're back in --

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

-- the Big Rick lab, and the collision we just saw on the sub-atomic level is now displayed on the dozens of display screens all over the walls.

There is much GASPING, did it work?!

CONRAD
Negative. Negative. Glancing blows only.

There are AWWWS of disappointment around the lab. Karen turns to Howard.

KAREN
What happened?

CONRAD
The nuclei have to collide precisely head to head. Otherwise there's nothing to record.

UNDERSECRETARY
So you're saying it doesn't work.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
We get about five million collisions per second. Give it a minute, will ya?

CONRAD
Hang on... let me clean up the beam.
(into mic)
Beam position monitor, please.

CUT TO:

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

It's dead quiet in town. Everybody's waiting.

On the bench, the three Old Men in the Packer helmets turn their heads to the left. Then to the right.

Birds CHIRP. Still waiting.

EXT BACK YARD DAY

The Mother comes back to the doorway, yells to the kids who are still swimming in the pool.

MOTHER
I said *NOW!*

KID
Five more minutes!

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

Mitch and Bob Kugelmas are in work clothes, tool belts around their waists, pounding nails into the wood frame of a new house they're building at the edge of town. No helmets and tin foil for them.

BAM! BAM! BAM! The steady pounding of their hammers is interrupted briefly as Mitch glances at his watch, sees what time it is. He shoots a worried look over at Bob, who just GRUNTS, dubious of the whole thing, and goes back to POUNDING.

CUT TO:

FROM A BLACK SCREEN,

a tiny speck of light suddenly explodes into a perfect symmetrical pattern, every color in the rainbow shooting off every which way. Pulling back quickly, we see we're

IN THE BIG RICK LAB,

and we're seeing this on one of the dozen wall current monitors all over the place.

Conrad bolts up, right out of his chair.

CONRAD
WE HAVE BEAM ON BEAM COLLISIONS!

A great CHEER rises up from the entire group in the lab. Hugs are exchanged, fists pumped in the air. Karen smiles, taken in by all the enthusiasm.

The Undersecretary looks almost disappointed.

Howard is hugged, repeatedly, and high-fived. He sees Karen, smiles.

HOWARD
You gotta understand... some of these guys have been on this for almost twenty years... and this is it.

Just as he did a moment ago, Howard grabs her giddily.

HOWARD (cont'd)
This is it!

CONRAD
Stable data-taking mode!

A slight, almost imperceptible *ripple* shivers through the image, like the one we saw and (probably) dismissed in the opening.

Howard grabs Karen, giddy.

HOWARD
This is it!

CONRAD
Stable data-taking mode!

It was like a visual hiccup, and Howard noticed. His face wrinkles up in concern for a moment, then he lunges toward a tabletop and fumbles for a pen and paper on Conrad's desktop.

HOWARD
Something.

CONTINUED:

CONRAD
(equally puzzled)
Yeah.

Around them, the display screens are really going crazy, collision after collision, brilliant fireworks displays all over the place.

Howard scribbles quickly on the pad of paper, a symbol and a word:

00 Loop

(That "00" is supposed to be the symbol for infinity, a figure eight on its side. What kind of keyboard doesn't have the symbol for infinity?)

Howard is jostled as the two dozen Scientists rush back to their monitors. Right in front of him, somebody POPS a champagne cork. Howard drops the pen and watches as the cork flies across the room. It sails over the tubes, and into the part of the laboratory that is actually within the perimeter of the supercollider ring.

The cork passes into the ring area, bounces off the far wall --

-- and floats back out the way it came.

But slowly. Very slowly. Violating several laws of nature. Howard's the only one who noticed it.

He gets up from the table, walks slowly across the lab, ignoring the frenzy and excitement all around him, eyes fixed on the cork as it drifts lazily through the air, back to him.

Howard reaches the very edge of the ring circle. The cork drifts all the way out toward him, and the moment it passes out of the interior of the ring --

-- it drops to the floor at his feet with a soft little THUNK.

He bends down and picks it up. When he stands, Karen is right behind him, big smile on her face.

KAREN
Cool. How'd you do that?

HOWARD
Uhhhh...

CONTINUED: (2)

KAREN
Oh no.

But she wasn't talking to him, she'd noticed something behind him. Howard turns, follows her gaze. Within the ring area --

-- everything not bolted down is slowly rising up into the air.

CUT TO:

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

On the bench, the three Old Men slowly take off their helmets. They look at each other.

OLD MAN 1
Do you feel...?

OLD MAN 2
Couple-two-tree pounds lighter?

OLD MAN 1
Yeah, pret-near.

Pause.

OLD MAN 3
Feels good!

OLD MAN 2
Believe you me!

INT CAR DAY

Boots Germaine drives his burnt umber Caprice Classic with the velour interior down Main Street. But the car slows, comes to a stop.

Boots is confused. He pumps his foot on the gas. The engine RACES, the speedometer hops up to fifty -- but he's not moving an inch.

BOOTS
What in the name of heavenly glory?

He opens the door, takes a peek outside.

ON THE STREET,

we see Boots looking down at us, his face horrified. Pulling back, we realize why -- his car is *floating,* three feet in the air, wheels spinning like crazy but nowhere near the street.

Boots SCREAMS.

INT SUPERMARKET DAY

In the produce aisle of the supermarket, fruits and vegetables rise up into the air. So do SHOPPERS and their carts.

EXT BACK YARD DAY

Those same Kids are still swimming in the pool. Well, they're swimming in the *water,* anyway, but when one of the kids dives underwater, he's shocked when he comes out --

-- *on the other side!* He looks down at the empty swimming pool, ten feet beneath him.

KID
MOOOOOOM!

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

In the new house, the one Bob and Mitch are working on, Bob's feet rise up past Mitch, who is still POUNDING.

BOB (O.S.)
Uh... Mitchy?

Mitch turns, to see Bob's boots just passing him. In fact, everything on the other side of the house is rising up past him, but everything on Mitch's side is still firmly on the ground.

MITCH
Holy cheese in rice!

Jumping up above them, we see why this strange circumstance is so -- the house is built on the edge of town, half of it inside the ring's curve, half of it outside.

EXT ABOVE THE TOWN DAY

Even higher up, *way* high up above the town of Sparkle Creek, we get the big picture. Everything inside the tunnel's perimeter is slowly floating up into the sky. Everything around it is completely normal. This can only lead us to conclude:

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

HOWARD
Graviton theory is correct!

The phones are RINGING off the hook, there is much scurrying back and forth, it's crisis mode in the lab, but Howard seems thrilled beyond belief.

KAREN
What?!

HOWARD
(talking a mile a minute)
There's a theory about gravity, that it isn't generated by an object's mass but based on tiny sub-atomic particles called gravitons, and I think we've just *proven* it! By sending electron neutrinos into light-speed motion around the ring, we must have sucked all the gravitons within its perimeter to the very edge, which caused-

Jerry Corndell SLAMS down a phone and finishes Howard's sentence:

JERRY CORNDELL
THE SHIT TO HIT THE FAN! It's chaos in town! Panic in the streets!

UNDERSECRETARY
Get up there! Handle it!

JERRY CORNDELL
Yes *sir!*

He turns and races off. Karen goes after him. Howard stops her by taking hold of her arm.

HOWARD
Karen, wait!

Karen shakes her arm free and heads for the door.

HOWARD (cont'd)
We don't know what's happening out there.

KAREN
Why do you think I'm going?

CONTINUED:

Howard watches as Karen heads out the door. Conrad's chair, with Conrad in it, zips into frame.

CONRAD
I got severe errors in the beam path, something's clumping around it all over the edges of the tube.

HOWARD
Gravitons!

CONRAD
Gravitons?!

HOWARD
Gravitons! Gravitons!

CONRAD
Heard you.

INT TEKCOM LOBBY DAY

Karen is about ten paces behind Jerry Corndell. He races out the hallway, across the lobby of the building, and blasts out the door. She follows.

EXT TEKCOM DAY

Karen exits the building and sees Jerry Corndell heading toward the parking lot, but as he turns a corner he crosses over into the interior of the ring --

-- and his pumping legs rise up off the ground! He floats around the corner and tumbles over the parking lot, where a hundred cars are floating away into the sky.

Jerry C. flaps his arms wildly, manages to spin himself over upside down, and grabs hold of two big fistfuls of grass.

He's stuck there for a moment, exactly upside down, clinging to the grass. He SCREAMS!

KAREN
Hold on! I'm going to help you!

Karen, still outside the ring, still subject to the laws of gravity, searches frantically for something to help her save Jerry Corndell.

She runs to a flagpole, unties the rope and starts stripping it down.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Those three Old Men are clinging to the top of their bench, hung up like upside-down wash.

Taking the long view down the street, we see a dozen TOWNSFOLK, all upside-down, all hanging onto road signs, telephone poles, anything to keep them from floating away into space.

EXT FARMER'S FIELD DAY

A dozen cows float up into frame, drifting into the sky above a farmer's field.

COW
Moo?

EXT BACK YARDS DAY

In three back yards, three DOGS float at the ends of their leashes.

DOGS
Woof?

INT SUPERMARKET DAY

Fruits, vegetables, and Shoppers are all pressed up against the ceiling of the supermarket. A Muzak version of "Burning Down the House" plays on tinny speakers.

EXT TEKCOM DAY

Karen runs to the perimeter of the ring with a coil of rope in hand.

Corndell is clinging desperately to the grass. Karen twirls the rope and throws it. A fraction of a second too late because --

RIP! Jerry Corndell's grass pulls out of the ground and he starts to float away. He SHRIEKS as he rises, tumbling ass over teakettle until he CRUNCHES into the very tip-top branches of a tree and sticks there.

Momentarily.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

In the lab, everybody's screaming at everybody, people are swarming all over the place.

CONTINUED:

UNDERSECRETARY
TURN IT OFF!

HOWARD
YOU CAN'T JUST-

UNDERSECRETARY
OFF OFF OFF OFF RIGHT NOW!

EXT NEW HOUSE - DAY

CINCH! Mitch, feet still firmly planted on the ground, ties a rope around his waist and looks up into the sky.

Bob floats away above him, dangerously high in the sky.

MITCH
HOLD ON, BOBBY, I'M COMIN'!

Mitch bends his knees, steps over the edge of the ring, and leaps as high as he possibly can.

Which is quite high, considering there's no gravity. He takes off like a rocket, blasting straight up into the sky toward Bob.

On the ground, the rope uncoils, fast. The other end is tied securely to a joist. It reaches the end of its play and pulls taut just as --

AT THE END OF THE ROPE

-- Mitch's hand locks around Bob's ankle.

He holds on tight.

FROM THE GROUND,

we see both of them floating at the end of the rope, a hundred feet off the ground. They start hauling themselves down, hand over hand, as fast as they can.

CUT TO:

EXT TEKCOM DAY

Karen hurriedly fixes the end of her rope to a cinder block.

Jerry Corndell is clinging to the branches at the top of the tree by the very tips of his fingers.

CONTINUED:

Karen hurls the block over the gravity border where the once heavy object zings skyward like a balloon. Karen grabs the other end of the rope, stopping its ascent, and works to steer it towards Jerry Corndell, who looks relieved that help is on the way.

But then he sees something that makes his face go pale. The branches of the tree are waving.

He looks up. A group of nearby trees bend toward him, bowing before *a strong wind.*

JERRY CORNDELL
Uh...

The wind hits his tree, twists him around, the branches blow and bend, he loses his grip --

-- *and he's swept away into the sky!*

Jerry Corndell floats away like a lost balloon.

CUT TO:

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

More chaos. Howard is pleading with the Undersecretary, who is fighting his way toward the control deck.

HOWARD
Listen to me, you've got to let Conrad implement a gradual slowdown --

UNDERSECRETARY
Get out of my way!

HOWARD
-- we'll drop to half light speed and incrementally-

But the Undersecretary bulls right past him, flips open the big metal box, reaches in to the giant ON/OFF switch, and slams it down into the "OFF" position.

A deafening BUZZER sounds and a mechanized voice calls out over speakers:

VOICE (O.S.)
Shut down mode. Shut down mode.

CONTINUED:

The AC power hum dissipates. Water stops rushing through the pipes. The display screens go blank as the collisions cease. The Undersecretary sighs in relief and shoots his cuffs.

UNDERSECRETARY
Thank God.

But behind him, there arises such a CLATTER...

They all turn. On the other side of the lab, within the perimeter of the ring --

-- it's raining tools! Everything that was once up is now coming down, SMASHING into the floor.

HOWARD
Oh God.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

See, gravity isn't just a good idea, it's the *law*. And when that law's broken, somebody's gotta pay.

All the Townspeople who were clinging to benches, street signs, and telephone poles drop, SMACKING into the ground.

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

Mitch and Bob, who had been hauling themselves in on the rope, CRASH to the wooden floor of the new house.

INT SUPERMARKET DAY

Fruits, vegetables, and Shoppers let go of the ceiling and SMACK into the floor.

EXT MID-AIR DAY

High above the town, maybe a couple thousand feet up, Jerry Corndell stops rising.

He LAUGHS, giddy, happy.

Then he starts to fall.

He SCREAMS, horrified, sad.

He plunges down toward the town.

EXT BACK YARD DAY

All the water that rose out of the back yard swimming pool SPLASHES back into it, the Kids still swimming in it. One after the other, they BURST to the surface, GASPING for air.

But unhurt.

KID
EXCELLENT!

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

More chaos. More screaming.

UNDERSECRETARY
TURN IT ON! TURN IT ON! TURN IT ON!

HOWARD
WE CAN'T! YOU THREW IT INTO EMERGENCY SHUTDOWN!

EXT FARMER'S FIELD DAY

It's raining cows. One after another, they SMACK into the landscape, mercifully out of our line of sight.

EXT PARKING LOT DAY

It's raining cars. Karen ducks for cover in the guard shack as a hundred automobiles pile on top of one another in the TekCom parking lot.

The last to fall is her own, and it's headed straight for the guard shack. She leaps out at the last second and the car flattens the shack like a pancake. The siren SQUAWKS, then dies.

Karen takes off running, headed down the hill and into town, serpentining her way down the driveway as she dodges more falling objects from the skies.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

As the last of whatever was up comes down, Townspeople slowly drag themselves to their feet and view their debris-strewn town.

Some limp to the center of the street. (Nearly everyone will sport a limp, sling, or cast for the rest of the movie.) They stand there as the town once again grows quiet.

CONTINUED:

Boots Germaine limps up to join the group. He's upset.

BOOTS
This wasn't covered in the meeting!

OLD MAN 1
Is anybody hurt?

OLD MAN 2
I think I fractured my hip.

OLD MAN 1
That happened months ago, you old fool.

OLD MAN 2
The other hip.

OLD MAN 3
At least nobody's dead.

A SCREAM rises up to deafening level, coming from directly above them. They all look up, see Jerry Corndell's face, at the top of Jerry Corndell's *body*, which is rocketing down toward the town at 128 feet per second.

They all wince as Jerry Corndell's scream is abruptly cut off as his body disappears behind a row of storefronts and lands out of sight with a discouraging thud. They all turn back and look at Old Man 3 again.

OLD MAN 3 (cont'd)
Nobody from *here,* anyway.

EXT NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE DAY

A garage door opens and Karen backs out on a dirtbike that survived the chaos. She kicks it into gear and takes off down the street.

EXT ROAD INTO TOWN DAY

Driving fast, Karen weaves the dirtbike through the littered street. People are jumping into wrecked cars, trying to start them up (which of course they can't).

So they grab the nearest bicycle, hop aboard, and head the hell out of town. This is *real* panic in the streets.

We roll with TWO GUYS on bikes as they barrel down the road, headed toward the sign that says "Welcome to Sparkle Creek."

CONTINUED:

Just as they pass the sign --

-- they disappear.

Not all at once, but with a wipe, their image erased just as they cross the border out of town..

FROM A HIGH ANGLE,

we see a half-dozen PEOPLE behind them, some on foot, still racing toward the edge of town. They slam on the brakes, stopping just short of the border at the edge of town.

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

Mitch and Bob drag themselves to their feet, nursing swollen ankles.

BOB
I'm buyin'.

MITCH
I'm lettin' ya.

Bob picks up his tool belt, steps through the frame of the front door --

-- and vanishes into thin air.

Mitch makes a desperate dive to grab him and is left holding only his tool belt.

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

Karen ditches the dirtbike in the back yard. She runs between the joists and into the half-finished house.

KAREN
Dad? Bob? Hello? Are you here?

Karen runs towards the front door frame, the same one Bob disappeared through. Mitch grabs her and hugs her.

MITCH
Thank God you're all right.

Karen sees Bob's tool belt in her father's hand.

KAREN
What happened to Bob? Where is he?

CONTINUED:

MITCH
Gone.

KAREN
What do you mean, gone?

MITCH
He walked through that door and disappeared.

KAREN
He floated away?

MITCH
He *vanished.* I don't know how else to say it, Karen. Bob is *gone.*

EXT TEKCOM DAY

Howard, The Undersecretary, and all the other Scientists and Technicians stagger out of the TekCom building and look out over the mess that is the parking lot.

From up here on this hilltop, they can see the town, not that far below. They can see the havoc, hear the SHOUTING and PANIC.

HOWARD
Oh God... what have I done?

CUT TO:

EXT SPARKLE CREEK DUSK

An aerial shot as the sun is going down. Outside the perimeter of the collider track, everything is as calm and bucolic as ever. But inside it, the town of Sparkle Creek is like a war zone.

EXT TOWN HALL DUSK

Well, that guy from Channel 6 finally showed up. So did the guys from Channel 4, Channel 12, ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Nightline, Fox News, and the Weather Channel, and they're all camped out in front of the town hall, their camera trucks parked up and down Main Street, satellite dishes reaching up to the sky.

Outside the town hall, the sign board is open and Owen is changing the letters to announce:

Tonight: Why All Hell Has Broken Loose

CONTINUED:

A swarm of CAMERAMEN are taping him, which, to tell the truth, is okay with Owen.

INT TOWN HALL NIGHT

The entire town is packed inside the hall, but the newspeople have been kept outside. Most everyone is limping, splinted, or bandaged. People are on their feet, pointing fingers, SHOUTING, hurling insults and accusations. The Undersecretary stands on stage. Sitting at a table behind him are Howard, Conrad, and a framed 8x10 of a smiling Jerry Corndell with a black band around it.

Karen stands off to one side. Howard tries to catch her eye. She knows he's trying, but she looks away.

UNDERSECRETARY
People... people please. If we could just try to maintain an element of decorum everyone will get a chance to speak.

Nobody pays any attention. Karen raises a bullhorn and pulls the trigger.

KAREN
(amplified)
MOUTHS SHUT AND ASSES IN CHAIRS!

The crowd begins to settle down and take their seats.

UNDERSECRETARY
Thank you, Sheriff.

Boots is still standing. He raises his finger and opens his mouth to ask a question.

KAREN
(amplified)
THAT MEANS YOU, BOOTS.

Boots sits. It's quieter but the tension remains.

UNDERSECRETARY
I'd like to begin the meeting with a moment of silence for our fallen comrade, Jerry Corndike.

CONRAD
(whispers)
Corn-*dell.*

CONTINUED:

UNDERSECRETARY
Mr. Corndell was a dedicated civil servant who gave his time and, regrettably, his life, to the United States Department of Energy. He will be missed by us all. Let's have a moment of silence in his memory.

The Undersecretary bows his head respectfully. Someone in the back row throws a foil-wrapped Packer helmet which SHATTERS the picture of poor Jerry.

BACK ROW AGITATOR
Screw you!

An ANGRY CITIZEN bolts to his feet.

ANGRY CITIZEN
We want answers, not silence!

Now everyone is back on their feet SHOUTING and MAKING DEMANDS.

Karen raises her bullhorn.

KAREN
(amplified)
THE NEXT PERSON WHO TALKS OUT OF TURN WILL BE EJECTED FROM THE MEETING!

Silence.

MRS. KNOEBEL
Oh.

EXT TOWN HALL NIGHT

Mrs. Knoebel is all alone on the sidewalk in her wheelchair. She has been ejected, and camera lights are nearly blinding her.

MRS. KNOEBEL
Oh.

INT TOWN HALL NIGHT

The Undersecretary stands before the crowd.

UNDERSECRETARY
The accelerator has been deactivated and the facility locked down. It can cause no further harm.

CONTINUED:

Boots Germaine leaps to his feet.

BOOTS
What about the harm that's already been done?!

UNDERSECRETARY
I will personally command a D.O.E. crisis management team which will be in Sparkle Creek within twenty-four hours. Additionally, an oversight and review committee will be brought in to assess damages and determine compensation.

BOOTS
Compensation? There are people missing! Where the hell are they?

UNDERSECRETARY
It's too early to assume that the people missing have anything to do with what went wrong with the experiment.

BOOTS
Yeah, crap like this happened *all* the time before you people got here!

ANGRY CITIZEN
Four people *disappeared!* Two of 'em were in the Rotary!

UNDERSECRETARY
While undeniably emotional, that sort of anecdotal reportage isn't really-

He ducks. A metal folding chair flies onto the stage and BANGS into his legs.

ANGRY CITIZEN
Is *that* emotional enough for you?!

UNDERSECRETARY
For all we know, your loved ones may have just decided to take a drive into Sheboygan. They could walk through your door at any moment. Let's not jump to conclusions.

A meek little PRIEST with round glasses stands, trying to calm the crowd.

CONTINUED: (2)

PRIEST
Please, please, if I may... I'd like to make a plea for calm. There is an explanation for this which may give us greater understanding. It seems clear that we've all been deceived from the beginning, but no one should be held responsible other than the Great Deceiver himself. Satan. In biblical times, the course of action would have been to anoint Lucifer's minions with holy water.

People start sliding their chairs away from his.

PRIEST (cont'd)
And then stone them.

Silence.

EXT TOWN HALL NIGHT

The meek little Priest has been placed outside with Mrs. Knoebel. A swarm of NEWSMEN crowd around them, shouting "Father! Father, over here!"

PRIEST
Haven't seen you at mass lately, Mrs. Knoebel.

INT TOWN HALL NIGHT

The crowd is angry again. Mitch stands up, a calming influence.

MITCH
Now look. We saw people vanish with our own eyes and we deserve some answers. Are you gonna talk to us straight or not?

UNDERSECRETARY
I would like you to know, sir, this is as open and honest as the United States government will ever be.

HOWARD
(standing)
Would you *shut up?*

The Undersecretary turns, stunned. Howard realizes that suddenly everyone is looking at him.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (cont'd)
(to the crowd)
I just... I can't tell you how sorry I am. If I'd had any idea that my work could have lead to consequences like these, I never would've begun, I... I...

AGITATOR
(from the back)
Cut to the chase, egghead! Where's my wife?

HOWARD
It appears... when we went into emergency shutdown, we created a momentary phase transition around the perimeter of the collider ring. People who crossed over the border at that exact moment seem to have-

AGITATOR
DISAPPEARED! We know that part! Where are they?!

HOWARD
If we assume, as string theorists have, that there are as many fourteen dimensions, and as Kaluza suggests, that both gravity and electromagnetism are leaks from the edges of those dimensions, it's possible that the missing people may have been delivered into a yet unseen and curled up dimension.

They're listening.

HOWARD (cont'd)
That's just a theory. It would mean we don't live in just a universe, but in a *multiverse* where time and place are fluid, where they move back, forwards, up, down, and through one another. But if it's true, and this machine is the only way into those universes... then it's the only way out. Please. Let me activate it one more time.

The crowd is quiet, his sincerity impressive. Karen steps forward.

CONTINUED: (2)

KAREN
Can you guarantee that nothing like what just happened is ever going to happen with that thing again?

Howard hesitates. He would love to say yes, but...

HOWARD
There's always some degree of risk...

The Undersecretary steps forward.

UNDERSECRETARY
All right, let's put it to a vote. Those in favor of giving Dr. Heywood free reign to continue his work, please raise your hands.

Roughly half the Townsfolk raise their hands.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
Those in favor of permanently terminating the experiment and pressing criminal charges-

The other half raise *their* hands.

Howard looks over at Karen. She doesn't raise her hand, but she doesn't come to his defense either. She looks at him, and Conrad and the Undersecretary.

KAREN
Could you all excuse us for a moment?

CUT TO:

EXT TOWN HALL NIGHT

The meeting is over and the Townsfolk are dispersing. They are immediately set upon by news people. Howard, waiting anxiously, spots Karen and hurries up to her.

KAREN
Congratulations. You've succeeded in dividing the town almost exactly in half. Anybody who knows somebody who disappeared wants you to try again, anybody who doesn't would pretty much like to see you dead.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
What did they decide?

KAREN
They decided to let *me* decide.

HOWARD
What did you decide?

KAREN
I haven't decided.

The camera lights find them, so Karen grabs Howard by the arm.

She hustles him off into the mouth of an alley.

IN THE ALLEY,

they're alone again.

HOWARD
I'm sorry.

KAREN
You're sorry?! I'm the one who was kissing you in the corn, secretly wishing there was no Bob, and now there *is* no Bob! How do you think that makes me feel?

HOWARD
(thinks)
Powerful?

KAREN
Guilty! That's how it makes me feel, unbelievably guilty! And what about those other people? And what about what might happen if I *let* you run that stupid thing again? Why do *I* have to decide this? I hate my job! I hate *you!*

She walks away.

CUT TO:

EXT TEKCOM DAY

The gate outside the plant has been chained and padlocked shut. A sign hangs on it:

CONTINUED:

Department of Energy Official Signage
Category: General Information
Official Message: CLOSED

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

The Big Rick lab is shut down, empty, the lights are all out, the place is only lit by the harsh spotlights powered by generator backup.

At the main console, Howard slumps in the big chair, brooding. Conrad comes in, carrying an extra large cup of coffee. He makes his way across the cavernous space, finds Howard in his seat.

CONRAD
Hey. How'd you get in?

HOWARD
Over the fence. You?

CONRAD
(shows his dirty shirt)
Under. Not a climber.

Conrad clears his throat, looks sad. Howard gets up, gives Conrad back his chair. Conrad smiles and sits. Howard sighs and plops into the chair next to him.

CONRAD (cont'd)
Don't get too down on yourself.

HOWARD
It's a catastrophic screw-up. People are missing. A man is dead.

CONRAD
It's not like you're the *first* theoretical physicist to ever claim human lives.

Howard just looks at him -- that's supposed to help?

Conrad continues, oblivious, shuffling papers, cleaning up his desktop.

CONRAD (cont'd)
This is no time to sit around and sulk. There's work to do.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
Didn't you read the signage? We're out of business.

CONRAD
Oh, please. You really think the Sparkle Creeky-ites are gonna find their way out of the *multiverse* without us?

HOWARD
They *hate* us.

CONRAD
Can you blame 'em?

HOWARD
They want to *kill* us.

CONRAD
So? Dude, we're *physicists!* We eat Fig Newtons! We don't date until we're forty! We get wired on Jolt Cola and try to prove Kerchoff's Law! We are *hero material!* Come on, let's get to work, my caffeine is peaking.

HOWARD
How are we gonna work? The Undersecretary cut us off from the main power grid.

CONRAD
He can't cut off our brains, can he?

He scoops up a yellow note pad from the desktop, starts to throw it in the trash, then stops, noticing something on it.

CONRAD (cont'd)
This yours?

He shows it to Howard, who glances at it and shakes his head.

HOWARD
Nope.

Conrad starts to throw it away, then looks again.

CONRAD
It's your handwriting.

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD
(looking more closely)
It is, isn't it?

We take a look. We've seen it before:

00 Loop

Howard wrinkles up his face, puzzled.

HOWARD (cont'd)
Infinity symbol. Loop. "Infinite loop?" I don't remember writing this.

While he thinks, he doodles on the pad, drawing the infinity symbol over and over again.

CONRAD
Must have been during the test.

HOWARD
I'm sure I did, but I'm saying, I have no recollection whatsoever.

CONRAD
Weird. The opposite of deja vu. What do you call that?

Howard looks at the note pad, now filled with a dozen infinity symbols.

HOWARD
Something to think about.

CUT TO:

INT SHERIFF'S OFFICE DAY

The Undersecretary sits at Karen's desk, on the phone. He's using a headset, his hands folded neatly on the squeaky-clean desktop in front of him.

UNDERSECRETARY
(into phone)
This is no longer a variance. This is an overage.

Karen comes in from outside, shutting out the ravenous horde of media types outside. She sees the Undersecretary, makes a face, can I talk to you? The Undersecretary holds up a finger -- in a minute.

CONTINUED:

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
(into phone)
You're not listening to me. You're not listening to me. You're not... are you listening to me? You're *not* listening to me.

He points to a chair. She sits.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
(into phone)
I'm aware of that. I'm aware of that. I'm aware of that. You're not listening to me. This is no longer a variance, this is an overage. I think he knows where I stand.

A long pause. Suddenly, Karen turns and looks at him -- were you talking to me?

KAREN
Sorry, what?

UNDERSECRETARY
(of his phone call)
I think he knows where I stand.

KAREN
Oh. Good. Well, good. Listen, the reason I-

UNDERSECRETARY
What can I do for you?

KAREN
Well, that's what I was about to say, I-

But he holds up a finger -- be quiet. He's on the phone again, he must have hit some button while she wasn't looking.

UNDERSECRETARY
(into headset)
I'm aware of that. I'm aware of that. I'm aware of that.

Karen drops her head in her hands.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
Have you looked at the variances? Have you looked at the overages?
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
Because this isn't a variance. This is an overage. You were saying?

Karen turns, he's talking to her again.

KAREN
Oh. Right. Well. I've thought a lot about my decision, and talked to as many people as I could. And the bottom line is, all we really want is our friends and family back.

UNDERSECRETARY
I understand. I understand. I understand.

She hesitates -- was that into the phone? He gestures -- go on.

KAREN
Ah. Thanks. My feeling is that our only chance of fixing what went wrong is to let Dr. Heywood take another shot at it.

UNDERSECRETARY
You're not listening to me.

KAREN
Of course I am, I'm just try-

But of course, that was back into the headset. He's on the phone again, holding up a finger for her to wait.

UNDERSECRETARY
You're not listening to me. This is no longer a variance, this-

RIP! With one swift move, Karen darts forward and yanks the headset plug right out of the phone.

KAREN
That's a *real* good way to get your ass kicked.

UNDERSECRETARY
You cut off the directorate sub-head!

KAREN
So, speaking on behalf of the town, I've decided to let him go forward.

CONTINUED: (3)

UNDERSECRETARY
Well.

He sits back, about six inches. You know, to be friendly. Convivial.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
This project, which is under my direct supervision and at the top of my accountability tree, has gone wrong. Wildly, spectacularly, litigiously haywire. Just this morning it was assigned a PILR number the size of my cholesterol count.
(he pronounces it "pillar")

KAREN
PILR?

UNDERSECRETARY
Personal Injury Liability Rating.

He tosses a government report across the desk to her. She pushes it aside.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
I've already pulled the plug. Now I'm going to bury the outlet. I'm bringing in a D.O.E. demolition crew and a million cubic yards of cement. I'm going to dynamite the lab and bury this boondoggle, once and for all. *Now,* before the lawyers get here.

KAREN
But you're just covering your ass! I'm talking about people, missing people! I'm sorry, this decision is final. I've made up my mind.

UNDERSECRETARY
Listen, Dorothy. You may have a hat and a dime store badge, but if you oppose me in any way, the pendulous weight of the federal court system will fall on you like a cartoon safe. You're not in charge here. *I* am.

KAREN
You win.

CLANG!

CONTINUED: (4)

The cell door closes in front of the Undersecretary, who is now locked in the jail cell.

KAREN (cont'd)
You're in charge. See you later.

CUT TO:

EXT TEKCOM DAY

CLANG! A sledgehammer smashes through the padlock hanging over the front gate of "TekCom." Karen and Howard throw open the gates and stand aside. The Technicians and Scientists return to work, many on bikes, many on foot, some in hopelessly battered cars, all streaming up the hill toward the Big Rick lab.

Howard's voice comes over the image:

HOWARD (O.S.)
We've activated the collider twice. Both times, in the very instant beam on beam collisions began, a strange phenomenon occurred.

FLASHBACK IMAGE:

We're back in Karen's house, just before the Packer game started.

HOWARD (O.S.)
It was fleeting, it was barely detectable --

MITCH
Karen, you up?

That strange ripple passes through the screen, and the image hiccups:

MITCH (cont'd)
Karen, you up?

ANOTHER FLASHBACK IMAGE:

This time, we're in the Big Rick lab, where we see the same thing happen, this time to Conrad.

CONRAD
Stable data-taking mode!
(ripple)
Stable data-taking mode!

INT BIG RICK TUNNEL DAY

In the Big Rick tunnel, an endless row of fluorescent lights light up, one after the other. Howard's voice continues over:

HOWARD (O.S.)
We skipped back in time, three seconds. But within moments it was as if it'd never happened. Literally.

We follow the row, racing down the tunnel and emerging in --

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

-- the Big Rick lab, where the lights are all flickering to life as the crew gets back to work. Howard's voice continues:

HOWARD (O.S.)
None of us even remember it.

On the main control deck, we find Howard, Karen, and Conrad, who is settling back into his chair.

KAREN
Then how do you know it ever happened?

HOWARD
Because we checked the Forward Time Projection Chamber!

He rushes over to a large, complex device next to the main detector. His excitement is growing.

HOWARD (cont'd)
(about to explain)
The Forward Time Projection Chamber --
(thinks better of it)
-- is real complicated! But the basic idea is that it's a recording device. See, everything that happens inside the collision diamond happens so fast that we need a special detector that isolates individual collision events to within a few billionths of a second, so we can compose individual computer re-creations later. When we checked the Chamber memory, we found this --

ACROSS THE ROOM,

hundreds upon hundreds of collision printouts have been mounted on the wall, in pairings of two. They're now in front of them.

HOWARD
Repetitions! Thousands of them!
Identical collisions!

CONRAD
Which are impossible.

HOWARD
Which are impossible! Like two people having the same fingerprints! Or twin snowflakes. But even less likely!

CONRAD
By an order of magnitude.

HOWARD
By an order of magnitude!

KAREN
Then why did it happen?

HOWARD
Because a freak collision threw us into an infinite loop! Plunged us into a groove in time like a stuck record, repeating the instant of impact over and over, maybe a thousand times before another collision came along and threw us out of it. I knew it, the moment it happened --

Howard grabs the notepad, the one on which he scrawled the note during the experiment earlier, and points to it with great excitement.

HOWARD (cont'd)
I wrote it right here, "Infinite loop!"

KAREN
I think I'd remember doing the same thing a thousand times in a row.

HOWARD
But you don't, that's the point! None of us do!

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (cont'd)
I didn't remember writing this note because the memory no longer existed!

KAREN
How does this help us fix what happened?

HOWARD
I don't want to *fix* anything! I want to make it so it was never broken in the first place!

KAREN
(sees where he's going with this)
You want to go back in time.

HOWARD
YOU BET YOUR ASS I DO!

INT DETECTOR MECHANISM DAY

We crawl over the immensely complicated wiring and circuitry of the detector mechanism as Conrad's voice calls out, amplified throughout the lab:

CONRAD (O.S.)
ROLL THE DETECTOR!

BAM! BAM! The hydraulic pipes PISTON into their floor sockets, concrete GROANS and tiny cracks spiderweb through it as the massive device begins its roll across the floor of the Big Rick lab. As we move with it, Howard's voice continues:

HOWARD (O.S.)
We don't want to go back just a few seconds, that won't do us any good. We need *days.*

UP ON THE CONTROL DECK,

Conrad's panel is lighting up like a Christmas tree as he runs through his pre-activation checklist. Howard continues to Karen.

HOWARD
Three days, to be precise. And for a reaction that powerful, we'll need to generate more energy, we figured it at ten to the eighteenth power.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
By energy, do you mean speed?

CONRAD
We mean energy.

KAREN
I thought speed was energy.

CONRAD
Speed is speed.

KAREN
Then what's energy?

CONRAD
Mass.

KAREN
Then what's mass?

CONRAD
Mass is energy too.

KAREN
Mass is energy?

CONRAD
Mass is energy.

KAREN
Then why not call mass energy in the first place and have *that* be the word for energy and there's no energy but just mass?

CONRAD
(thinks)
Mass *is* energy.

HOWARD
SO LIKE I WAS SAYING...

INSIDE ONE OF THE TUNNELS,

Howard's voice continues as we creep through one of the tunnels. We find Conrad lying on his back, surrounded by a mess of cables and tubes, working on something.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (O.S.)
We have to increase the energy with multiple collisions, each one building on the last.

Drawing closer, we see that Conrad is installing a piece of jury-rigged equipment. It looks like a flywheel, fitted right over a gap in the beam tube. There are five distinct areas on it, each a different color.

HOWARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Conrad's constructed a five-point flywheel --

BACK UP ON THE MAIN DECK,

Howard goes on, to Karen.

HOWARD
-- with particles of five different elements, each with increasing atomic weights --

BACK INSIDE THE TUNNEL,

the first wing of the flywheel is a silvery color.

HOWARD (O.S.)
First is mercury.

The flywheel spins, rotates a grayish-looking wing over the end of the tube.

HOWARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Second is polonium.

The flywheel spins, three more times, each element different-looking, and each corresponding to:

HOWARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Then comes radon, iridium --

BACK IN THE LAB,

CONRAD
But I'm opposed to iridium.

HOWARD
We *know* you're opposed to iridium.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Why is he opposed to iridium?

HOWARD
Long story.

BACK IN THE TUNNEL,

the flywheel rotates over to the final element, a sinister-looking blueish substance.

HOWARD (O.S.)
And finally, the heaviest element known to man -- ununoctium.

BACK UP ON THE MAIN DECK,

Howard is finishing:

HOWARD
As each new element collides, the energy will increase. By our calculations, the fifth and final element will give us enough unstable energy to hurl us back in time by seventy-two hours. Three days.

BELOW THEM,

BOOM! The giant blue ring settles into place in the center of the lab, between two equally gigantic magnet rings. The lab trembles.

WORKER
DETECTOR IS UP!

ON THE DECK,

Karen turns away from the detector, looks back at Howard, her mind racing ahead, through the consequences of the events he's just outlined for her.

KAREN
But three days ago...

HOWARD
We won't have met. And things could happen any one of a million ways, and we probably never will meet.

CONTINUED:

Conrad starts calling out the checks, with more urgency this time than before:

CONRAD
Vacuum!

VOICE (O.S.)
Check!

HOWARD
And if we don't meet, you *will* get to your wedding on time, and you'll marry Bob. And we'll just live with that, and we'll be okay, because you can't miss something that didn't ever happen.

CONRAD
Magnets!

VOICE (O.S.)
Check!

KAREN
I *will* miss you! I already do. I think I've missed you since before we even met.

HOWARD
(impulsively, a blurt)
I'm in love with you.

KAREN
You're a real pain in the ass.

He grabs and kisses her. She returns it immediately. He pulls away, more to say, the words coming out in a rush now.

HOWARD
There's this story called "Flatland." In Flatland, they only have two dimensions. No depth. Everybody's a triangle, a straight line, or a circle.

CONRAD
RF cavity!

VOICE (O.S.)
Check!

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD
And one day this straight line, he's perfectly happy just living his flat little life but all of a sudden he sees this sphere, it just *descends* into his world. And he... he had no *idea.* That anything could be so beautiful.

CONRAD
Photomultipliers!

VOICE (O.S.)
Five by five!

HOWARD
You floated down into my life with your mint chip ice cream cone and you ruined everything, *nothing* is the same anymore, I'm just lost in all this empty space I thought I loved, but I don't anymore, I love *you*, and to know that when we go back I won't even remember you is killing me, it's killing me...

CONRAD
Silicon vertex tracker!

VOICE (O.S.)
Fixed and running!

KAREN
Maybe we will remember!

CONRAD
RF cavity!

VOICE (O.S.)
Check!

HOWARD
We won't.

KAREN
Maybe we will! Maybe that's what deja vu is, maybe we *have* done everything a thousand times before and we're stuck in it forever, but what if we're *not?*

CONRAD
Forward time projection chamber!

CONTINUED: (3)

VOICE (O.S.)
On line!

KAREN
What if nobody's ever tried hard enough, what if this time we can break out, we can *remember.* What if it's like a dream, and if we can just get a hold of one thread of it, we'll remember each other, we'll remember *everything...*

Conrad enters commands wildly. The AC power hum begins. The WATER RUSHES through the pipes. Conrad flips open the metal box, exposing the big ON/OFF switch.

CONRAD
And --

HOWARD
But why would we?

Karen grabs him by the lapels and pulls him close.

KAREN
Faith, schmuck.

She kisses him again, all arms and lips and limbs intertwined.

Conrad SLAMS the switch to "ON."

CONRAD
-- we are in collider mode.

CUT TO:

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

Over a rise in the road, a long column of white cars and trucks HUMS over a rise in the road. As they WHOOSH past us, we see discrete block lettering on their sides:

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

They're coming.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

A SPEAKER atop the squad car BLARES a message.

CONTINUED:

OWEN (O.S.)
ATTENTION, CITIZENS. THE SUPERCOLLIDER THING WILL BE ACTIVATED IN THREE MINUTES.

Owen, behind the wheel, is speaking into the microphone as he slowly trolls the streets.

OWEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
PERSONAL SAFETY IS YOUR OWN RESPONSIBILITY. LIFE ISN'T FAIR. DON'T SAY WE DIDN'T WARN YOU.

He passes the bench on Main Street, where the Three Old Guys are back in their familiar spots, now sporting casts and slings and other signs of damage.

They pass a rope from one to another, looping it through themselves and the bench. Tying themselves in. Wouldn't miss *this* for the world either.

EXT BACK YARD DAY

Those same kids are in that same swimming pool. Their Mother pokes her head out the door.

MOTHER
KIDS! INSIDE, NOW!

This time, they bolt out of the water and race toward the house, dripping wet.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Remaining Townspeople run to get the hell off the streets. Doors SLAM. Cars pull into garages. In seconds, the town looks deserted.

INT SHERIFF'S OFFICE DAY

In the Sheriff's office, the Undersecretary is still behind bars, on a chair, staring out of the cell like a lizard on a rock.

Owen enters to find Boots Germaine rifling through desk drawers. Owen strikes a pose, puts his hand on the butt of his gun.

OWEN
Step away from the desk, Sir!

CONTINUED:

BOOTS
Where are the keys to the cell, Owen?

OWEN
(still officious)
The keys are on my pull chain, Sir!

BOOTS
Stop calling me sir and help me let this guy out.

OWEN
I've got strict orders from Karen to keep him here. I answer to her.

UNDERSECRETARY
No, you answer to me. I could list the federal chain of command. Do you want me to list the chain of command?

BOOTS
Don't make him do it Owen, it takes a really long time. Karen's off her nut, she's gonna get us all killed if we don't stop her.

OWEN
I will not disobey a direct order from my superior! You've seen her when she's mad.

Boots reaches out and grabs the keys from Owen. They stretch out from his belt thing and Boots starts to walk toward the cell, pulling Owen along with him.

OWEN (cont'd)
Let go of those keys, Boots!

BOOTS
Make me!

Owen leaps onto Boots's back and locks his head in a WWF sleeper hold. They commence a-wrasslin'.

CUT TO:

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

Crazy off-center collisions produce wild patterns on the event display monitors all around the Big Rick lab.

CONTINUED:

At the controls, Conrad stares intently at his screen.

CONRAD
Glancing blow... indirect... not yet...

Suddenly, his screen explodes in a perfectly symmetrical pattern, as does every other screen in the lab.

CONRAD (cont'd)
BEAM ON BEAM!

KAREN
(to Howard)
Hey, we're not gonna have that no-gravity problem again, are we?

HOWARD
Don't be ridic-

WHOMP! With stunning suddenness, Conrad's chair legs splinter right out from under him and his chair collapses to the floor.

As does Conrad. As does everyone in the entire laboratory, they're all *slammed to the floor,* as if gravity were suddenly many times stronger than it was two seconds ago (which, in fact, it is).

Shelves fall from walls, everything drops and nothing bounces, soda cans crumple by themselves, the basketball lands and sticks like a wet muffin.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

On Main Street, birds fall. Trees bend. Car tires POP and deflate.

EXT POND DAY

In a pond, two rowboats sink up to their gunwales.

EXT TOWN SQUARE DAY

The statue of the guy on the horse flattens, the horse's legs going out from under it.

INT SHERIFF'S OFFICE DAY

Boots is still searching for the right key. Owen is still on his back trying to stop him.

CONTINUED:

WHAM! Excess gravity tears the keys from Boots's hand and they fall to the floor. WHAM! WHAM! Boots goes down. Owen goes down. WHAM! The Undersecretary flattens his chair.

Boots and Owen meet eyes. The keys now lie equidistant between them. With all his effort, Owen pulls himself up on his elbows. Then Boots does. It's a race to defy excess gravity and fight their way to the keys -- a very slow race.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

The Three Old Guys lie on their backs on their splintered bench, staring up at the sky as birds rain down around them.

OLD MAN 1
My back!

OLD MAN 2
My leg!

OLD MAN 3
My bladder!

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

Plastered to the floor as they are, it's hard to talk, their mouths seem to be part of the concrete. But Karen, Howard, and Conrad struggle anyway, their speech heavily slurred:

HOWARD
Plenty of gravity now!

Conrad starts dragging himself across the floor, he looks like a whale trying to cross a beach.

CONRAD
Gotta... change... beam path...

Ceiling tiles start to pull free, they crash around him like mortars. Now the fluorescent lights begin to drop off their chains, tubes SHATTER on the ground as Conrad gets one hand up on his desktop.

On the desktop, the hand trembles up into the air a few inches, then SLAMS down on the keyboard.

ON THE SCREENS,

the collision patterns lose their symmetry, go back to the crazy patterns that were there before.

INT SHERIFF'S OFFICE DAY

Suddenly freed from the floor, both Owen and Boots lunge for the keys at the same time. Boots gets them first and leaps up, starts unlocking the cell door.

OWEN
That's a felony, Boots!

BOOTS
And you're in high school, stay outta my way.

He swings the cell door open wide.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

In the lab, everyone starts dragging themselves to their feet.

HOWARD
Incredible! Who would have thought mercury was a graviton-attractor?

KAREN
WHO THE HELL PUT YOU IN CHARGE OF *ANYTHING?!*

A MECHANICAL VOICE speaks up:

VOICE (O.S.)
Thirty seconds to flywheel rotation.

KAREN
Christ in a blanket!

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

The Three Old Men stand up. A few other Townspeople poke their heads out of doors.

OLD MAN 1
All things considered, it could have been worse.

OLD MAN 2
Give 'em a minute.

They hear a RUMBLING in the distance and turn. The Department of Energy convoy is on them, POUNDING through the streets at top speed.

CONTINUED:

They slow as they reach the center of town. The Undersecretary hurries up alongside, leaps onto the step rail of the lead truck and they ROAR up the hill, headed for the plant.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

The mechanical voice BOOMS in the lab:

VOICE (O.S.)
Polonium rotation in three... two... one...

INSIDE THE MACHINE,

the flywheel turns, HUMMING softly, turning away from the glistening silvery mercury window. Another window rotates into place, this one shiny black. It CLICKS into place and a brilliant red beam shoots right through it.

IN THE LAB,

Conrad spins in his chair.

CONRAD
Polonium electrons are stripped and collisions occurring...

Once again, the monitors explode with fireworks.

CONRAD (cont'd)
... *now!*

Everybody freezes. Takes a breath. For a long moment, nothing. Nobody moves, not a muscle. Finally, Karen speaks, but she does it in a strange way, her mouth barely moving.

KAREN
Is it me, or do you feel weird?

HOWARD
Weirder than before?

KAREN
What fresh hell is this?

She moves her arm. Something isn't quite right about the way it moves, it's robot-like, rising straight up like a paper doll's arms.

CONTINUED:

The entire screen image pivots, like a painting hanging on a center wire. As the image flattens out, we see what the problem is.

They're in a two-dimensional world!

The image keeps rotating, now becoming almost paper-thin, giving us a sideways view of their world, which is all there is. It keeps turning, all the way around, doing a one-eighty, and when the image fills the screen again, we're seeing them from behind.

Everything in the lab is flattened out, including the people. There's no depth anymore, everything looks like photographs cut out and pasted on the same background.

KAREN (cont'd)
You said there were fourteen dimensions...

HOWARD
I said there *might* be.

KAREN
WELL YOU JUST LOST TWELVE!

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

On Main Street, a dachshund wanders past camera, then turns and looks back at its tail, puzzled. As it turns, we see it like a ribbon, no depth whatsoever.

In fact, the whole *town* has lost its depth, it looks like a photocollage with no perspective.

EXT TEKCOM DAY

The D.O.E. convoy moves up the hill of the flattened landscape, an absurd image of cutout trucks and cars that makes us squeal with delight like little children.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

Howard rotates toward Conrad, showing us his flat side.

HOWARD
Conrad! Manually rotate the flywheel!

CONRAD
You got it, Slim!

CONTINUED:

Conrad turns and slithers across the walls like a shadow, heading for his control seat, which he then wipes into.

CONRAD (cont'd)
Radon molecules on deck!

INSIDE THE MACHINE,

the 2D flywheel rotates to another brightly-colored section. The beam shines through, turning the entire screen red for a moment.

EXT HIGH ABOVE SPARKLE CREEK DAY

From high above Sparkle Creek, we hear the WHINING of the supercollider reach its peak level.

And the entire town disappears.

The town *really* disappears, everything within the circle's perimeter is gone, leaving only idyllic grasslands, trees and birds and streams and stuff.

Birds CHIRP. The creek BABBLES. A badger peeks his head out of his hole. Several DEER prance forward, grazing. One of them gives a sniff, then turns its head and freezes, cocking an ear to the wind. Danger is in the air, and it ain't no hunters.

A low RUMBLING sound rises up, grows rapidly louder. The deer take off.

The image shudders, undulates, and with an enormous WHOMP the entire town of Sparkle Creek re-emerges, inflating in a split-second like a balloon at the end of a fire hose.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

Well, everybody's back and they're all 3D. And they're not feeling too chatty. Karen flexes her fingers, pats her hair.

Howard clears his throat, embarrassed. The moment of silence is punctuated by that mechanical voice:

VOICE (O.S.)
Flywheel rotation in thirty seconds.

Everybody runs everywhere.

KAREN
OH LORD MAKE IT STOP!

CONTINUED:

Conrad's chair zips up in front of Howard.

CONRAD
This is gonna be iridium. I am deeply, deeply, deeply opposed to using iridium.

HOWARD
What? Because of the Walker Treatise?

CONRAD
Of *course* because of the Walker Treatise!

KAREN
What's the Walker Treatise?

HOWARD
It's bad science! Irresponsible, alarmist doomsday claptrap!

CONRAD
(fast, like the whole rest of the movie)
Walker et. al. conjectured that iridium collisions could create a roving black hole which would swallow up not only our solar system and the Milky Way, but the entire Virgo Supercluster and all matter in the observable universe.

HOWARD
Uh, NOT.

CONRAD
Of course, after a second big bang, all cosmic history could evolve in precisely the same manner and we might end up right back here in this room, but who wants to wait thirteen billion years?

HOWARD
(to Karen)
Don't listen to him. I'm right about this.

KAREN
God knows you were right about everything else!

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD
Come on, even Walker said it was just a one in seven hundred million chance! I *really* don't think I'm wrong.

KAREN
So some purple headed alien who's just minding his own business is gonna get obliterated because *you* can't put your ego aside?!

CONRAD
Plus about, oh, six billion earthlings.

HOWARD
(hurt)
Do you think I have a big ego?

VOICE (O.S.)
Flywheel rotation in fifteen seconds.

INT TEKCOM LOBBY DAY

Led by the Undersecretary, the D.O.E. CRISIS TEAM, which includes many uniformed FEDERAL MARSHALS, bursts through the doors of the TekCom lobby and takes off toward the elevators.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

The argument in the lab is reaching a fevered pitch.

HOWARD
I try to listen to others.

KAREN
THAT'S NOT THE ISSUE!

HOWARD
But they're usually wrong.

Conrad has his fingers poised over the keyboard.

CONRAD
Your call, Boss, I can still stop it!

VOICE (O.S.)
Flywheel rotation in five...

KAREN
(to Howard)
Admit it, you could be wrong!

CONTINUED:

VOICE (O.S.)
Four...

KAREN
Say it!

VOICE (O.S.)
Three...

KAREN
"I could be wrong!" SAY IT!

Howard bites his lip.

VOICE (O.S.)
Two...

KAREN
SAY THE WORDS! "I. COULD. BE. *WRONG!"*

HOWARD
(trying his hardest)
I...

VOICE (O.S.)
One...

HOWARD
... really don't think I am.

INSIDE THE MACHINE,

the flywheel rotates. Iridium slides up into place. It's a very creepy amber color.

The beam shoots through it.

IN THE LAB,

the screens erupt in a beautiful display. Collisions like we've never seen.

From across the room, a TINY BLACK SWIRLING PINPOINT appears right in the center of the event vertex, where the collision itself is taking place.

It begins to move, or, *rove*, if you will, growing larger as it does. Within a second or two the black spot is the size of a cue ball.

CONTINUED:

But this little guy's got a lotta juice. Every single thing in the laboratory, including the air, bends toward it, stretches, elongates, and then, with one great slurp, all matter in the lab is sucked into the black spot and swallowed.

The entire screen goes black, but only for a second, as we cut to --

EXT VIRGO SUPERCLUSTER SPACE NIGHT

Seen from a distance, that little black spot fella, now pulsing with a swirling halo of light around it, appears in an outer spiral arm of the Milky Way.

Mirroring the process that happened in the lab, all light from all stars in the Virgo Supercluster begins to bend toward it and is sucked away in an instant, leaving a black screen.

No sound. No light. No movie, except for a barely detectable pulsing black spot in the middle of the screen.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED: (2)

This is not a printer error.

CONTINUED: (3)

Finally, just as some audience members get up to leave --

CONTINUED: (4)

KA-BOOM!

All that dark and all that quiet is replaced by the biggest, brightest, loudest explosion you've ever seen, all emanating from that black little cue ball guy who was pulsing at the center of the screen the whole time.

Out of the swirling gases and birthing stars left in the explosion's wake, a legend appears:

THIRTEEN BILLION YEARS LATER

In three seconds, we see the Milky Way re-form itself, we hyper-zoom toward it, right toward that outer spiral arm, where --

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

-- Conrad's face pleads with us, back in the Big Rick lab, which is identical in every way to what we saw before. He's talking fast, the exact same words (and same shot) as we just saw:

CONRAD
Walker et. al. conjectured that iridium collisions could create a roving black hole which would swallow up not only our solar system and the Milky Way, but the entire Virgo Supercluster and all matter in the observable universe.

Howard looks at him, skeptical.

HOWARD
You know...

But this time he really considers it.

HOWARD (cont'd)
I could be wrong about this.

CONRAD
So, bail on the iridium?

HOWARD
Yeah, better safe than sorry.

KAREN
Hey, it takes a highly evolved man to admit when he's wrong.

Howard shrugs modestly. The mechanical voice speaks up:

CONTINUED:

VOICE (O.S.)
Final flywheel rotation in thirty seconds.

HOWARD
Do we have enough energy without the iridium?

CONRAD
(checking his screen)
Just barely.

HOWARD
This is it.

VOICE (O.S.)
Ununoctium rotation in twenty seconds.

BAM! The doors of the lab burst open, SMASHED THROUGH by a battering ram. GOVERNMENT AGENTS pour inside, SHOUTING commands. The Undersecretary is in the lead.

UNDERSECRETARY
STEP AWAY FROM THOSE CONTROLS!

Howard and Karen turn toward them, Conrad shoots one quick glance and knows the score. He looks from them to the big on/off switch in the metal panel.

He dives onto his keyboard and starts typing as fast as his fingers will allow.

VOICE (O.S.)
Ununoctium rotation in fifteen seconds.

Howard is grabbed by two Agents and shoved roughly up against the wall.

HOWARD
Wait! You don't know what you're doing!

UNDERSECRETARY
Neither do you!

He turns to an Agent, points to Karen.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
Restrain her too!

Two BURLY AGENTS grab Karen.

CONTINUED: (2)

VOICE (O.S.)
Rotation in ten seconds.

The Undersecretary turns, sees Conrad still at the keyboard, typing like there's no tomorrow.

UNDERSECRETARY
GET HIM AWAY FROM THAT KEYBOARD!

Agents race across the floor toward Conrad, who types even faster.

VOICE (O.S.)
Rotation in five...

The Agents race up the steps.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Four...

The Agents pounce on Conrad.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Three...

Just as they drag him away, Conrad hits the "ENTER" key with an outstretched finger.

The voice stops. It never says "two."

CLICK! Handcuffs bite into Howard's wrists.

CRUNCH! Karen is shoved onto the floor, a foot in her back.

SMACK! Howard's face hits the floor next to hers.

Around them, the WHOOSH of the water through the pipes ceases. The electric power hum stops. The sound of the machine quiets.

In the silence of the lab, the Undersecretary stands over Howard and Karen, staring down at them officiously.

UNDERSECRETARY
Now. I'm gonna put this thing out of my misery once and for all.

He turns to Conrad, who's being held by Agents.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
Shut it off.

CONTINUED: (3)

CONRAD
It is off.

UNDERSECRETARY
What do you think I am, some local official?! A dog catcher, a vote counter?! I am the Appropriations Undersecretary of the Department of Energy of the United States of America, and I can read an on/off switch!

He sweeps an arm out, pointing it at the big on/off switch, still clearly in the "ON" position.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
NOW SHUT DOWN THAT MACHINE!

CONRAD
It is off.

He looks at Howard meaningfully. Howard's eyes widen. He looks at Karen.

HOWARD
It *is* off.

KAREN
It *is* off?

UNDERSECRETARY
Fine! I'll do it myself!

He marches across the lab, up the steps to the console, and over to the switch.

CONRAD
(under his breath)
You do that.

On the platform, the Undersecretary puts his hand on the switch and SLAMS it into the off position. He turns to face the others.

UNDERSECRETARY
File this one under-

But he stops, hearing a sound. The WHOOSHING of water through the pipes. The HUM of electricity. He turns, confused, looks at Conrad.

CONTINUED: (4)

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
WHAT DID YOU DO?!

CONRAD
I reversed the switch.

The mechanical voice returns, picking up where it left off.

VOICE (O.S.)
Rotation in three... two... one...

UNDERSECRETARY
YOU REVERSED THE SWITCH?!

CONRAD
I did that.

VOICE (O.S.)
Ununoctium rotation.

INSIDE THE MACHINE,

the flywheel rotates its last time, sliding a translucent blue element into place -- ununoctium.

Behind it, the red beam begins to glow.

BACK IN THE LAB,

Howard turns toward Karen, still next to him on the floor. He reaches over and takes her hand. She squeezes his.

KAREN
We will meet. And we *will* remember.

HOWARD
I hope.

KAREN
(smiles)
Hey. You learned a new word.

INSIDE THE MACHINE,

the red beam EXPLODES through the translucent blue, creating a gorgeous, diamond-flecked PURPLISH BLAST.

BACK IN THE LAB,

we see the entire lab from across the room as that familiar *ripple* waves through it, but this is one is strange, bigger, more powerful and distinct than the others. The ripple shudders, the image bends and fades away over a shot of --

CUT TO:

EXT TOWN HALL DAY

-- a game of marbles. We know this shot, it was the beginning of the movie.

A blue-green ball that could be the earth (but isn't) rolls across the ground, bumping and bouncing on uneven terrain before SMACKING into a marbled yellow ball and sending it rolling off in another direction.

A shiny steely ball comes rolling into view, bounces off a red ball, caroms into a white one, and SMACKS into a line of three balls, causing a chain reaction of SMACKING and bumping and unpredictable colliding.

Pulling back from the super closeups, we watch the game of marbles from above as the Three Boys crawl around the chalk circle they've drawn on the plaza in front of the town hall. Rising above them, we watch as they fire away, the marbles CLICKING softly off one another in the circle.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Karen hurries out of the dry cleaner's on Main Street, just as she did in the beginning. She opens the door of her police car, hangs her laundry in the back, and slides behind the wheel.

We drift into the car, look closely at Karen's face. Just as she starts up the car, a slight, almost imperceptible *ripple* slithers through the image, and though we didn't understand that ripple before, we certainly do now.

EXT ICE CREAM STAND DAY

The Teenage Girl with the bangs holds out Howard's cone:

TEENAGE GIRL
Mint chip on a sugar cone!

HOWARD (O.S.)
That's me!

CONTINUED:

Howard glides through frame on his bike and takes the cone. Pulling back, we watch him loop lazily toward Main Street on his bike, eating the cone.

EXT TOWN HALL DAY

CLICK! The big silver marble CLICKS into two others, knocking them out of the circle. The sequence is replaying almost exactly as it did before.

But this time we notice something we didn't see in the opening -- a JUNE BUG, crawling slowly toward the circle.

EXT MAIN STREET NIGHT

In Karen's car, she reaches for the radio, keys the microphone.

KAREN
Hey, Owen, you there?

OWEN (O.S.)
Go ahead, Unit One, Alpha Base reading you five by five, over.

KAREN
Run me the checklist once more, hey.

OWEN
Say again, Unit One, Alpha Base is ten six hundred your last transmission, over.

KAREN
Owen, talk normal, I am so late. And I'm forgetting something. I *know* I'm forgetting something.

EXT TOWN HALL DAY

One of the KIDS bends down at the edge of the marble circle, lining up the greatest marble combo shot of all time.

But the June Bug is clambering slowly toward the circle, unseen by the boys.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Howard rounds a corner, turns onto Main Street. Town Hall is visible up ahead.

INT KAREN'S CAR DAY

Owen's voice comes over the radio as Karen starts the car.

OWEN (O.S.)
Shoes?

KAREN
This is making me crazy -- *what am I forgetting?*

EXT TOWN HALL DAY

The kid squints, really lining up that shot, he bites his lip, flicks his thumb, and lets her fly.

It's headed straight toward the June Bug, which sees it coming and pulls into its shell, turning into nothing more than a bump in the road.

The marble caroms off the bug's shell --

KID
Darn it!

-- and skips out of the circle, a totally different shot than the one the Kid made last time.

But the marble bounces across the plaza, caroms off a building, DOINGS off a metal sign, and bounces toward the sidewalk.

KID (cont'd)
MY SHOOTER!

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Howard's feet pump the pedals of his bike while he works on his cone, not really looking where he's going.

INT KAREN'S CAR DAY

Karen backs into the street, still on the radio with Owen.

KAREN
What's that supposed to mean, good attitude, of course I have a good attitude. I'm thrilled.

OWEN (O.S.)
Whatever you say, Boss.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Pipsqueak.

She SNAPS off the radio and drops the car into drive.

EXT SIDEWALK DAY

The marble bounds down the sidewalk, chased by the Kid.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Howard sees the shiny marble bounce toward the street, fifty feet ahead of him.

INT KAREN'S CAR DAY

Karen hits the gas.

EXT SIDEWALK DAY

The marble hits a funny crack in the sidewalk and bounces toward the street. The Kid lunges for it, not noticing the police car headed straight at him.

IN THE CAR,

Karen's eyes pop wide open --

ON THE BIKE,

Howard's eyes pop wide open too-

AND ON THE SIDEWALK

-- the Kid's hand SNATCHES the marble out of the air, catching it before it ever makes it to the street.

He sighs in relief, clutching his marble as the police car rolls past him.

IN THE CAR,

Karen sighs in relief.

ON THE BIKE,

Howard sighs in relief.

FROM OVERHEAD,

we see the bike and the police car pass each other, safely and uneventfully.

ON THE STREET,

the distance between them grows as they do not meet.

IN FRONT OF TOWN HALL,

the June Bug emerges from its shell and goes on its way, oblivious to the meeting of souls it just prevented.

CUT TO:

EXT COUNTY COURTHOUSE DAY

The squad car is parked at the end of the long sidewalk that leads up to the County Courthouse. The car is rocking about on its wheels, as we watch Karen hurriedly changing into her wedding dress inside the car, like we did in the opening.

Mitch, Boots, Carol wait on the steps of the County Courthouse. This time Karen's not as late and Bob Kugelmas, Jr. is still with them, dressed in a dark suit he can't wait to get out of.

Karen bolts out of the car, adjusting the dress and trying to step into her shoes while running down the sidewalk toward them.

She's hurrying, hurrying, hurrying, she catches sight of them --

-- and then she's not hurrying. She's slowing down. She's walking. She's looking at Bob.

And she stops, ten feet away from them all. Her face has fallen. So has Bob's. They're just looking at each other. She can't do it.

And everybody knows. Mitch sighs and shakes his head. Carol puts her hands on her hips and glares at Karen. Boots checks his watch and MUMBLES under his breath.

BOOTS
I don't know why we keep coming to these things.

Bob walks out to Karen. She looks him in the eye and musters as much kindness as humanly possible.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Bob? Bob, I love you and you love me and we both know it and two marriages is giving it the old college try, Bob, it really is, but let's not go for three, Bob. Bob? Bob, let's not get married. Ever again.

BOB
Okay.

KAREN
(kisses him on the cheek)
Thanks, Honey.

She turns to go.

BOB
We still on for the game?

KAREN
Kickoff's at eight.

CUT TO:

EXT MAIN STREET DUSK

As the sun sets, the Teenage Girl who tends the ice cream stand leans out holding a green cone.

TEENAGE GIRL
Mint chip on a sugar cone!

Karen, back in uniform, takes the ice cream cone and walks over toward a picnic table. She sits down, near the silhouette of a man facing away from her.

She sighs and takes a few licks of the cone. *Now* what am I gonna do? The guy next to her speaks up.

GUY (O.S.)
Never knew I could fall in love just watching a girl eat ice cream.

Karen turns, her tongue still extended, to look at this tactless person next to her.

It's Jerry Corndell, alive and well and tucking into a banana split.

CONTINUED:

JERRY CORNDELL
(like a tiger)
Rrrraarr.

Karen sighs. This day is getting worse all the time. She gets up and heads for the street, putting on the glasses she wears when she drives her car. She steps off the sidewalk without looking.

A SHOUT draws her attention, she whirls just in time to see --

-- Howard, on his bike, headed straight for her, only a few feet away. She jumps, leaps just enough to get out of his way, he throws his hands up in self-defense --

-- scoops the mint chip cone right out of her grip --

-- and SMACKS into the front bumper of her parked squad car. He flies into the air and SMACKS against her windshield like a big bug, her mint chip cone SPLATS onto her windshield next to his face *exactly* like it did in the opening.

KAREN
Oh my God!

She races over to the hood, where Howard is peeling himself off the windshield.

KAREN (cont'd)
Are you all right?!

He turns and looks at her, rather calm, considering. He's had the wind knocked out of him, but seems otherwise uninjured.

HOWARD
Well, I'm uh... surprised.

KAREN
Oh my God, I'm so sorry. Do you want to go to the hospital?

Howard, struck by a thought, pulls a notebook from his pocket and starts scribbling in it.

HOWARD
(distracted)
Hmm?

KAREN
You might have a head injury.

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD
Collision objects *relative* mass. Okay.

KAREN
You seem a little out of it.

HOWARD
No, I'm like this.

He climbs off the hood, still writing.

KAREN
Are you an escaped mental patient?

He looks up at her. They make eye contact, hold it for a moment longer than they ought to.

HOWARD
I am having the strongest feeling of deja vu.

KAREN
(puzzled)
How weird, so am I. It's like... there's something I'm supposed to remember...

HOWARD
It's like waking up from a dream.

KAREN
Gotta remember...

HOWARD
If you can just get a hold of one thread of it...

They're staring at each other, and now that attraction has turned into... sadness.

KAREN
Well. It's gone now.

Something suddenly catches Howard's eye. His eyes light up as he takes her by the shoulders and turns her to face him.

KAREN (cont'd)
Hey!

CONTINUED: (3)

He stares at her face. We go in close too, to see what he's staring at. It's her eyeglasses, the ones she wears for driving.

KAREN (cont'd)
What are you doing?!

He snatches the glasses from her face and holds them up, studying them intensely until everything else in the shot goes blurry leaving only the black outline of the frame. We've seen this shape before, it's a perfect sideways figure-eight.

IT'S THE INFINITY SYMBOL!

-- rapidly scrolling through Howard's field of vision in a column a thousand entries long.

Back in the real world, Karen puts a hand on her hip and unsnaps the holster of her gun.

KAREN (cont'd)
I'm gonna need you to take a step back, sir.

Howard takes a step forward instead -- taking her in his arms and kissing her.

She pulls away. Stunned, she says nothing. She stares at him *knowing* there is something she needs to remember, something damn important.

KAREN (cont'd)
Do that again.

He kisses her again. *What* a kiss. They pull apart slowly this time. Just a few inches.

Karen's face breaks out in a smile like the sunrise. She remembers.

KAREN (cont'd)
(whispers)
Just... one more time.

And as they fall into the kiss to end all kisses and Sinatra resumes his rightful place on the soundtrack, we rise up above them, above the ice cream stand, above the point where the two of them collided, and Karen's voice comes over, talking to us now.

CONTINUED: (4)

KAREN (V.O.) (cont'd)
To Einstein's supposition that mankind might one day know all that there is to know about the universe, I say this:

We climb higher and higher above them, to see the sleepy town around them and the whole wide world beyond.

KAREN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Oh Albert. Where's the fun in that?

FADE OUT.